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EDITORIAL NOTE

Thematic papers collection on

Inclusive English Language Education in Tertiary Education Context: Policy and Practice

Eds.: Jamila Al Siyabi, Victoria Tuzlukova, Nadežda Stojković

Serving as a forum for language researchers and practitioners to reflect on, this thematic papers collection of *The Journal of Teaching English for Specific and Academic Purposes* (JTESAP) is aimed at exploring diverse circumstances that form the contemporary setting for inclusive English language teaching and learning in the context of tertiary education, and in terms of which it can be fully understood in order to minimize or remove barriers to English language education and facilitate the success of all learners.

This thematic papers collection has been prepared in response to ideas of discovering and presenting the work done that have always been supported by the JTESAP, as well as to signify promoting inclusivity in English language teaching and learning. With the changing perspectives and trends on English language teaching and learning, it has now become a pivotal point to ascertain where more scholarship should be exerted, what gaps in knowledge should be filled, what issues and groups remain insufficiently represented, what questions are still unanswered, and which priorities can inform future research initiatives and change the way English language teaching community works (Sun, 2014; Douglas & Landry, 2021; Douglas et al., 2021). One dimension of this focus is the discussions on the importance of diversity and inclusion in English language teaching, and creation of classroom settings that “bridge educational inequality, reflect diversity and promote the inclusion of typically underrepresented groups” (Chong, 2021, n.p.). Indeed, inclusive education is viewed by many as “a dynamic approach of responding positively to pupils with diversity and seeing individual differences not as a problem but as an opportunity for enriching learning” (Mariga et al., 2014, p.25). However, though the importance of this theme is continuous, it is still underdeveloped and not enough is known about local policies and teaching and learning practices of inclusive English language education, or challenging and successful episodes of such practices that could be incremental to the context. Also, it is significant to define inclusion as based on the principle that individuals have different learning needs and abilities and that educational institutions need to innovate and adapt their structure, policies and practices, in order to accommodate those needs (Sharma, Loreman & Forlin, 2012). Teaching that aims at improving inclusive education settings (Bellacicco & Farinella, 2018) need to be promoted. Nevertheless, the concept of ‘inclusion’ in the area of English language teaching and learning, still viewed as manifold and complex, due to its ever-changing nature is not yet clearly defined and explored.

To meet the existing gaps and make research on inclusive English language education available for public scrutiny, this thematic collection of *The Journal of Teaching English for Specific and Academic Purposes* is about searching for knowledge, putting isolated facts, practices and experiences into perspective, helping making connections across academic and language teaching communities, and contributing to scientific value and social significance of language educators and pedagogues involved in diverse practices of inclusive English language teaching and learning. The topics covered in this thematic collection include, but are not limited to, inclusive policies and practices in English language teaching and learning across the tertiary education context, innovations and technologies in inclusive English language classroom, as well as teachers' perspectives, successful and challenging aspects of addressing the problems faced by students in the context of inclusive English language classroom. The issue also includes studies on the international perspectives on inclusive English language teaching and learning in order to better understand how to facilitate a supportive, effective and appropriate classroom environment and enhance students teaching and learning in the context of an inclusive classroom.

In their paper "Inclusion in the Context of English Language Classroom: Teachers' Current Beliefs and Practices", Jamila Al Siyabi, Victoria Tuzlukova, Khalid Al Kaabi, and Asila Almaawali explore English language teachers' views about integration of visually impaired students into the mainstream classroom. The exploration is based on the findings of a year-long research project conducted at the Centre for Preparatory Studies of Sultan Qaboos University that examined diverse conditions of inclusive teaching and learning settings, including teachers' assumptions regarding inclusion, teaching strategies, classroom environment and management, special needs students' interaction and collaboration with other students in the mainstream English language classroom, and teacher professional development. In the opinion of the authors, teachers' shared experiences and beliefs may lead to stronger culture of inclusion and its better understanding.

The paper entitled "Differentiating E-learning Content in ESL Courses to Meet Special Needs of Students with Learning Difficulties" is contributed by Olga Domorovskaya with the SMART International Online Institute of Psychology. It reports on a study that focuses on special learning needs of students with reading and writing difficulties, or dyslexia, who take English as a compulsory course at the institutions of tertiary education in Russia. The study is rooted in the authors' strong belief that "inclusive education is not about highlighting the difference but about how to support everyone in the class". Here, the author employs a wide approach to inclusion in education as a principle aimed at catering for all students and directing all education policies and practices. In more detail, guided by understanding of importance of content, process, product, and learning environment's differentiating, the study focused on students struggling with foreign language learning when achieving their educational goals. It involved 320 tertiary education students who took an online self-study English language course with differentiated content to identify their special learning needs and difficulties in English language learning. The results of the study demonstrate students' higher engagement and success rates when working with differentiated content since it provides options for completion, choosing one's way to present the results, and to complete the course assignments.

"Ensuring Inclusivity through Critical Thinking in EFL Contexts" by Sandhya Rao Mehta draws on the results from a study that examines the extent to which students in a

supervised undergraduate research project course felt equipped to work independently using a range of critical thinking skills developed within the course. The author brings into discussion critical thinking as an important, but challenging component in the context of English as a foreign language, and links it to inclusivity that embraces the quality of diverse skills, interests, competency levels and corresponding outcomes. She argues that “critical thinking skills are best developed when students are given autonomy for their learning and when they are discussing issues based on their cultural environment”. She also asserts that “giving students autonomy empowers them to think critically and creatively, making learning more inclusive”. The research by Dr. Sandhya Mehta based on a qualitative study of student questionnaires and focus group interviews reveals that critical thinking should be seen as a series of teachable skills. As specified by the author, these skills make it possible for students to develop individual pieces of work that will enable them to find their own voices. Findings of this study also show that providing opportunities for autonomous learning in the context of the English language classroom ensures inclusivity, equipping students with required skills.

In their paper “Using BLENDI Approach to Improve the EFL Students’ Language Skills”, Irina Kazumyan and Nagamurali Eragamreddy explore the implementation of blended learning that incorporates both online and in-person instruction for a more productive learning environment and inclusion in teaching English as a foreign language. Their study also looks at how the BLENDI method affects various language components and whether it can help English language learners enhance their linguistic proficiency. The authors are of the opinion that the BLENDI approach can be implemented with a wide range of students and learning environments. The BLENDI approach is described by the authors as “a forward-thinking and successful technique for enhancing the language proficiency of EFL students in modern educational settings”. However, according to them, to promote inclusion in blended learning environments, strategies that cater for various types of students should be implemented. Additionally, further exploration of elements such as student motivation, teacher facilitation, and the long-term effects on language proficiency becomes important.

The paper by Gennady Medvedev entitled “Common Pronunciation Problems in Inclusive Educational Settings” focuses on pronunciation difficulties of certain segmental features related to Oman’s local English language teaching environment that includes language learners of different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Drawing its conclusions from research findings, Dr. Medvedev’s paper looks into some commonly mispronounced words, in and outside the English language classrooms, the paper explains the reasons behind such challenges and suggests some practical ideas to avoid common pronunciation problems in the context of the inclusive English language classroom.

A related paper by Iryna Lenchuk and Amer Ahmed “Because I Speak Jibbali ...”: A Case Study of the Use of Minority Languages in Dhofari Educational Settings” explores the extent to which the linguistic diversity present in the Dhofar region located in southern Oman is reflected in educational settings for the purpose of creating inclusive teaching and learning practices. The specific focus of the paper is on the use of Jibbali, an endangered indigenous South Arabian language as one of the minority languages spoken in Dhofar, with the aim to answer the question of the level of multilingualism in the Dhofar region, and whether such multilingualism is reflected in the educational settings. As explained by Lenchuk and Ahmed,

learners of English in the context of their research draw heavily on their rich linguistic repertoires in their daily interactions; however, the current educational practices fall short of reflecting that reality. Thus, shared indigenous language(s) primarily tag the context of the interaction as informal and intimate, and space should be given to the use of indigenous languages in educational settings. In the authors' view, inclusion of indigenous languages may significantly contribute to the educational settings currently in place, since as the authors put it, "one way to revitalize the language is to bring the language to the educational settings to the benefits of the language, its speakers and the broader community". This can be viewed as a step towards achieving a more equitable, safe and inclusive learning environment.

The purpose of a paper "Exploring Aspects of Inclusion to Enhance Oral Proficiency in Higher Education EFL Classroom" by Aneta Naumoska and Biljana Naumoska-Sarakinska is to take a closer look at various aspects related to inclusion for the purpose of enhancing English as a Foreign Language learners' oral skills proficiency, addressing the potential need of materials development, and the importance of establishing and promoting clear and objective criteria. The exploration of the aspects of inclusion for oral proficiency's enhancement is supported by the authors' discussion of the need to rethink the way in which oral communicative skills as a vital segment of their communicative proficiency are dealt with in the context of the tertiary English classroom, and whether learners receive proper guidance, support and scaffolding to help them improve them. In the words of the authors, "care ought to be taken so that it is done in a more inclusive fashion to correspond to the new attitudes and expectations of the diverse 'global village' we are living in".

In Elena Spirovska Tevdovska's paper "Intercultural Awareness, Inclusion and Learning Experiences in ESP Courses: Students' Perceptions and Views", the author reviews and examines students' perceptions and views on intercultural awareness and inclusivity in the context of tertiary education and ESP setting. Involving both local and international students who come from diverse ethnic, national and cultural backgrounds, the study conducted by Tevdovska aims at exploring students' awareness of inclusion and diversity. In addition, it examined students' attitude towards the learning environment in ESP courses and teaching and learning practices which foster students' intercultural awareness, the necessity of these practices and the ways to improve. Some teaching practices that facilitate inclusivity and promote intercultural awareness in the context of ESP courses are recommended by the author.

The paper "Hybrid ESP Courses as a Part of an Inclusive Academic Environment" by Albena Stefanova presents a study of the students' and faculty members' attitudes and perceptions to hybrid academic ESP courses. The emphasis of this paper is on inclusion and modern education in the context of learning modes and language teaching. The author asserts that "implementing inclusive policies, creating inclusive environments and applying inclusive methodologies are major aspects of modern education as a basis of sustainable personal and societal development". The discussion in the paper is firmly rooted in scholarly thought on inclusion and its different aspects. It is organized with regard to ESP course design that accommodates different learning styles, and the introduction of inclusive and innovative practices that lead to increased involvement, motivation and opportunities for learning in an academic context.

Digambar Ghodke in the paper entitled "English for Students from Marginalized Sections at the Tertiary Level: An Inclusive Approach" reviews the status of tertiary-level English education in India. In particular, the author inquires whether English education in

India is inclusive or exclusive. The observations provided by the author regarding English pedagogy and learning outcomes at the tertiary level in Indian higher education institutes (HEIs), especially in rural and semi-urban areas, made it possible for the author to identify the need in assisting most learners at the tertiary level in developing basic English skills. According to the authors' observations, "children from privileged sections, especially from urban and metropolitan areas get better exposure at an early age to English and its correct usage in real-life situations with accent and decent. Further, other semi-urban privileged children have also been getting good exposure, although not satisfactory, to the English language from an early age". At the same time, as noted by the author, "their counterparts from the socio-economically underprivileged sections learn English as one of the subjects without appropriate exposure to its usage at primary, secondary, and higher secondary levels for twelve years". As a result, as noticed by the author, "the outcomes are seldom visible in their learning". For this reason, the author suggests that thoughtful consideration of learning needs of diverse student population should be taken by the institutions of tertiary education. Also, there is an argument that an inclusive approach to the English language curricula and pedagogy at the tertiary level that emphasize the needs of learners from marginalized sections and are more inclusive and learner-friendly should be implemented.

In her paper "Language Planning and its Effects on Post Foundation Students' Proficiency in Inclusive Vocational Training Environment", Dalinda Zghidi holds that using the native language as the medium of instruction can help students understand the concepts and skills needed to prepare them for the labor market. The aim of her study is to examine language planning that supports an inclusive learning environment in the context of English as Medium of Instruction (EMI), and its potential impact on students' learning experiences in Oman's vocational colleges. While discussing the barriers to learning that students experience when faced with studying technical English or English for vocational purpose (EVP), the author also considers inadequate English language skills as a significant hindrance to understanding course content and acquiring marketable skills. In the author's view, "by overcoming linguistic barriers, the scope for integrating a group of individuals with special needs becomes open". The author also discusses inclusion of disabled people into vocational education and some potential benefits, including those on personal and socio-economic levels. One of the recommendations includes, for example, forming groups for disabled individuals whose disabilities align with vocational education requirements. According to the author, this policy should be implemented to ensure special needs students' integration into society and active participation in the economic cycle. As claimed by the author, such adjustments and move towards inclusive education "would more effectively enable the desired national growth".

The papers in this thematic collection of the *Journal of Teaching English for Specific and Academic Purposes* focus on different aspects of inclusive English language teaching and learning practice in a variety of contexts. However, they share a common understanding of the significance of inclusiveness and diversity for the continued development and enhancement of our students' competencies and skills. It is the wish of the editors and contributors that this issue serves as a valuable resource and reference guide for the comprehensive presentation and coverage of research on inclusive English language education in different local contexts of teaching and learning. It is also our hope that this collection of papers will prove to be useful for both teachers and researchers as a source of inspiration and ideas, and help them discover new perspectives for implementing inclusive education to build upon.

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INCLUSION IN THE CONTEXT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM: TEACHERS' CURRENT BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

Jamila Al Siyabi, Victoria Tuzlukova, Khalid Al Kaabi, Asila Almaawali

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	Asila Almaawali	 N/A

Abstract. *As the perspectives of English language teaching pedagogy change globally, new trends and issues emerge, and achieving effective inclusive language education is one of them. But what are teachers' current beliefs and practices of inclusion? This paper explores the beliefs that English language teachers in the Sultanate of Oman have confidence in and feel about inclusion giving most of the attention to integration of visually impaired students into the mainstream classroom. Based on the findings of a year-long research project conducted at the Centre for Preparatory Studies of Sultan Qaboos University, these cover such mostly cited and supported by research components, or factors and conditions of inclusive education (Bricker, 2000), as classroom practices, including teaching strategies, classroom environment, classroom management, collaboration and teaming, including special needs students' interaction with regular students in the mainstream English language classroom, participation in group activities, and teacher attitude, including teachers assumptions regarding inclusion, in general, and in the context tertiary education English language teaching and learning, and teacher professional development. Shared experiences and beliefs, as well as the components of inclusion, may lead to stronger culture of inclusion within the researched institution and a broader context of Oman's tertiary education.*

Key words: *inclusive education, English language teaching and learning, special needs, tertiary education, visually impaired students, Sultan Qaboos University, Oman*

1. INTRODUCTION

Recent global changes in perspectives of English language teaching pedagogy have led to the emergence of new trends in teaching methods, evaluation and innovation (Lopes & Cecilia, 2018). One such perspective is about achieving effective inclusive language education where inclusion is viewed as a “pedagogical approach that starts with the learning of everybody” (Black-Hawkins, 2017, p. 13) in spite of any factors, including psychological and physiological factors that play a significant role in foreign language teaching and learning as explained in a study by Bestchastnova and Bestchastnova (2023). For example, Zehne (2018) argues that ‘English conceptualized as a lingua franca

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... contributes to individualization and individual learning goals as a central aspect of inclusive teaching practices in ELT' (n.p.). Though not challenge free at different levels of language education, including the university level, as reported in some studies that have identified limited educational programs that accommodate to the visually impaired language learners (Cárdenas & Inga, 2019; Cárdenas & Inga, 2011). a limited focus on planning and material design (Al-Busaidi & Tuzlukova, 2018; Tuzlukova et al., 2023), as well as limited knowledge of suitable methodologies and strategies to teach the different language skills (Cárdenas & Inga, 2019), many scholars strongly support inclusive language education. Cantos et. al (2022) highlight the significance of raising the awareness of the educational community on the subject of inclusion and diversity. According to the researchers, inclusion "must be present in classrooms and be part of all the elements that integrate the teaching process and learning because we are all part of a diversity with particularities, strengths, and weaknesses, which enrich the classroom in the formation of values and new knowledge from an integrality (p.152). But what are English language teachers' current beliefs and practices of inclusion? This paper explores the beliefs that English language teachers in the Sultanate of Oman think and feel about inclusion with the focus on integrating visually impaired students into mainstream English language classroom.

2. STUDY CONTEXT

McMaster (2014) argues that 'while there is no set recipe for achieving a 'world class inclusive education system', each example offered ingredients that schools could use to create their own 'flavour' of inclusion' (p.42). This study was conducted at the Centre for Preparatory Studies at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman. In research, Oman's context of higher education is referred to as an English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) context (Mathew & Narayanan, 2023). The Center for Preparatory Studies is one of the units of Sultan Qaboos University, a national leader in higher education and community service in Oman, that primarily focuses on the English language education and offers both foundation and credit English language courses. "To excel in teaching and learning, research and innovation, and community service" (Mission, n.d., n.p.) is among the university's objectives and goals. Though still a relatively new experience of teaching and learning, inclusion of special needs English language learners is among institutional policies and practices with a special focus on departing students' learning and adaptation to the educational process from their needs.

3. STUDY METHODOLOGY

An interview instrument was developed to explore the teachers' backgrounds and experiences with English language teaching in the context of inclusive English language classroom. Eight teachers from the Centre for Preparatory Studies at Sultan Qaboos University who had taught special needs students in an inclusive class were interviewed. They were asked to reflect on their beliefs and practices of teaching visually impaired students in a mainstream classroom. The focus was on diverse aspects of student learning, classroom teaching practices, their challenging and advantageous aspects. For qualitative analysis, participants' free responses were coded using observed components, or factors and conditions of inclusive education (Bricker, 2000) that emerged. Two general types of

coding were performed. Free responses were grouped thematically, where possible. To keep data correctly and draw meaningful conclusions, additionally, free responses were coded and grouped to track the participants' individual responses. Each study participant received a code name "Teacher" followed by a number from one to eight.

4. STUDY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are based on the data analysis of teacher interviews. Identified teacher beliefs cover such components, or factors and conditions of inclusive education (Bricker, 2000), as classroom practices, teacher attitude, collaboration and teaming. These components are mostly cited and supported by research in inclusive education (Bricker, 2000; Janssen, 2006).

4.1. Classroom practices

4.1.1. *Teaching strategies and classroom environment*

While acknowledging the encouragement in the process of enabling and exercising the elements of inclusion in the English language classroom, the participants in the study, as the findings reveal, reported on the ways they developed and used to include visually impaired students in the wider context of the mainstream English language classroom. One illustration is teachers' discussion about whether they had to modify any teaching strategies and classroom environment to enhance the learning of students with special needs. Teacher 1 confirmed that she had to "make it a point" that in "every single" class, special needs students were asked questions and asked to read as any normal student. She also "discouraged" any special needs student to "think they can take extra time just for the sake of it", but she also saw how "genuine" the need was to "give extra time for any extension to deadlines". Though Teacher 7 reported no "change" of any teaching strategies, Teacher 2 expressed the same sentiment as Teacher 1. This participant, for example, stated that he had to increase the "proportion of collaborative and peer-learning" in his lessons. He "paired" students with special educational needs with other students, and when "required" gave roles to the students in the "group". For example, in a reading comprehension task he would give the sighted student the role of "reader" and the blind student the role of "thinker", the former would read the question and read or reread sections of the text, while the blind student would try to "figure out" the answer. Teacher 5 mentioned using WhatsApp messages to record writing classes whenever a new color-coded sample was introduced in the course. Teacher 8, however, stated that having special needs students in her classes does not "compel" her to make any "changes" to the classroom "routine" or "lesson strategies"; "the only thing" is that she often uses the note taking time or activity answering time to write the lesson notes on the concerned student notebook or explain a given point to him/her. Teacher 3 stated that "modifying" teaching strategies and "adapting" the classroom environment are "important steps" in "enhancing" the learning of students with special needs in an inclusive classroom. Teacher 4 also asserted that she had to "modify" a few teaching activities and assignments to "enhance" the learning of visually impaired students. Further, this study participant mentioned that regarding the environment, she had to "incorporate" most of the activities where there was group work to make sure that visually impaired students were "really following". She stated that she had assigned the two visually impaired she had in one group, but then realized that they "separate" [d] themselves from the rest of the group, so she "instinctively" mixed them with other groups.

4.1.2. Strategies adopted for inclusive English classroom and use of assistive technology

Susanto and Nanda (2018) argue that visually impaired students can study a foreign language with a unique support of assistive technologies. Closely related are the findings in the study by Cárdenas and Inga (2019) who contend that the adoption approaches that are meaningful and that integrate innovative technologies can enhance the learning of visual impaired students. The researchers believe that technologies can assist visually impaired students in developing more autonomy and independence in learning and boost their engagement and communication in a heterogeneous classroom setting. These ideas resonate with the findings in this study.

For an inclusive classroom, teachers in the context of Oman's tertiary education English language classroom employed different strategies for teaching English and used some assistive technologies. Teacher 1 used Braille copies, and her students brought their audio-enabled special needs software installed on their laptops. Teacher 7 employed some active learning strategies such as think/pair/share, jigsaw reading (visually impaired students have their own version of the reading book, they do not have difficulties engaging in this activity), and role play to help her students with visual impairments "benefit more from the class just like the students without disabilities". Considering assistive technology, Teacher 7 found Text-To-Speech (TTS) software "quite valuable" since she could help her students gain more from their reading classes by listening to the text and answering the questions. Teacher 2 stated that he shared low vision materials in advance of lessons and produced Moodle quizzes that were accessible. He also did peer-instruction, collaborative writing, low-vision versions of portfolio and study skills assessment documents. Teacher 2 indicated, however, that he didn't use assistive technology, but his low vision student did. Teacher 5 also indicated that she made sure that she "voiced" almost everything she "explained". WhatsApp and Google Classroom were used "heavily" in her class to create a more "friendly" and easy-to-use learning environment. Teacher 5 also elaborated that she dedicated some of the class time to sit next to the SN student and explain the materials/ activities privately, and she resorted to peer work too. Teacher 8 stated that she often used collaborative learning, pair work and peer correction activities. For visually impaired students, she always used voice feedback (from Google) either for their assigned work submitted to Google Classroom or their project tasks (via WhatsApp). Teacher 3 said that she used different teaching methods, adjusted materials and activities as needed, provided individual support and used assistive technology. She added that she communicated with the student using WhatsApp since her visually impaired student was trained to use a screen reader, and she requested a soft copy of the teaching materials and shared it with the student for "easier accessibility". Teacher 4 stated that she tried to focus more on "detailed verbal" descriptions and instructions and tried to do more peer work and group activities. She also proposed that it was an excellent experience for both the visually impaired students and his classmates as it allowed "mutual learning". Teacher 6 stated that her students with visual impairments were familiar with Google Classroom; therefore, this platform helped her to "monitor" them, and there were times when they had to "upload" assignments. She also mentioned that her students used some devices that helped with their learning such as magnifiers and screen readers. Teacher 6, however, contended that she did not use much assistive technology as she had "no recommendations or suggestions" from the administration of

the course she taught despite her frequent requests. She added that she “felt very guilty”, and that she “needed more training” on assistive technologies.

Emerging assistive technologies can pave the way for more efficient integration of the visually impaired students into the mainstream English language classroom as they can make use of a range of resources with the screen reader technology such as Non-Visual Desktop Access (NVDA) and Job Access with Speech (JAWS) (Susanto & Nanda, 2018). There is a need for higher education institutions to be more inclusive via adapting their classroom methodologies to make them more appropriate and incorporate emerging technologies (Cardenas & Inga, 2020).

4.1.3. Inclusion and discipline

Teachers were asked to discuss whether they thought inclusion might cause any problems with discipline in classroom management. Teacher 1 stated that teachers “must expect issues of normal students “wanting to sit separately” and “away from” the special needs”. As a teacher, Teacher 7 noted that she did not have any problems with her classroom management since she tried to explain “each and every activity” to her visually impaired students and “put them in groups” of two or three to be “engaged with the activity”. Teacher 2 stated that the “only issues” he could “foresee” are “managing” the rest of the class while “attending” to the “needs” of the special needs students one-on-one and “managing exclusion” or “bullying” if it occurs. Teacher 5 believed that inclusion could “cause” problems, while Teacher 8 disagreed stating that inclusion does not “lead to” problems “at all”. Similarly, Teacher 4 disagreed that inclusion could lead to issues with discipline. Teacher 6 noted that visually impaired students sometimes have other psychological issues, and that teachers have to be “informed” about students’ “details”. This is a clear reference to the significance of student profile and how teachers can interact with them in a more informed manner. Teacher 3 stated that the concept of special needs inclusion, where students with “diverse abilities” are “included” in mainstream classrooms, can present “unique” challenges for classroom management; however, it is important to note, she argued, that these challenges can be “effectively addressed” with “appropriate” strategies and support.

4.1.4. Attention to students in class

Teachers were asked to discuss any difficulty that they experienced in giving equal attention to all students in an inclusive class, and they came up with interesting points to ponder over. Teacher 1 proposed that normal students can become “impatient, even possessive” for the teacher’s attention. Further, Teacher 7 found it “a bit challenging at times”, especially when students had a listening/reading (i.e. receptive skills) practice since the visually impaired students “needed special attention” to do the activities and she had to “provide other students with whole class feedback”. Teacher 2 indicated that “occasionally” he had “difficulty ensuring” that his attention was “well-distributed” and ensuring that the “needs” of “all” students were “supported” and their learning was “appropriately scaffolded”. Teacher 5 proposed that visually impaired students “require” a longer time to “process” the learning materials, “locate” the activities and “form” the answers. They “need much more attention”, Teacher 5 explained, than “expected” especially in reading classes. Teacher 8 thought that inclusion can be at times “difficult” to give “equal” attention to all students, and that is why she sometimes “delegate” [s] to

excellent students and those who are willing to help their peers, and they “accept” to support her in engaging with special educational needs peers. Teacher 3 proposed that in an inclusive classroom, it can be “challenging” to give “equal” attention to all students, due to their “unique needs”. Teacher 6 stated that the “main challenge” was “ensuring” visually impaired students were “following up” with her or not. She had to ask them at the end of the class and “see if they are there”. She would ask questions such as, ‘Are we on the same page? Do you know what you are supposed to do for the next class? Have you absorbed what we have discussed today?’ She also indicated that even though their responses were “positive”, she was never “sure” if that was the case. Teacher 4, however, stated that she had encountered “no difficulty” in this regard.

4.2. Collaboration and teaming

4.2.1. *Special needs students’ interaction with regular students*

As specified by Vygotsky (1978), students learn through their interactions with more knowledgeable fellows. One of the interview questions encouraged study participants to share their perspectives on whether they thought students with special needs are easily accepted by students without disabilities. Teacher 1 indicated that this could be a “challenge”: “there is this – us and them – divide, unfortunately”. Teacher 7 maintained that all the students in her class were so “cooperative and helpful” and did their best to help her visually impaired students. She further contended that *‘it all depends on the classroom environment. If the teacher builds a good rapport with their students and creates a friendly environment, it is not hard to ask all students (both with disabilities and without disabilities) to work together’*.

Teacher 2 argued that interaction can be very dependent on both the personality of the students and the instructor’s teaching style. He mentioned that he had a physically disabled student who had a small group of preferred partners who she worked with, but she seemed isolated from other female students in the class. This student would often sit alone in the classroom before class while the others were on the balcony; as she used the male corridor to enter and leave class, she left the classroom alone and travelled to class alone. Teacher 2’s other special needs student was a blind male student, and he was accepted by the class; however, this student suggested that it was due to Teacher 2’s teaching style, as in a previous level his classmates were described as being afraid to talk to him. Teacher 2 used a large amount of pair work, and small discussion activities, and he regularly changed people’s partners. The students also did a writing lesson in which they discussed problems and solutions for issues faced by blind people. This led to other students in the class asking him questions about the problems he faced. This seemed to make them more “empathetic” about the challenges he faced, and “respectful” of how he “overcame” them. Teacher 2, however, emphasized that this would not “work with” all blind students, as some would not “enjoy discussing their disabilities”. He argued further that autism and other psychological or personality conditions often have “worse social consequences” than physical disorders. Teacher 5 pointed out that her SN students were “accepted warmly”, and most students “supported them in one way or another”. She also stated that most of them were “lucky enough” to have “dedicated” classmates to be “available” even outside class time. Teacher 8 also proposed that students without disabilities are very “kind and willing” to help their peers with disabilities, and that she would normally “approach” some and “inform” them about “what is expected” from them in terms of “help and collaboration”, and they accept with no “problems or objections”. Teacher 3 indicated

that in her classroom, students with special needs were “easily accepted” by their peers without disabilities; the other students were “helpful, supportive” and “treated” them with “kindness and respect”, and this created a “positive and inclusive” classroom environment. Further, Teacher 4 stated that all the students loved the visually impaired student she had and were very “helpful and friendly”. Teacher 6 maintained that her students were “very willing” to help, and they were “interested” in working with them in groups.

4.2.2. Group activities

Janssen (2006) emphasizes major components that constitute inclusion represented in “administrative support, teacher attitude, parental support and involvement, collaboration and teaming, and classroom practices” (p.7). More support is needed for visually impaired students to succeed in their learning (Hiago & Sade, 2020).

The teachers also discussed whether it was easy to conduct group activities involving special needs students with general students. Teacher 1 contended that the “nature” of the course she taught did not “require” this. Teacher 7, however, believed that it can be “challenging” because “students without disabilities are not trained to know how to behave with special needs students”, and that “can cause some problems”. If the teacher “monitors” the class “meticulously” and pays enough attention to all groups, she further argued, they can “make sure” the activity is “conducted successfully”. Teacher 2, on the other hand, indicated that this was “not necessary”, but with “adequate planning and experience”, and “a willingness” to change activities and “sequences” of learning, it was “do-able”. Teacher 5, similarly, thought that group activities are “alright” in speaking classes, but it is “very challenging” when it comes to the other skills, especially reading and listening. She mentioned that she tried group work in reading classes, and the result was “time-consuming” tasks and “failing to finish on time”. Teacher 8 indicated that group work is challenging and time consuming to “a great extent”. Teacher 3 stated that conducting group activities that include both special needs and general students can be “challenging” and may “require extra planning and instruction”. Teacher 3 added that it is important to consider each student's abilities and make “necessary adaptations” to “ensure” everyone can “participate and benefit” from the activity. Teacher 4, however, indicated that it was “easy to involve” visually impaired students in group work. To Teacher 6, it was also “easy” to conduct group activities where group members were assigned roles for discussion, critical thinking, group reading and comprehension questions.

4.2.3. Academic and social effects for special needs students

The interviewed teachers also talked about the concept of positive academic and social effects for students with special needs. Teacher 1 argued that the experience can be positive in “many ways”, especially when one sees them “struggle and prove themselves”, but it can be “negative” when other students “do not include them and perhaps hurt their feelings”. She further proposed that “in case of other related psychosomatic disorders”, it can be “quite disconcerting” to the teacher and other students. Considering the positive aspects, Teacher 7 contended that inclusion helps visually impaired students “achieve better academic outcomes”, and it gives them the “opportunity to socialize” with their classmates. On the other hand, Teacher 7 asserted that “the only negative effect” is “the limited attention” that teachers can give to visually impaired students, especially in “mixed-ability” classes.

Further, Teacher 2 highlighted some positive impacts such as “developing skills” for inclusion in society and the workplaces, “developing awareness” of the challenges of studying, working and socializing in a “world designed for non-disabled” people, developing strategies for “coping with” this and developing social skills and social connections. He also added that this could help “encourage tolerance” among both students and teachers, “demystifying disabilities” for those who are not “experienced” with disabled people. Yet, Teacher 2 thought that special schools “allow” them to “develop relationships and solidarity” with people with “similar” experiences, SEN students can receive “specialized support”, and therefore, “unnecessary challenges and barriers” are “removed”.

Teacher 5 asserted that one positive aspect of inclusion is “creating a sense of belonging and unity” among students. She further explained that inclusion can lead to “a wider network” of friends for students, and they may receive help from their peers. Teacher 5, however, contended that the “gap in proficiency levels” between students can become “apparent”, especially in activities that involve photos, and that this can make some students “feel lost or different”. She also added that “implementing” inclusion can be “time-consuming”, and teachers may “struggle” to cover all the required material within the course schedule. According to Teacher 5, teachers may also need to explain activities “multiple times” to “ensure” that all students understand, a situation that can require extra effort on their part. Teacher 8 emphasized that positive effects lie in “boosting” the students’ “morale” and providing them with enough support and help them “overcome” “obstacles” to be able to “prove themselves”. Teacher 8 also maintained that if those students are used to being “treated as babies” and “incapable” of doing anything on their own, this will “make the teacher’s job extremely hard” and the students won’t be able to make any “progress” nor “push” themselves out of their “comfort zones”.

Teacher 3 contended that inclusion in education can have positive and negative effects for students with special needs. She elaborated that positive effects include “academic and social growth and improved self-esteem”, whereas negative effects may include “challenges” with “pace and content”, and “limited individual” attention. Teacher 3 also commented that overall, effective implementation, support and resources are crucial in “maximizing” the positive effects of inclusion while addressing potential challenges. Concerning the positive aspects, Teacher 4 mentioned that the visually impaired student she had taught was an amazing example of a hardworking and smart student. She stated, however, that the negative side was that she always needed extra time and effort to work with this particular student at the end of the class. Teacher 6 argued that when regular students help a classmate who needs their help and who does not “enjoy the same advantage” they do, this increases the collaboration and cooperation between students in doing the classroom activities. To her, this is a dynamo effect; when visually impaired students get “better help”, they will understand the materials “better” their “performance” will “definitely be better”.

4.2.4. Academic and social effects on regular students due to having visually impaired students in class

During the interviews, the teachers who participated in the study also reflected on the effects of having students with visual impairments on regular students in their classes. Teacher 1 contended that this differs from “cohort to cohort and from student to student”.

She elaborated further noting that ‘some feel nothing, some feel very motivated to do better and shed off their laziness, some dislike their presence and get impatient’.

Teacher 1 argued further that “there is no one answer to this question” as it is a “dynamic situation” where teachers as adults must “set thinking and attitude right”. Teacher 7, on the other hand, asserted that students without disabilities can “benefit” both academically and socially from being with VI students since being in a “diverse environment” can help “develop a sense of empathy and understanding” among students. Additionally, Teacher 7 argued that “students’ problem-solving” abilities can “improve”, leading to “better” academic performance. Teacher 2 agreed that socially, other students “practice tolerance”, inclusion and “develop empathy”, while academically, it “encourages peer-support” which can “consolidate knowledge” and “develop language skills”.

In addition, Teacher 5 proposed that from an “academic standpoint”, it is “possible” that “low achieving” students may “view” their peers with special needs as “positive role models for motivation”, and that regular students can also benefit socially from “interacting with” their peers with special needs. An example Teacher 5 used was a visually impaired female student who “formed” a “close” friendship with a regular student through their “partnership” in class, which, according to her, showed that regular students can “develop” the social skill of “accepting” and “working with” their peers with special needs. Teacher 8 also asserted that she “certainly” believed that there are positive academic and social impacts on students without disabilities; it is an “inspiring” learning experience to them and a “lesson” in “compassion and collaborative learning”. Teacher 3 agreed that having visually impaired students in regular classrooms can positively impact their regular peers. It can increase “empathy”, improve communication skills, “foster” collaboration and teamwork, “enhance” problem-solving abilities, and “raise awareness about accessibility”. Teacher 4 indicated that “all” the students wanted to be “around” him, and he “motivated” his classmates to “work harder and be better”.

Further, Teacher 6 contended that when regular students “interact with” the visually impaired students, this is part of their “social responsibility”, “sense of belonging”, “obligation” and “service” to the “community” they “belong to”. It is also about, she added, feeling “responsible for” and being “considerate about” the people around them as well as reducing “arrogance” as they help someone “who needs help”. Regular students can also become more “giving” and “take the initiative” as they do not “wait for the teacher” to ask them to help. This, Teacher 6 added, “prepares them for real life” so when they meet special needs individuals around them, they are well prepared on how to deal with them.

4.3. Teacher attitude

4.3.1. Is inclusion a good idea?

Teaching the English language effectively is one primary strategy that the Omani government implements to maintain its sustainable development (Al Jadidi, 2009). However, research in the Omani higher education context of the English language teaching and learning of visually impaired students indicates that teachers’ knowledge and expertise is inadequate (Al-Busaidi & Tuzlukova, 2018). As well as that, teaching programs at higher education institutions are not entirely adapted to the needs of the visually impaired students (Al-Siyabi et al., 2022). As a consequence, active involvement of visually impaired students in their learning processes is hindered (Al-Siyabi et al.,

2022). In addition, failing to adapt teaching approaches that target students who have visual impairment such as using of visual-based modules and pictograms, materials in Braille, digitalized course materials also deprive visually impaired students of equal access to learning (Tuzlukova et al., 2021). These observations resonate with the study by Febtiningsih et al. (2021) that emphasizes that the challenges that visually impaired students encounter in the writing component of the English language class are mainly about curriculum and syllabus not matching the students' need, teaching time constraint, limited learning resources, inappropriateness of teaching strategy, unqualified teachers and negative students' attitude.

On the notion of whether inclusion is good practice in the context of English language teaching and learning at the level of higher education, teachers brought up different perspectives. Teacher 1 noted that inclusion should be "up to a limited number". In a class, a teacher can "handle" up to two special needs students "properly" as it is "gentler on all concerned" when institutions "do it in a very subtle and effective way". Teacher 7 argued that inclusion is "highly recommend" if it is seen from "different perspectives". She elaborated,

from a teacher's point of view, having VI students is a blessing since they can assist these students in reaching their potential and enjoying a sense of fulfillment. Moreover, teachers should be more creative in designing and implementing lesson plans, which can eventually lead to gaining more experience. Considering VI students themselves, they can socialize with other students their age, which gives them the opportunity to discuss their issues with their classmates. Regular students may also find inclusion helpful since they can develop empathy and understanding.

Teacher 2 shared a similar perspective and argued that "failing" to practice inclusion "isolates" special needs students "freely participating" in society, and it "perpetuates" a society that "fails to understand and accommodate" people with special needs. Teacher 5 believed that inclusion should not be recommended unless teachers are "provided" with "good training", and the course materials are "tailored fairly to meet" the needs of students with special needs. She added that without adequate support and accommodations, the "benefits" of inclusion may not be "fully realized", and this could lead to "difficulties" for both regular students and those with special needs. It is crucial, according to Teacher 5, that the "necessary resources and support" are "provided" to "ensure" that inclusion is "implemented successfully" and that all students are given "equal opportunities to succeed".

Teacher 8 also asserted that she would "absolutely" opt for inclusion. She argued further that she is against "excluding" these students and "creating a discriminatory educational system" whereby SN students are taught "separately" from ordinary students, as this is "bound to create negative attitudes" and "mental issues" for both parties. Teacher 3 emphasized that inclusion in education is generally recommended because it "benefits" students with special needs and "promotes" "equality, social integration, and academic growth". Teacher 3 also stressed that "challenges" can be "overcome" with "individualized support and resources", and that "decisions" should be based on each student's "needs, available sources", namely materials and trained teaching staff.

Teacher 4 argued that inclusion helps students with visual impairments to "blend in" with other students and learn from them, and this will help them in their "future career" and will make it "easy" for visually impaired students to "blend into" their future "work environment". Teacher 6 noted that she is "definitely" with preparing the teacher, "everyone and the environment", and the "entire community" to "implement" inclusion.

Teacher 6 also argued that if all the involved “parties” prepare for inclusion, the institution should go for it, but she maintained that her experience was totally the “opposite” as she initially had some sort of “rejection”, and that she had “zero idea” on how to deal with students who have a certain visual impairment. She also stated that she was “lucky” to have students who were “willing” to help, but it might not always be the case. There are still “behaviors” of certain people who still feel “reluctant” to help people with visual impairments and “avoid” them. Teacher 6 also mentioned an “innovative event” called, “Dinner in the Dark” conducted by one of the student associations at the university where regular students get the experience of having dinner with visually impaired students in complete darkness to experience what it is like to be visually impaired to “raise awareness” about this group of students. Teacher 6 also noted that though she never attended the event, she could “picture” it where the concept of dealing with visually impaired students can be “spread” without resorting to merely conventional means such as lectures and speeches.

4.3.2. *Special training*

Recent research in the context of Oman indicates that there is a lack of awareness about the concepts related to inclusion in higher education (Al-Busaidi & Tuzlukova, 2018). Teacher training and professional development for boosting required competencies of language educators in inclusive classrooms can orient them to innovations and use of technologies and lead teachers to be more prepared to handle inclusive teaching (Al-Siyabi et al., 2022). Teachers should be informed of the needs of the visually impaired English language learners, their levels of impairment and potential training needs teachers engaged to enhance effective student learning (Al-Busaidi & Tuzlukova, 2018).

Teachers who participated in the study reflected on whether they thought that special training is required to teach special needs students, and they also talked about how they managed. Teacher 1 argued that teachers involved in the teaching of the special needs must be interviewed to see the teacher’s intent is “sincere” and not for the sake of “adding a feather in the CV Cap” of having done this and that. It should be a “very genuine urge” to be “useful” and to “support” the blind students “with a balance of compassion, care and also firm treatment” so students do not “make excuses”. In the interview, the focus should be on the teacher’s real intent.

Teacher 7 argued that to teach students more effectively, teachers at some level “require” special training sessions from “experts” to “better manage their classes”. To improve teaching skills, Teacher 7 continued, she read articles, watched videos on YouTube, and participated in online courses. Teacher 2 stated that he managed by “drawing on” his experience of communicative language teaching, peer-learning and differentiation. He added that he tried to “remain empathetic” considering the challenges that each activity may pose, and thinking about how he could get around them while still ensuring his blind student was “engaged and challenged”. He also “liaised” with the special needs committee. Teacher 2 contended, however, that he felt more “training and sharing” is “required” to “ensure good practice” and “expand teachers’ repertoires of strategies”. Teacher 5 also stated that special training is “definitely” significant, and that even though she “learned by experience”, she felt that special training is “necessary”. Teacher 8 strongly believed that special training is “required” for teachers to be able to “handle” SN students “effectively”. She also contended that she managed to teach these students for years “relying” on her “patient nature and willingness” to give and support students in need. Teacher 3 also argued that special

training is important for teachers to “effectively” teach students with special needs; it helps them learn strategies and techniques “tailored to” the “unique” needs of these students. This training equips teachers, Teacher 3 continued, with the skills to “create inclusive” classrooms, adapt materials, and provide “appropriate” support. Teacher 4 contended that professional training must be provided for teachers before taking on such a task. She mentioned that in the beginning, teaching a visually impaired student was “very challenging” since she had never taught students with visual impairments. She also stated that beside getting some help from the course leader, she had to spend hours doing research and reading online articles about how to work with visually impaired students. Teacher 6 contended that teachers have to be “prepared”, classrooms should be “equipped”, and regular students have to be “prepared culturally and mentally”. She suggested that teachers need help on “how to deal with” special needs students; they need to be briefed on “applications and software” that can be used when teaching visually impaired students. However, she added, sometimes even when training opportunities are available, teachers may have “other duties” that prevent them from “joining” training.

7. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Visually impaired students are at a disadvantage in the English language classroom owing to the limited access to required information they gain through the use of the Braille system or audio recorded materials, a situation that also leads to lacking social inclusion (Cárdenas & Inga, 2011). Modification of teaching material and instruction for visually impaired English language learners is normally inadequate (Susanto & Nanda, 2018). Visually impaired students face obstacles in developing autonomy in language education and language acquisition, (Hiago & Sade, 2020). Visually impaired language learners are still disadvantaged in learning; however, emerging assistive technologies have paved the way for a growing interest in the English language education of visually impaired students, access to knowledge and its success, and it has also led to an increase in the body of literature on teaching and learning of these students in higher education (Arslantaş, 2017). Shared experiences and beliefs, as well as the components of inclusion, may also lead to stronger culture of inclusion within the researched institution and a broader context of Oman’s tertiary education.

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DIFFERENTIATING E-LEARNING CONTENT IN ESL COURSES TO MEET SPECIAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

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Abstract. *Dyslexia is a special need more than a reading difficulty considered along with the notion of language aptitude regarded as a cluster of cognitive factors related to language learning. This paper reports on a study that focused on special learning needs of students with reading and writing difficulties or dyslexia who take English as a compulsory course at the institutions of tertiary education in Russia. The study was guided by understanding that differentiating the content, the process, the product, and the learning environment can be effective for achieving the educational goals of students struggling with foreign language learning. It involved 320 tertiary education students who took an online self-study English language course with differentiated content, to identify their special learning needs and difficulties in English language learning. The Learning Management System analytics was conducted, and the results of engagement and success rates of the students completing the tasks with or without differentiated content were compared. The findings of the study demonstrate students' higher engagement and success rates when working with differentiated content since it provides options for completion, choosing one's way to present the results, and to complete the course assignments.*

Key words: *dyslexia, special learning needs, educational content, differentiated learning*

1. INTRODUCTION

Diversity in today's classrooms at all levels of education is what teachers might encounter, and what might be one of the challenges for them. Diversity often requires different approaches and techniques to meet students' needs to make sure all of them reach their full academic potential. How might then students differ in the language classroom? They might differ in terms of motivation, aptitude for language learning, and differences in the pace of learning, as well as economic, social, linguistic, and ethnic diversity, and specific learning differences such as, for example, special physical or learning needs.

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In education, the notion of ‘inclusion’ was originally introduced in the area of special needs’ education, and later has been expanded to specify a type of education that caters for all students (Erlam et al. 2021). Inclusive education is defined as a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners and can thus be understood as a key strategy to achieve education for all (Acedo 2008). It is also advised that as an overall principle, inclusive education should guide all education policies and practices, starting from the fact that education is a basic human right and the foundation for a more just and equal society (UNESCO report 2016). Consequently, inclusive education is not about highlighting the difference but about how to support everyone in the class.

2. INCLUSION AND SPECIAL NEEDS

According to the Rosstat’ statistics, special needs students in Russia make between 1% to 8% of the tertiary student population depending on the choice of future profession (Social Monitoring of the Ministry of Education 2017, p.3). As explained in Daitov and Daitova 2022, special needs are regarded as disabilities in the Russian system of education. These involve such categories as visual, hearing or mobility impairment, and physical disabilities. Inclusive education practices are mostly offered for these categories. However, they might include individualized education programs as university students can experience even more pressure to meet special requirements to graduate. Integration of those who are impaired is challenging but yet can be successful (Tuzlukova et al. 2023).

Foreign language is one of the tertiary education requirements both in Sciences and Humanities that leads to an exam at the end of the second year of a Bachelor’s degree. To achieve the learning outcomes and pass the exam, students have to complete the course that involves such components as reading for specific purposes, making presentations of organized ideas, and academic writing. The results of a six-year monitoring of the students who come to the university choosing non-linguistic specialties show that the level of English differs from A1 to B2. The number of students performing at A1 are about 30% depending on the faculty. The federal standard for the secondary school states that those graduating from the ninth grade are supposed to have an A2 level of English and those finishing the eleventh grade are at least at B1 level (Federal Standard, 2022). The question that this research is trying to answer is whether poor academic performance in English is due to low language aptitude of a student or due to learning difficulties that students are not aware of, like dyslexia.

Dyslexia is not among the categories of disabilities in Russian education, and students struggling with reading or writing in English are not supported by any special needs programs and students are not provided any assistance.

According to the British Dyslexia Association, “dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. It is especially interesting that reading comprehension is described as a secondary consequence that may reduce reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge. (IDA 2008, p.16)

Educators worldwide emphasize that dyslexia is among the most common language-based learning disabilities that affects reading, spelling, and information processing of

roughly 20 % of the world population (Pauc 2005). Heiman and Prezel 2003 believe that dyslexia is a lifelong disability, and the difficulties that individuals experience at school continue into higher education. Lopez-Escribano, Sanchez and Carretero 2018 are of the opinion that the ability to read and write properly pose even more challenges to the dyslexic individual as the expectation for effective note taking and academic writing is higher at tertiary level, and this is when, as noted by MacCullagh 2014, globally, there is indication that higher education institutions are seeing an increasing student population with disabilities, particularly dyslexia.

The above-mentioned approaches to treat dyslexia in education prove that it needs deeper understanding by educators than just a reading or writing difficulty.

In Russia, the problem of reading and writing difficulties has been studied for several decades and is connected with the names of A. Lurii 1987, R. Levina 2000, R. Lalaeva 2003 and others. Complex approach combining the studies in medicine, psychology and pedagogy aimed at understanding the nature of different aspects in learning writing and reading, has been proven in the works of B. Ananiev (1982), L. Paramonova (2001), I. Sadovnikova (2005) and others. Dyslexia is viewed as a special learning need mostly defined as reading difficulty, while dysgraphia is considered a writing difficulty. (Letter from the Ministry of Education 2023, p. 2-3).

There is some inconsistency in terminology that is used in pedagogical and medical sources. This is due to the fact that Russian doctors use The International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, the 10th edition (ICD 2008) where there is no such disease as dyslexia. There is a specific reading disorder with a disease code F81.0, but it covers only severe cases when a child has difficulties comprehending the material along with letter recognition (ICD-10 2019). As a result, Russian neurologists do not work with dyslexia in Russia. At primary and secondary school levels, dyslexic children get assistance from psychologists and psychotherapists who deal primarily with reading and writing difficulties in the Russian language, and difficulties in math. Those struggling with reading and writing in Russian might not be high achievers in a foreign language as a subject at school; however, when they choose to continue their education, they still have to learn a foreign language, predominantly English at the tertiary level.

3. APTITUDE AS AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

At a secondary school level, the support to dyslexic students is meant to be provided by a school psychologist. A guide from the Ministry of Education dated from 2019 optimizes pedagogical and psychological support for those who face difficulties in writing and reading. Dyslexia is considered as a specific selective difficulty influencing the academic performance of certain students (Kornev 2003). There is also a guide published in 2020 (A Guide for School Teachers and Speech Therapists 2019) that regulates the work of teachers and speech therapists at school to provide support to the students struggling with writing and reading. This guidance is aimed mostly at supporting the students while learning Russian. There is no official guidance from the Ministry of Education in terms of teaching English as a foreign language at school to those who have difficulties in reading and spelling.

So English is quite often left behind by a student and their parents who primarily focus on improvements in the Russian language. This is because by the time such students finish school and start planning their further education, they have to achieve a high standard of state exams, including exam in Russian, and, as a rule, tertiary education students do not have signs of dyslexia in their mother tongue. At the same time, they still might face difficulties in learning a foreign language. This could happen because they did not spend time and effort to overcome difficulties in writing or reading in English as this was not their priority. They come to a university and have to fulfill the requirements of the syllabus that includes reading, writing - both general and academic, listening, and speaking on a level not lower than B1 by the end of the second year (Program, 2023, p.15).

Students come with a low level of English, they have not grammar more than 3 academic hours of classes a week and about 35 hours of self-study work a semester. Those who did not have signs of dyslexia, but just did not learn English well at school are struggling to achieve the goal of the course. Those who have signs of dyslexia should experience even more pressure. The question of our research is whether foreign language learning can be improved by better input provided by differentiated content and individual support of the students, or is the language aptitude what limits the level that a student can achieve in certain circumstances.

Research suggests that in the context, where the input is poor, language aptitude is important (Wen 2018). Language aptitude refers to the learner's inherent ability for language learning that is not involved in the learner's general intelligence (Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam 2008). The language aptitude clusters cognitive factors that researchers believe are related to success in learning a foreign or second language (Dörnyei 2005).

The three main components of the language aptitude are:

1. *Language analytic ability* that refers to the ability to see patterns and regularities in language and to develop an understanding of how language works. It underlines the learning of the grammatical structures of a language.
2. *Phonemic encoding ability* that relates to the ability to associate symbols and sounds. It is associated with the ability to decode aural language and to express oneself orally.
3. *Memory*. Of all the components of language aptitude, understanding about memory is the one that has changed the most over time. Current thinking refers to 'working memory' as being important for language learning. Working memory is a complicated construct that is involved in the storage and processing of information (Miyake & Friedman 1998).

Language aptitude is not about the fact that a student might have challenges in developing of all four skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. It is possible that a student is more proficient in any of the skills and weak in others. The question is how the teacher can best cater to the different aptitude strengths and weaknesses of the students that they have in their class. Research suggests that giving learners explicit information about the language they are learning, including grammar rules and explanations is important because it tends to even out differences that there might be for learners in terms of the aptitude (Erlam 2005).

4. LEARNING NEEDS OF DYSLEXIC STUDENTS IN A CONTEXT OF A RUSSIAN TERTIARY EDUCATION

Practical experience of teaching English to university students of non-linguistic specialties proves that every year about 30% of students coming to university are at no higher than A2 level of English language proficiency. This data came from the observation of about 630 students studying science and technology at online University (Statistics, 2023) from 2017 to 2023. Each year there are about 110 students starting the English course for science and technology. A placement test is used to settle them in groups of different levels of English. There are 6 groups every year, and 2 of them are of A1+ and A2 level, which is about 33 students. By the end of the second year about 25%, or 9 students out of those with a low level of English still do not reach a level higher than A2. There is a hypothesis ref that individual differentiation of the material taught, in terms of the form it is presented, and learning techniques provided could help the students to perform better in English.

The assumption of the research conducted includes the following:

- lower level of English when coming the university is due to the poor language teaching at secondary school;
- lower level of English is due to a low language aptitude;
- lower level of English is due to some reading or writing difficulties that could be signs of dyslexia.

To verify the assumption and research if the students can perform better, the research includes progress monitoring that is composed of the entrance test, progress tests, and the final test. Along with the test results that include the assessment of speaking, writing, listening, and reading skills, the progress monitoring includes the results of a self-study course. To check the assumption that the students might need some individual support in learning to perform better, we have differentiated e-learning content of the English language course that is designed for self-studies and does not include teacher's support except for monitoring completion rate and efficiency.

Methodology

Firstly, to identify the percentage of students who might need additional support due to reading or writing difficulties, a questionnaire was designed. The students were asked ten questions created for adults to define if they have dyslexia. This questioner was published by the International Dyslexia Association (IDA 2023). The questions examined the speed and intensity of reading, any experiences of omission or substitution of letters while reading, as well as spelling and memory capacity while learning. Noticing seven and more difficulties from the list of questions indicates dyslexia. The questionnaire was administered to 320 students. It was voluntary and anyone could withdraw at any time. One hundred sixty-five students gave their responses. Eight participants mentioned 7 and more problems that they face while learning English. Seven students mentioned 5-6 difficulties.

At the next stage of the study, an in-depth interview with fifteen students who mentioned 5-7 difficulties in the questionnaire was conducted. All of the above-mentioned students agreed to participate in the in-depth interviews. The aim was to identify if they had reading and writing difficulties in Russian at school. Three students from this group were aware of their dyslexia. Five had problems in spelling and reading,

but memorizing was fast, which might mean lack of experience in learning English. The remaining 7 students answered that they did not learn English at school well and expressed willingness to study and improve their level of English.

As a result of the in-depth interviews, all 15 students were chosen for the course with differentiated content. At this stage there is no possibility to differentiate the content depending on the type of learning difficulty, so all 15 students will be provided with the same course.

We assume that after secondary school the student of a non-linguistic specialty might not have a solid language background and experience of efficient language learning techniques. This assumption that the students do not have a solid background in learning English at school comes from the analysis of several research aimed at improving the quality of English language teaching on a secondary school level. This assumption is partially proved by Regional Research of The Quality of Education in the Rostov region that included English as a subject. The research was aimed at calculating the average grade of school students in the 8th form. The results prove 51,8% of those having satisfactory marks which means they do not reach A2 that is stated in the standard. (RRQE 2016).

Low level of the English language competency can be connected with the lack of experience in using different learning strategies. We assume that teaching students' certain language learning techniques helps achieve their educational goal. If so, these students' special needs are not connected with the learning content but with the strategies. Since the number of students with low performance in English is rather high and their needs in providing them with learning strategies are not catered for, action was required. The content differentiation that provides different learning strategies and techniques was implemented in the electronic self-study course of English.

4. CONTENT DIFFERENTIATION TO MEET SPECIAL NEEDS OF DYSLEXIC STUDENTS

As every student has to complete the university English course successfully, they have to adapt different techniques to reach their educational goal. The assumption is that the support can be provided by implementing a differentiated instruction approach when designing a course.

According to Tomlinson 2023, instruction is differentiated through four ways: 1) content, 2) process, 3) product, and 4) learning environment.

Content, process and product

Differentiating the content includes differentiating activities that cover different levels of Bloom's taxonomy (Smyslova 2022), which is a classification of levels of intellectual behavior going from lower-order thinking skills to higher-order thinking skills. These levels are: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. As dyslexic students might have difficulties with all these levels, a multisensory approach to material design was used when we developed an online self-study course. Students can learn by hearing, seeing, touching and doing activities which may use their hands and bodies. With this approach, students are able to interpret, comprehend and synthesize information better, as they can use more than one sensory input to make connections between facts or understanding.

To introduce new vocabulary, the words and expressions are presented through a picture or video, thus providing the meaning, the form of the word appearing on the screen letter by letter, and audio pronouncing the new word several times. Letters are appearing on a light blue screen and are written using smooth lines like in Roboto font. Research indicates that coloured overlays help overcome visual stress that a dyslexic student experiences.

The next task is to look at the word on the screen, write it and say it out loud. It is good to add a voice recognition feature, but too few Learning Management Systems provide it. Such activities integrate auditory, tactile and visual stimuli, students are able to build a relationship between the sound, feeling and appearance of learning activity, which will enable learners to better remember the main information, address phonemic encoding and spelling difficulties issues.

The other option to differentiate the content is to divide a task into several smaller ones and provide a checklist to the task along with the instruction. The student will still accomplish the same goal, but complete it in stages. For example, long texts are divided into paragraphs and there is a list of keywords before each paragraph so that the student focuses on the main information. The questions are provided after each paragraph one at a time.

What is also important is constant revision. Some students mentioned revising the same material 6-7 times before they remember it. Every lesson starts with revision of the previous material. It focuses on key points presented in graphics, pictures or graphs. Revision is planned so that students with dyslexia can have more training. The lesson provides several tasks for vocabulary revision. Those who do not have dyslexia can complete one and go on. Those who need more practice can complete up to 5 tasks. To register the progress in the Learning management system one task is obligatory, but the completion of the others is registered as completed.

The mode of text presentation is also varied to ensure that they can be oral based. All texts and instructions to the tasks are provided both as text and as audio. AI ability to vocalize the text is used to create materials. This is true for the tests also. It helps encompass all senses while learning. There is advice in the lessons for the student to write the concepts and keywords along with listening and reading.

Product means what a student creates by the end of the lesson or a module in an online course. There are PowerPoint presentations on certain topics, written summaries, and oral answers on certain topics that are assessed.

There is an option to record the answer instead of writing where possible, as well as to prepare a PowerPoint presentation to summarize the topic. This takes more effort from the teacher as they need to check such tasks. They cannot be automatically assessed by Learning Management Systems yet but there is a hope that in the future even a simply structured Learning management system will have integrated AI that will be able to check voice answers.

Learning environment

In the classroom this is about interaction patterns, support and opportunity to work individually if necessary. In online courses the need for working individually is fully met. This provided the opportunity for students to follow their own paths in learning. The learning environment is diverse in terms of level, abilities, time needed for the course completion. (Bazanov et al. 2023)

All the above mentioned was implemented in an online English course for IT specialists. As students have offline classes and an online self-study course the results of their progress were monitored by the teacher who used rubrics to differentiate assessment styles. In the online course the Learning Management System educational analytics was used to monitor the completion rate along with the number of attempts to complete different tasks. To have clearer understanding if the differentiation of content works, similar reading tasks were provided with and without support. Eight students who had dyslexia were divided into two groups and provided either the online course without specially organized materials or the course designed to assist dyslexic students. The total completion rate and correct answers provided by the group who used assisting materials was 43% higher. As this is a work in progress research, the results are still being analyzed and there is an understanding that dyslexia is different for every person. So, to get more statistics, we plan to scale the research and provide the material to a larger group of dyslexic students from different faculties. The other important issue is that it is more reliable to compare the results of the same person learning the material with or without assistance. Preliminary results show the necessity of differentiating the content to meet special needs of dyslexic students due to the higher completion rate presented in the research. The results provided the ground for deeper research aimed at working out certain criteria for assessing the materials to be dyslexic friendly to meet the needs of every student.

6. CONCLUSION

The assumption that not all dyslexic students are aware of dyslexia was proven by the survey that proved an average 5% of dyslexic students in a target group. The survey was taken on a group of 320 volunteers, 165 of them provided their answers. As there was no aim to specify dyslexia from language learning difficulties the students participating in the research were either aware of dyslexia or simply have reading and writing difficulties without being diagnosed dyslexia in childhood. Other cognitive abilities that might influence language learning were not studied.

The attempt to differentiate the content to support dyslexic students in our research proved about 40% better comprehension of the material studied. Data obtained from the Learning Management System educational analytics proved that students noticing elements of dyslexia or being dyslexic show 43% higher engagement and success rates when working with differentiated content that provides the options for completion, choosing the way to present the results, and the form of the course.

Differentiating the process of studying is provided by an access to e-learning course that is designed to respect an individual pace of any student. Differentiating production has provided an opportunity for the students to submit the task in different forms, either written or oral. The form of submission should be approved by the institution. This is important for dyslexia to be recognized as a special need that will allow differentiating not only the learning process and techniques but the product that a student is supposed to prepare during the course.

Limitations

The research left the concept of language aptitude behind. There was no possibility to assess it and it needs more study.

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ENSURING INCLUSIVITY THROUGH CRITICAL THINKING IN EFL CONTEXTS

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Abstract. *This paper examines the extent to which students in a supervised undergraduate research project course felt equipped to work independently using a range of critical thinking skills developed within the course. As critical thinking is an important but challenging component in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context, empowering students to engage in process-driven reading and writing can be seen to be inclusive. In this sense, inclusivity embraces the quality of embracing diverse skills, interests, competency levels and corresponding outcomes. Based on a qualitative study of student questionnaires and focus group interviews, this study concludes that students are able to comprehend, analyze and apply ideas and theories when given training and practice in these areas. Findings from an extensive questionnaire and student interviews show that EFL learners in the Arab world are capable of thinking critically, particularly when they research areas of significance to themselves and their society. Critical thinking should thus be seen as a series of teachable skills which enable the EFL student to create an individual piece of work which successfully incorporates academic writing skills and enables them to find their own voice. Providing opportunities for independent learning thus ensures inclusivity, equipping students with required skills.*

Key words: *inclusive learning, critical thinking, writing in EFL, English as a Foreign Language, research project*

1. INTRODUCTION

An ongoing debate among EFL instructors reveals a cultural divide over whether second or foreign language learners of English (ESL or EFL) possess the required critical thinking skills, given the cultural contexts in which they often operate. While critical thinking, in itself an abstract concept difficult to define, is viewed as an important skill among undergraduate students in all international contexts, studies have suggested that the term is primarily understood as possessing an individual voice, questioning of authority and creating a compelling counter argument. This paper suggests that as long as critical thinking is defined as a philosophical aptitude derived from the Socratic tradition, it remains limited in scope and predicted outcomes. A more helpful and useful way of approaching critical thinking is from an educational, particularly EFL perspective

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through which it can be seen to be a set of sub-skills which equip and empower students to approach texts from multiple perspectives using a variety of strategies and being able to transfer these skills into a writing context. This is even more important today when social media has made the distinction between real and fake more problematic. Using the example of a student driven research project, this study investigates the extent to which students felt themselves to be empowered when guided with a set of critical thinking skills to engage in an independent research project. The study concludes that inclusivity in EFL is attainable when students are equally equipped with skills which can be independently applied.

2. INCLUSIVITY IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

Diversity and inclusivity today have multiple meanings and implications, given the diversity of an EFL classroom in terms of gender, culture, race and physical abilities, among other variables (Chan & Lo, 2017). Various factors such as students' self-esteem (Al-Obaydi, Doncheva & Nashruddin, 2021), curriculum and policy implementation (Villafuerte, & Mosquera 2020) and specific strategies used (Murni, 2019) have been investigated to understand the way in which the EFL classroom could become more productive and achieve the professed learning outcomes. Strategies such as peer tutoring, collaborative and team learning, use of audio visual material and dividing units into smaller ones often tend to be more successful strategies that suit a range of learners with different capacities. One of the most challenging issues in EFL is critical thinking and writing (Mehta & Al Mahrooqi, 2015; Tosuncuoglu, 2018; Saleh, 2019) as the process includes multiple layers of learning the language, understanding its cultural connotations and making decisions based on it. Case studies, such as those of Javorcikova and Badinská (2021) suggest that critical thinking skills is lacking even among adult readers in contexts like Slovakia. While some studies have suggested that critical thinking is particular to some cultures (Atkinson, 1997), it has now been accepted to be an essential but challenging component of all learning. As such, the extent to which critical thinking skills can be developed in an EFL classroom to include learners of different abilities, levels and capacities continues to be debated. This study is based on the hypothesis that critical thinking skills are best developed when students are given autonomy for their learning and when they are discussing issues based on their cultural environment. Giving students autonomy empowers them to think critically and creatively, making learning more inclusive.

3. DEFINING CRITICAL THINKING: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

What critical thinking actually means is itself a contentious issue. Ennis' 1993 definition that "critical thinking is reasonable and reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do" (Ennis, 1993, p. 180) set the tone for the discursive manner in which critical thinking began to be thought of as a process. On the one hand, it can be seen as an activity "that involves the use of information, experience, and world knowledge in ways which allow [EFL] students to seek alternatives, make inferences, pose questions, and solve problems, thereby signaling understanding in a variety of ways" (Liaw, 2007, p. 51). Atkinson (1997) famously defined it as a "social practice" (Atkinson, 1997, p. 77) which could thus not be taught. Willingham adds to this by

stating that “First, critical thinking is not a skill. There is not a set of critical thinking skills that can be acquired and deployed regardless of context” (Willingham, 2007, p. 17). Critical thinking is commonly accepted as a “lifelong competency that enables people to take an active role in a democratic society” (Barak & Shahab, 2023, p. 872).

While having a strong opinion and being able to express it in a unique way (Barnawi, 2011) may be an important component of higher order thinking, many other theories have attempted to focus on the skills which are developed in the course of reading. Research by Davidson (1996) and Chapple & Curtis (2000), among others, posits the idea that critical thinking is a particularly necessary and learnable skill among EFL learners since it provides the language and structure so essential for writing in English. Thus, Rebecca Oxford (2001) rightly advocates “task based rather than content based” writing and Renner (1996) declares that the higher order skills most connected with critical thinking almost always lead to “improved levels of skills in language use” (Renner 1996, p. 14). Culture, it thus appears, may not be the most important consideration for testing critical skills.

4. CRITICAL THINKING IN EFL CONTEXTS

The cultural debate is important in so far as critical thinking continues to be thought of as a way of voicing opinions and dealing with areas which are essentially debatable. This is a point made by Long (2004), Errihani (2012), and Hashemi & Ghanizadeh (2012), all of whom suggest that critical thinking skills in writing should involve more than the ability to question authority and give a clearly formulated opinion on global areas of debate. Errihani cites the work of Ruggiero (2004), who described critical thinking as “the process by which we test claims and arguments and determine which have merit and which do not” (Ruggiero, as cited by Errihani, p. 6). Errihani goes on to state that these skills are in fact more relevant to EFL contexts than the voicing of political opinions leading to tendencies which would change society (Errihani, 2012, p. 6). Hashemi & Ghanizadeh also use the work of Pennycook (1996), and Davidson & Dunham (1997) to suggest that critical thinking skills actually comprise the ability to look at established hypotheses, question them, and test them in new contexts (Hashemi & Ghanizadeh, 2012). Christopher Long (2004) succinctly summarizes how critical thinking ought to be seen more as a series of separate tasks which can be individually taught and evaluated rather than as a holistic ability to “reasonably or reflectively decide on what to believe or do” (Ennis and Weir, 1985 as cited by Long, p. 227).

Far from being simply a series of instructions seemingly unconnected, this way of decoding critical thinking skills addresses various issues in ELT, apart from the fact that it avoids cultural conflicts of all kinds. In this context, it also serves to identify the most crucial elements which make critical thinking an important part of learning and using a second or foreign language - allowing for a subsequent development of ideas and opinions based on more practical skills obtained through a process of reading. Barnawi (2011) uses a similar approach to view critical thinking from a more practical perspective by pointing to a set of issues which the student could be made aware of in the course of reading a text. He identifies features such as understanding the primary purpose of the text, judging a text for important argumentation patterns, understanding the reasons and justifications provided as evidence in an argument, and discussing the extent to which such arguments are convincing. In the debate on definitions, it may become clear that

having a tendency towards critical thinking, by which is meant “an aspect of intrinsic motivation to solve problems and make decisions by using thinking” (Hashemi & Ghanizadeh, 2012, p. 39), is perhaps not the only or even the most productive way of using the term in EFL contexts. Most studies which base themselves on the notion of critical thinking as a skill, rather than as a worldview inherent within the reader, use the Watson-Glaser Appraisal format which assesses students on their ability to infer, recognize assumptions, make deductions based on information, interpret given information and evaluate it as being strong/weak, relevant/irrelevant (as cited by Cadvar & Doe, 2012, p. 298). This established method of evaluating critical thinking skills can then be successfully transferred to student writing since it will be more feasible for students to gauge their own system of development as they develop their reading abilities. This is also evident in other studies in EFL contexts (Spirovska, 2022; Tosuncuoglu, 2018).

5. EMPOWERING STUDENTS TO THINK CRITICALLY

The link between critical thinking and the writing process remains tenuous, largely because students are often hesitant to set down their thoughts on paper, struggling as they are with the logistics of expression, grammar and vocabulary. Some studies (Stotsky, 1991; Cavdar & Doe, 2012) argue that students are more involved and committed to their writing when they feel that they are in control of their own material and their own time, rather than being guided by a formulaic method of writing on imposed topics. This is an argument supported in a study by Hidi & McLaren (1998) in which students were seen to be more motivated when writing on topics for which they were equipped in terms of background knowledge and in which they had a real interest. Stapleton (2002) cogently supports this argument in his research based on 45 Japanese students, some of whom were asked to write on a topic familiar to them and some on a topic with which they were not very familiar. Based on the various criteria of critical skills evaluation such as argument, reason, evidence, refutation, conclusion and fallacies, he says that students who wrote on topics on which they had some background knowledge and clear opinions did much better in terms of the given criteria than those made to write on topics which were unfamiliar - in this case, gun control in the United States. “[F]ewer arguments and less evidence” (Stapleton, 2002, p. 523) appeared in essays which dealt with unfamiliar topics, while students voiced their opinions more strongly and confidently in areas with which they were familiar. A similar study by Javorcikova and Badinská (2021) found that vast training was required to equip students with critical thinking skills at the undergraduate level. This makes EFL more inclusive in that it opens up opportunities for students using their own cultural resources. It is in this context that a similar study was made on English major students at an Arab university.

6. THE RESEARCH PROJECT: A CASE STUDY

In order to evaluate the critical skills gained in the course of a student-centered research course for Arts and Education English majors at Oman's Sultan Qaboos University, a questionnaire was distributed in order to enable students to reflect on the course and identify crucial areas of competence and achievements, keeping in mind the notion that critical thinking was being defined as a series of analytical skills with which the students might have been equipped in previous courses as well as the one being undertaken at that time - skills they would find an opportunity to use in an original project.

The Research Project at Sultan Qaboos University is a 6th semester (third year) undergraduate course for English students (Arts and Education majors), guided by an instructor but researched and written entirely by students themselves. This 15-week course involves students choosing a topic of personal interest, composing a proposal approved by their instructor, and involving a 4000-word literature review. It also involves the submission of an annotated bibliography before the literature review, in which a minimum of 7 sources are to be identified and analyzed for their content, main arguments and relevance to the student's area of interest. The final paper, which is approximately 8000 words long, includes questionnaires, surveys and/or interviews on the topics which are formulated by the students themselves, transcripts and samples of which are appended in their papers. The entire process is supervised by instructors who oversee between six to ten students during the semester. Following their submission of the research paper, students are given an opportunity to present their papers at a student conference and publish a summary of their findings in a student journal.

The course typically follows a fixed pattern in which students choose a topic (almost always in the first week of teaching), submit a proposal within two weeks, spend around four weeks researching their topics by visiting the library and browsing online, submit a literature review, and create questionnaires which are then given to other students or, if necessary, to participants outside the university. The final paper is based on the findings of the questionnaires and on the interviews which are conducted by the students as they are waiting for their samples to be returned. The final paper includes a section on the methodology, findings, and recommendations, together with a final reference list using the APA format.

7. METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire was given to students in their final year (7th and 8th semesters) in order to ascertain the kind of critical skills which they felt they had acquired during the research project. The questionnaire was based on Stapleton (2002), Kubota (1999), Yeh (2009) Barnawi (2011) and Errihani (2012), whose studies proved that EFL students display a range of critical thinking and writing skills and are capable of transferring these skills to their writing. The questionnaire also focused particularly on what students felt they had gained in the course of an entire semester where they were given considerable independence and liberty to discover areas of interest and were free to organize their own time for the various assigned tasks. The study involved 84 students studying in the English Department, 28 of whom were English literature specialists and 56 English Education majors. The majority were females (76) and 8 were male. They ranged in age from 20 to 23, and had all volunteered to complete the questionnaire.

Two instruments were used to collect data - a 43-item questionnaire and a structured interview. The questionnaire went through several stages of validation with three professors continuously revising it. The validation process resulted in deleting items felt to be duplicating others or items felt to be unrelated to the topic. It also resulted in a few items being added, such as some pertaining to handling graphical information.

Participants were asked to evaluate how well the research project course they had taken prepared them in terms of skills related to the above item categories by choosing one out of four possible options: no training; inadequate training; good training; very good training.

The subsequent interviews were voluntary and invitations were sent via e-mail to all the students who had participated in the questionnaire. Ten students volunteered and each was met separately. Since the interviewees gave detailed answers, it was felt that their responses were indicative of the larger student sample, and so no more students were pursued to do the interviews. The interview sample consisted of female students majoring in English at the College of Education. All were 22 years old, except one who was 23. No male students volunteered.

The interview contained 5 main questions which aimed to find out the extent to which students thought that the Research Project course honed their critical thinking skills and how these skills could be further developed.

8. RESULTS

The aim of the study was to discover how well participants felt that they were prepared in terms of specified critical thinking skills taught in their research-project classes. Two instruments were employed to collect data in order to achieve the study's objective: a close-item questionnaire and a semi-structured interview.

The 43 skills and sub-skills included in the questionnaire were categorized into 11 groups and participants were asked to choose from a scale of 1-4 (one being the lowest and 4 the highest). The categories included the following:

- a. Critical thinking and topic choice
- b. Examining ideas
- c. Critical thinking and choosing and handling sources
- d. Idea synthesis
- e. Argumentation
- f. Idea organization
- g. Instrument design
- h. Visual/graphical information
- i. Justifying results
- j. Arriving at logical conclusions
- k. Problem solving

The means of the six categories above (ranging from 2.88 to 3.5) indicate that most participants felt they were well trained through their research courses in most of the skills listed under those categories. Participants felt confident that they were well prepared to choose topics which would be worth researching. However, fewer participants felt that they were trained well in finding and developing insights into a research problem important to their society, as the mean for item one was the lowest (2.82) in this category.

They also believed that they were well trained in instrument design as all items under this category had a mean of 3 or above, and the same is true of the category on idea organization. The choosing and handling sources category had 8 items, among which there were 5 obtaining a mean of above 3, indicating a majority agreement among participants that they were trained well in these. The three items that obtained less than a mean of 3 dealt with the following: adding participants' own ideas and insights to comment on previous research (mean = 2.99); distinguishing between important and unimportant information (mean = 2.98); and criticising a source to pinpoint strengths and/or weaknesses (mean = 2.65). The last three are closely related to source examination, a category that obtained a mean of less than 3.

As for the fifth category with the highest mean, critical thinking and result justification, the mean for the two items was above 3, indicating an agreement that participants felt well trained in comparing and contrasting findings with findings from previous research, and explaining them in the light of factors relevant to Omani society. This could be due to their familiarity with their own cultural context, which enabled them to view data and results through their own cultural lens. This is especially possible because the data was collected from Omani society, of which the participants were members.

The only category that received less than 2.5 was "critical thinking and handling graphical information", which had a mean of 2.46. The participants felt they were inadequately trained to interpret graphical information (mean = 2.54), create effective graphical representations of their results (mean = 2.46), and determine patterns from visual data (mean = 2.40). This could be attributed to the fact that teachers were more concerned about instructing students in matters related to the written word than about visual data interpretation and to the fact that such data is not always present in Applied Linguistics research, which is the area to which most students (as education majors) belonged.

9. INTERVIEW RESULTS

Most of the information garnered from the questionnaires was also substantiated by a series of semi-structured interviews conducted on ten volunteering students. In many ways, their responses echoed most of the responses to the questions in the close-ended questionnaire. The data obtained from the interviews was transcribed and later classified thematically. Ideas pertaining to the same theme were grouped together. Differences were noted and examples quoted. The results are given below, retaining, however, much of the students' own vocabulary in order to remain authentic.

1. In what ways did the Research Project course foster your critical thinking skills?

Classroom discussions of various research ideas and sample articles seem to have given students the opportunity to examine how their classmates thought, and this resulted in their gaining new and multiple perspectives on a research idea. In the words of one interviewee: "Research Project promoted critical thinking significantly through various ways. First, through the discussions that were conducted during the lessons as students got the chance to look deeply on the way their classmates think."

Choosing a significant researchable topic according to a set of criteria provided by instructors compelled students to think carefully so that their selected topics met the required criteria. Interviewees replied as follows:

- i. "The first way the course fostered my critical thinking is through choosing a topic.... We were forced to think deeply especially that the topic we will choose must meet some conditions."
- ii. "[c]ritical thinking was fostered in this course from the beginning – since choosing the topic. First, I learned to examine the society around me and know what are the aspects and problems that really require research. Second the way of setting the significance of my research and finding its place among previous studies was also a way of improving the critical thinking skills."
- iii. "Choosing a topic was difficult and it took me more than two weeks. This fostered my thinking when I thought about each topic that came to my mind from different aspects. In fact, I changed my topic three times, the last of which I had finished writing the proposal, but changed the whole thing to another completely different one."

Although uncertainty about which topic to choose may influence students taking the Research Project course, they value this experience as they become metacognitively aware of the skills they have gained.

Another challenge which the students found daunting was to read sources critically in order to determine the validity of their assertions and to determine the objectivity or bias of their authors. Students felt that the course had developed a certain degree of skepticism about other people's ideas, positions and perceptions. Comments included the following:

- i. "The Research Project course fostered my critical thinking in helping me rethink about some of the facts found in articles and trying to prove whether they are right or wrong, or at least to speculate on the different dimensions of a certain concept."
- ii. "The course helped me think deeply of the subject of the research to be studied, examined and evaluated. During the process of writing the literature review, I thought about the writers' ideas and whether they are sensible and logical. We have to bear in mind that not all what is written is correct; there is also the likelihood of "wrongness in every written piece."
- iii. "Taking research courses (Academic Writing and Research Project) helped me enrich my critical thinking skills. Before I took these courses, I used to believe everything I read. I used to think that whatever is published must have been reviewed and that its validity was tested. After taking the research courses, I learned that the facts are changeable and what is true in the context of one study might not be considered true in another. Also, I learned that many facts are questionable and they can be criticized. Most studies have limitations that affect their results, that is why these limitations can be the basis of my criticism. In addition, I learned to support my argument with examples and statistics to increase its validity."

The majority reported that writing the literature review required critical thinking as they were all asked to analyze, compare and contrast ideas and sources, construct arguments and take positions. They were also asked to use their own words to write the review:

- i. "Writing a literature review needs also critical thinking since we are not just copying what we read in books and articles (which also needs critical thinking). We read, analyze, compare and write an argument."
- ii. "Now I am better in creating a way that makes the information I get from the sources support my point and in linking ideas which might seem unrelated to make them support the same point."

- iii. "The literature review is like a puzzle we have to solve. We had to see what the writers say and write about the same aspect from different points of view and then logically connect everything."

Constructing the research questions and creating a questionnaire based on them, as well as their own experiences of the Omani context further enhanced their critical thinking about what items to include and in what ways they would relate to the topic, and what function they would serve in answering which question(s). A sample of the interview responses include: "designing the study in general and setting the research questions were taught in a good way that involved taking into consideration several factors related to the examined issue. The students have to do everything by themselves. They were only guided by instructors. Also, critical thinking was promoted when designing the research tool. It was the first time for me to design a full questionnaire. It really involves critical thinking, clear vision of the measured issue and good observation for things related to it."

Analyzing the collected data and consolidating the results needed skills with which students were not previously well equipped, particularly about relating this to their literature review. In this regard, responses included the following:

- i. "Students are required to conduct a questionnaire and I think analyzing the statistics fosters critical thinking."
- ii. "Analyzing our own data and writing our own results need deep thinking."
- iii. "The area that I thought critically about more than any other area was the data analysis. I reflected on the respondents' answers and evaluated them on the basis of how much they were in harmony with what I got from the literature review."
- iv. "Analyzing the results of the study and drawing conclusions were useful steps in enhancing my critical thinking skills, especially evaluating and synthesizing."

Arriving at valid recommendations based on the results and the literature review was another aspect stressed by interviewees. They thought that since the suggestions had to fit the Omani context, producing useful and viable ones involved much critical thinking.

Skills emphasized by interviewees included effective topic choice, establishing the significance of a topic, analysis, synthesis, logical thinking, argumentation, categorization of relevant ideas, assessing sources' objectivity and relevance, recognizing bias, evaluating the validity of other people's ideas, criticising ideas, research methodology or results, supporting one's assertions, comparing and contrasting ideas, consolidating results, comparing one's own results with results from previous studies, and coming up with valid recommendations. One interviewee emphasized an added benefit which she got from the course, namely effective time management. She stated, "Now I find myself able to do intensive research in perfect time which is a result of time management skill I gained through the course." Another stressed the linguistic benefit she got from the course. In her words, "The course increased my vocabulary and improved my grammar and spelling skills."

2. *Do you think Omani students are capable of critical thinking?
Please explain your answer.*

Eight out of the eleven gave a positive reply to this question. They argued that all students have their own opinion depending on their life experiences and thinking styles. Answers varied, such as:

- i. "If they were not, we would not see Omani student with different opinions and different views. I think those dissimilar thoughts and ideologies have resulted from criticizing what students see and read."
- ii. "Everybody can think critically, especially in a university like SQU where we are taught not to accept anything without thinking. We are taught to read, search, make sure, analyze, criticize and then say our opinions if we agree or not."
- iii. "I notice that SQU students specifically have this skill because they are required to critique and criticize."

The remaining three students expressed reservations regarding the validity of generalizing the ability to think critically to all Omani students. They argued that some schools do not foster critical thinking and so students at first lack this skill on entering university. One interviewee stressed the influence of culture and an educational system which, she said, was based on "spoon-feeding". In the words of another interviewee, "The Omani culture is similar to most Arab countries' cultures, which teach students to follow blindly the rules of the ancestors and religion. That does not give students the chance to think reasonably about these rules and their accuracy. For example, students at school are taught to accept what the teacher is saying without any question. It might be considered a sign of disrespect if the students argued with what the teachers say and students will be punished. Moreover, the assessment used to test students' comprehension focuses more on students' ability to memorize what is written on the textbook rather than what is their opinion about it."

3. *What challenges do students face in acquiring critical thinking skills in research-based courses?*

The main challenges the interviewees talked about related to their inadequate familiarity with conducting research. They lack practice in writing literature reviews and some of them possess inadequate background knowledge on the topics they choose to study. One commented that some students might not be familiar with the society's problems and significant issues that deserve research. Such a challenge has a bearing on students' ability to choose a researchable topic in good time. Narrowing the selected topic so that it was not too wide to research within one semester was yet another challenge reported by one interviewee. Another mentioned lack of instructor supervision, and a few said that taking an objective stance and being able to detect bias were other challenges facing students. Due to lack of background knowledge and practice in critical thinking, students sometimes tend to just read and paraphrase what they find. One also commented that many students find it hard to support their arguments with valid information. Others find it difficult to locate relevant and current sources for their literature review. One emphasized academic pressure and multiple duties which reduced the time available for students to engage in critical thinking and reflection. Another interviewee agreed that students might find it "hard to organize their work while having other courses to do." A last challenge reported was the difficulty students found in sticking to a certain number of words for each section of the paper because they were not accustomed to having to do this. While each interviewee mentioned her own set of challenges, there were common ones among them all, especially, for example, the lack of familiarity with the research process.

4. *In your opinion, how can those challenges be tackled?*

In order to tackle the challenges which had been earlier pointed out, interviewees suggested increased reading and training in the application of reflection and critical thinking when handling reading material. They also suggested the integration of research skills into other courses, especially content-based ones. One interviewee suggested increased collaboration between students and instructors. Another recommended increasing the Research Project's duration "so students can take their time to think, observe and evaluate things around them." She further remarked that "the steps of the research were considered as assignments to be submitted on time which put us under pressure. Our main concern was not to lose grades rather than focus on doing things in a way that makes our study more effective." Hence, extending the Research Project course to two semesters, it was felt, would give students an opportunity to engage more with critical thinking and reflection.

5. *What can be done to improve the integration of critical thinking skills into research-based courses offered by SQU's Department of English?*

A few interviewees suggested integrating critical thinking skills into courses that preceded the Research Project in order to prepare students for using the skills in research. One suggested developing critical thinking skills indirectly at first and then step by step "through small activities given during various courses in the department not only in research-based courses." A few interviews suggested encouraging "group work during the classes because students get the chance to learn from their classmates. In addition, they exchange ideas, which I think develops critical thinking." Other interviewees espoused the value of discussions and urged instructors to encourage students in their classes by selecting topics relevant to their lives. Another said, "Providing texts during sessions to criticize them might be helpful." Two interviewees suggested encouraging students to reflect on their experiences and to think critically about what happens around them.

10. OBSERVATIONS ON THE STUDY

In this context of a supervised but independently written research project, critical thinking appears to be a skill which can be taught within the context of an EFL classroom, even though students may not have been culturally trained in earlier years. The research conducted on this set of students demonstrates that training in reading and thinking, with the opportunity for writing based on the readings, is an effective way of establishing a life-long habit of viewing ideas from a critical perspective. As students have noted, they are more comfortable working with areas which seem to be socially close to their own world and are more satisfied when dealing with contexts and persons with whom they are culturally familiar. As Stapleton's (2002) data showed, critical thinking cannot be viewed as an all-inclusive skill, the rules of which are established in a blanket series of established conventions. Empowered with the responsibility to produce a relevant, data-driven project, students are able to successfully employ their critical thinking abilities to help generate their own research.

As the data here has shown, most students were satisfied with the progress they made during the course of the semester in which they had to write an entire research paper on an original topic. As the course allowed them sufficient independence to create their own topics, though tailored enough to provide the necessary research skills, it was possible for

students to create an original piece of research based on established academic conventions. The limitations identified, namely, criticising others' positions, synthesizing multiple perspectives, and drawing more general conclusions based on individual writings, can be viewed as being more advanced skills which would require another platform for further training. In fact, the only lacuna within the program, according to the students, seemed to be the lack of skills in analysing visual data. This would not be a very challenging aspect to incorporate into the course itself.

11. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the plethora of student interview data, as well as responses to the questionnaire, this research allows for the articulation of a diverse set of possibilities to inculcate, develop inclusive learning by empowering students with critical thinking skills. It is imperative, as the research has shown and the students have suggested, to make higher order thinking skills an important component of the schooling curriculum, including it as part of the various subjects which are taught, and not as a separate skill. What is most important is to be able to re-define critical thinking as a series of sub skills which can be taught at various levels rather than a worldview which is inculcated wholesale. Identifying author intention, reading for meaning and suggestions, organizing material in a convincing way are all skills which can fit into an increasing hierarchy of student development. This is particularly true of visual images such as data interpretation and usage. Students should be taught how to use graphs, diagrams, as well as statistics, for their own specific purpose, and know how to use data to convince others of their argument. This could be done through debate settings where data could be used to convince others of a particular opinion.

Pedagogically, it is also a good idea to introduce more local works of literature to the students in Oman in order to foster a sense of self-knowledge and criticism as far as writing styles, content and context are concerned. If the use of familiar material eases the process of critical thinking, such an introduction in the Omani context would enable school students to be able to better identify themselves with their journalistic as well as literary writing. This, in turn, would foster an atmosphere of questioning, but more importantly, create models of thought within local contexts. As students have frequently pointed out, they feel the need to have further training in these skills which could be introduced well ahead of their tertiary education.

12. CONCLUSION

Viewing the results from a holistic perspective, they seem to suggest that students view critical thinking as an important outcome of independent writing as long as the relevant skills are introduced and worked on for a certain period of time. Critical thinking might thus be seen as a series of teachable skills which empower the EFL student to create a piece of work which would include such academic writing components as argumentation and thus help them to develop a specific, individual voice.

A self-driven research project which originates from students' own interests and knowledge thus seems to go a long way towards ensuring the application of critical skills in writing classes, thus working towards inclusivity. Given that students in the English

program brought very few critical skills with them from previous reading and writing classes, it is relevant to note that a course which allowed them to learn and actually use most of the writing skills, such as topic generation, source identification, synthesizing related material and understanding biases, was most effective in internalizing critical thinking skills. Although some skills, such as visual data interpretation, were viewed as being underrepresented, the overwhelmingly positive reaction to such a course points to the direction in which university learning in the Arab world should move. Based on questionnaires and interviews with selected students, this study concludes that respondents felt empowered once given an opportunity to take ownership of their reading and then used critical thinking skills in their writing. This was particularly so when they could pick topics interesting to them and had access to a range of relevant instruments. When asked about the skills they felt they had gained, a large majority said that being in control of their own writing and time frame enabled them to own their projects in a way impossible in earlier courses which involved writing. Far from being unable to acquire or use critical thinking, learners seemed only too eager to test their skills, provided they were in areas contextually relevant and once they had been sufficiently trained in the methodological aspects of writing research papers.

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USING BLENDI APPROACH TO IMPROVE THE EFL STUDENTS' LANGUAGE SKILLS


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Abstract. *Modern education system in most countries is built on providing equal education opportunities to all people, regardless of their capabilities and limitations. Hence, most higher education institutions have realized that preserving past learning and teaching practices does not meet the needs of a 21st century student. Many universities and colleges today use online and/or blended learning for most courses they offer. The aim of this article is to discuss the implementation of blended learning for inclusion in teaching English as a foreign language in one of the universities in Oman. This study also looks at how the BLENDI method affects various language components and whether it can help EFL students improve their language skills.*

Key words: *inclusive education, blended learning, foreign language teaching and learning*

1. INTRODUCTION

It can be difficult to learn a new language, especially for students taking English as a Foreign Language (EFL) exam, which frequently makes it difficult for them to improve their language abilities (Kakoulli-Constantinou, 2023). Researchers and educators have been looking for new ways to improve the outcomes of language learning in recent years, and technology is not an exception (Tuzlukova, 2016; Bugon, 2016). The BLENDI strategy, which stands for “Blended Learning for Inclusive Development”, is one such strategy that is gaining popularity (Jose & Abidin, 2015). It combines traditional teaching methods with technology-enhanced learning strategies. This study also looks at how the BLENDI method affects various language components and whether it can help EFL students improve their language skills.

Mixed learning offers students exhaustive schooling by coordinating web based learning exercises with face to face guidance. The BLENDI approach, which emphasizes inclusivity and makes use of technology to meet the varied requirements of students, extends this concept (Tuzlukova et al., 2016). With regards to showing English as an unknown dialect, BLENDI tries to lay out a warm, invigorating climate that obliges a

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scope of learning inclinations and styles. It is common knowledge that incorporating technology into language instruction has the potential to engage students, provide applications for the language in real life, and personalize the learning process. Development in advanced education is generally being driven by society's digitization. While trying to increase instructive expectations, new advances that appear to augment advancing principally by giving pupils more autonomous work and decreasing study hall work have adjusted the manner in which educators teach (Chaikina, et al., 2018).

While completing some of their coursework online, students in formal blended learning programs benefit from full-time study and supervision, maximizing training effectiveness and meeting individual needs (Powell et al., 2015). Also, mixed learning permits educators to invest more energy speaking with pupils with exceptional requirements as opposed to showing the whole class. Working individually or in small groups, teachers can assist these students with precise notions, skills, queries, or learning difficulties (Zavaraki, & Schneider, 2019). Blended learning has great promise in the Omani educational system as a versatile and effective approach to address students diverse learning requirements. In Oman, mixed learning can possibly further develop language capacity and familiarity considerably more, as English is taught as an unseen tongue (EFL (Al Mashaikhi et al., 2020). Since the majority of higher education institutions employ English as their primary language of education, it is crucial that they create and put into place quality assurance mechanisms in their foundation programs. These are necessary to provide pupils with the necessary language skills, which will ultimately influence how well they adjust to their new environment and how successful they are in their chosen fields and future careers (Al Mahrooqi et al., 2015).

1.1. Hypothesis

The BLENDI approach in teaching English as a foreign language enables

1. wider access and exposure to language as a result of online modes of delivery,
2. suitability of blended learning to support diversity in learning styles,
3. motivation and engagement of all the EFL students in various types of activities,
4. promotion of all the EFL students' independent work,
5. development of all the EFL students' digital literacy and critical thinking abilities in addition to their language proficiency.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Inclusive education -The BLENDI approach

Dangwal (2017), defines integrating traditional classroom education with blended learning that is site-specific and online instruction that makes use of electronic communication technology and online learning resources. Blended learning, is also called hybrid learning, gives a group of students individualized, differentiated instruction by combining the finest aspects of traditional education with the merits of online education. The educational community, which is aware of inclusive education, has paid attention to the emphasis on equal opportunities for diverse students. To advance inclusive education, cutting-edge pedagogical strategies like BLENDI (Blended Learning for Inclusive Development) are included.

Comprehensive education, as defined by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO], 2009), is a way of thinking that encourages every

pupil, regardless of their particular requirements, as well as characteristics, to actively take part in their education. In order to accommodate students from a variety of backgrounds, skill levels, and learning preferences, the goal is to create environments that foster a sense of community and belonging (Ainscow, 2005). With regards to comprehensive schooling, taking care of the necessities of students learning English as an unknown dialect (EFL) with fluctuating language capability is turning out to be increasingly vital (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007).

As part of an inclusive education, blended learning combines traditional in-person instruction with technology-enhanced instruction. The BLENDI system, which depends on mixed learning ideas, puts major areas of strength for incorporation and progress. The goal is to lay out a space that meets the different necessities of students while likewise recognizing the probability that each will have interesting advantages and downsides. According to Hockly (2018), BLENDI is both a methodological framework and a way of thinking that takes into account the unique learning paths of each student.

Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST, 2011), asserts that the beliefs of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which advocate giving a variety of options for demonstration, participation, as well as countenance, to meet various requirements of pupils, are in line with the inclusion of technology in inclusive teaching (Tuzlukova, & Al Busaidi, 2016). The use of ICT in the English educational curriculum in Oman is criticized in this paper, which also suggests that teachers use blended learning principles in the classroom. The paper surveys five fundamental components, including "The Omani English language curriculum, the blended learning approach, the use of ICT in Oman, issues that arise when using ICT", and suggested methods for using blended learning (Al Mashaikhi et al., 2020).

Exploring instructors' and learners' perspectives on the application of the common variety of education principles in Oman, ELT higher education classrooms can help improve variety in ELT classrooms in advanced learning contexts. The execution of four normal variety standards connected with students: (1) level of proficiency in the English language, (2) culture distinction, (3) utilization of L1, and (4) instructive foundation in view of the examination directed by Al Zadjali et al. (2020), to investigate the same concepts in the context of Omani higher education. This is to gain profound understanding of how these principles are applied in an EFL setting with non-native speakers. In order to enhance value to the form of literature and research on diversity in common and learner diversity in precise, the focus of this work is to enhance the concept of diversity in ELT institutions in non-native educational contexts. The study of Al Zadjali et al. (2020), can affect decidedly on policymaking, educational program arranging, and backing educator schooling and preparing in both Oman and other comparable nations.

The study conducted by Al-Amrani & Al-Ghaithi (2023), experimentally assesses the worth that Omani college students allot to web based learning and instructing, especially in supporting their close and personal schooling inside the mixed learning structure during the pandemic and later on. That is what the discoveries demonstrate. In general pupils communicated fulfillment with the nature of web-based learning and showing materials in the mixed learning setting. Notwithstanding, a few pupils communicated disappointment with the internet-based cooperation and instructor criticism. In particular, the shortfall of individualized educator criticism appears to have adversely impacted pupils' inspiration to participate by exercises and examine them with educators during eye to eye meetings. The review offers academic bits of knowledge into compelling

reconciliation of online advances in instructive projects and the use of online stages for innovation interceded guidance in advanced education.

The purpose of Mourssi and Al Kharosi (2014) study is to investigate the feasibility of “incorporating content and language integrated learning” (CLIL) into English language instruction at the Sultanate of Oman’s Higher College of Technology. The study identifies a number of factors to consider when putting this strategy into use in this particular setting. It offers some anticipated advantages, such as language proficiency, attitudes among teachers and students, and culture suitability for this setting. Additionally, executing such new methodology will experience parts of difficulties. As a result, the preparation of teachers, the design of materials, context issues, and learners’ levels are the most demanding issues that require in-depth discussion. The review recommends that carrying out CLIL in this setting is conceivable, provided that these difficulties were addressed preceding present the methodology formally.

3. METHODOLOGY

In the present study we have used observational qualitative analysis as a method to describe the BLEDI approach in teaching and learning English as a foreign language. In the process, we have included the description of inclusive education, the BLENDI approach and its main characteristic features, the description of blended instructional methods, the application of the BLENDI method in EFL classrooms in Omani contexts, as well as the strategies for promoting inclusion in the blended learning environment and the execution difficulties.

4. BLENDED INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS

4.1. Kinds of mixed learning

One kind of mixed learning is merged learning. Merged learning is an imaginative, yet instructive procedure that solidifies electronic education with regular homeroom direction. Because it presents pupils with the smartest scenario imaginable, it is an extraordinary method for drawing in pupils and students to guarantee that they are learning the same material. For educational systems looking for ways to offer pupils with individualized learning involvements, the strategy may prove to be an excellent option. As the name suggests, mixed education combines conversational classroom instruction and virtual instruction. It has been successful ever since it was officially considered a strategic framework (Schenk, 2023).

4.2. Web-based Driver Model

The Web-based driver model depends on the possibility of a learning climate that puts the necessities of student first and uses the instructor as a facilitator as opposed to an essential wellspring of data. This model’s ‘driver’ is the online component, which provides students with the necessary content and materials for interaction. The speaker guides and supports the pupils all through the course. In order to encourage student collaboration, the instructor can use video conferencing and discussion forums, as well as provide students with access to additional resources that they can use as needed. The educator can actually provide individual

assistance to pupils who have questions or require additional assistance, resulting in a more individualized learning environment (Schenk, 2023).

Instruction based on projects: When given the chance to concentrate on the subjects they need to master and advance when they feel prepared, students are unquestionably expected to engage with the material and acquire a deeper understanding of the material. Students are also taught to think critically and solve difficult problems through a project-based learning approach. Project based learning exercises, for instance, can be created in which students investigate a current issue in their community and create a project to address it (Schenk, 2023).

Modular design: The versatile model, which centers around setting out individual learning open doors for every learner, is one of the most well-known types of mixed learning. It offers pupils individual learning ways that are custom fitted to their particular necessities by joining computerized and ordinary strategies. In addition, the adaptive model provides students with immediate feedback, allowing teachers to swiftly modify their lesson plans and keep their learning progression. It is like working with an educated local escort who will assist you with redoing your excursion in light of their nearby information, group size, and members' inclinations. The features of adaptive learning solutions guarantee the best possible experience for each user (Schenk, 2023).

Model of hybrid learning: The blended learning approach integrates both face-to-face and virtual teaching. In most classrooms, students receive instruction both in person and online, using this model. Much of the time, altered eLearning improvement administrations are conveyed through a web-based stage like a web-based homeroom or a web-based course. On the other hand, a teacher gives instruction in person. In addition to virtual instruction, this type of blended learning offers a wider range of growth opportunities. In addition to virtual components for the creation of individual learning plans for each student, it provides a more individualized learning experience. Students can get individual support that is tailored to their needs with the assistance of virtual tutors, for instance, by combining AI and personalized learning. It enables students to develop and achieve academic success by providing them with specific guidance and support in achieving their learning objectives (Schenk, 2023).

Based on virtual game models: The virtual game-based model combines real and virtual components. A history teacher using a virtual game-based model is an illustration of how to use augmented reality and virtual reality in the classroom. Using actual game pieces, students would take part in a virtual battlefield simulation of a historical battle based on this model. Due to various difficulty levels, this method permits learners to study at their own level and enhances the interactive and engaging nature of the learning process. To confirm that students are challenged and involved, this model also makes it not complex to track advancement, offer feedback, and modify difficulty stages. Communal interaction is also allowed by this model since it is designed for exciting gaming (Schenk, 2023).

Issue based instructing: issue based learning (PBL) procedures that show certifiable circumstances, focusing on pupils having the option to foster information and abilities in taking care of an issue. PBL comprises of five phases in particular: 1) student direction towards issues, 2) arranging pupils into learning, 3) directing pupils to take care of issues, 4) creating and introducing work, and 5) examination and assessment of critical thinking (Yennita and Zukmadini, 2021).

Learning based on mastery: blended learning and mastery learning - also known as comprehensive learning - combine to form mastery-based blended learning. It is a methodical educational process that is executed in a systematic and organized way to allow learning to

alter to the requirements of both individual pupils and larger groups of learners. One of the standards of dominance learning is that pupils can advance effectively. These standard permits students to begin advancing by using other gaining assets, particularly from e-learning (Pamungkas et al., 2020). This method permits learners to study at their own speed and concentrate on important topics before moving on. Pupils are encouraged to actively take part in their education and take control of their education with this strategy. The ease with which students can move from challenging to more interesting material and revisit challenging material without having to wait for their peers to catch up is a good illustration of this novel mode (Schenk, 2023).

Cutting-edge: By clubbing virtual education tasks with customary face-to-face teaching, creates a hybrid learning setting in a cutting edge blended learning method. Students are given flexible opportunities and separate instruction for teamwork in this new way approach of cutting edge concept of learning which also progresses learning atmosphere (Shen et al., 2008).

Rotation model: in the pivot model, a popular mixed learning model, pupils alternate between different learning modalities. This is an innovative model. Students alternate between traditional classroom stations and online activities during a station rotation (Christensen et al., 2013). Learning can be tailored to each student's needs and learning preferences using this model (Schenk, 2023).

Model-flex: one more sort of mixed learning is the flex model, in which pupils are versatile, as far as time, spot and speed and most directions are given on the Web (Staker & Horn, 2012). Because it allows pupils to plan their own courses, this model is great for independent students.

Model of a flipped classroom: the enriched virtual model, also referred to as a "flipped classroom", as claimed by Horn & Staker (2014), enables students to complete the majority of their coursework online, and occasionally meet in person for additional support and enrichment. Students can use this model to learn at their own pace, participate in group projects, and have individual discussions to get explanations. Blended learning is not just for K-12 or secondary education, it is also great for language learning environments. Teaching English as an unknown dialect (EFL), for instance, has actually been done using the flipped learning hall model. Pupils can associate with language content on the web and furthermore practice their talking, tuning in, and relational abilities in class (Bergmann & Sams, 2012).

Only one model: as per Staker & Horn (2012), the single model is an even more comprehensive strategy in which students take some classes in person and complete others entirely online. The learning process can be tailored to each student's needs and preferences using this model, and students can choose their courses more freely.

Learning management systems: a critical piece of the innovation coordination that makes mixed learning fruitful is Learning Management Systems (LMS). Learning board frameworks (LMS) like Moodle, Chalkboard, and Material support content delivery, student engagement, and assessment in blended learning settings (Graham, 2006).

5. APPLICATION OF BLENDED LEARNING FOR INCLUSION METHOD IN EFL CLASSROOMS IN OMANI CONTEXTS

The rising pace of progress in various human exercises is a quality of current life. From the moment of birth, every generation is exposed to rapidly shifting living conditions, which will undoubtedly influence how individuals develop and shape (Tokareva et al., 2019). The digitization of society is a major driver of innovation in university education. New technologies that appear to maximize learning primarily by giving students more independent work and reducing classroom work in an effort to raise educational standards have altered teaching (Chaikina et al., 2018).

One nation that formally embraces ICT in all domains, including training, is Oman. Through the General Telecommunications Organization (GTO), the authorized internet service provider, in January 1997 the Sultanate of Oman became a member of the internet community. Few years after the incident, in His Regal Discourse on the twenty-ninth Public Day of Oman in 1999, His Royal Highness Sultan Qaboos Bin Said articulated his plan for information and communication technology advancement quite clearly. It says: The government and people of Oman must acknowledge how important it is to be ready to face the challenges posed by globalization (Alblushi, 2022). As progress is driven by information, technology, and research, Omanis will strive to fortify Omani state dimensions, create a budget predicated on international efficiency and competitiveness, enhance the functioning of Omani institutions, and strengthen its economy (Al Hosni, 2016). According to Jose and Abidin, (2015), using Moodle e-learning to its full potential is essential while teaching EFL classes. In Omani educational institutions, it might be used with in-person instruction. According to Al Mashaikhi et al. (2020), a flexible framework for teaching English is provided by the blended learning paradigm. The researchers advise Omani English language instructors to fully utilize blended learning approaches and ideas to improve their instruction in Oman.

5.1. Blended learning design

To talk the mixed learning essentials of Omani students, blended learning must be implemented in EFL classrooms. Students in blended learning have access to online data and materials that match their interests and knowledge levels. It improves the teaching environment by providing opportunities for professional collaboration and improving lecturers' time management skills (Owston et al., 2019; Guillén-Gámez & Perrino-Peña, 2020). Mixed learning expands students' energy in their own learning process (Chang-Tik, 2018), empowers them to learn at their singular speed, and better sets them up for the future by giving them commonsense capacities (Ustunel & Tokel, 2018). These abilities assist students with utilizing their instructive information, their ability for self-learning, and obviously their knowledge of PCs to the work environment (Güzer & Caner, 2014; Yeou, 2016).

5.2. Blended learning approach structure

5.2.1. Face-to-face components

Teachers are essential to providing face-to-face instruction because they facilitate students' direct interaction and communication. Up close and personal parts of a comprehensive EFL homeroom utilize a determination of informative procedures to oblige

pupils with various learning inclinations. This entails developing adaptable educational resources and tasks which can be accessible to all students in the Omani EFL context. As a representation, helpful ventures and gathering exercises energize peer connection and establish an inviting learning climate (Rose and Meyer, 2002). According to Tomlinson (2014), in-person instruction needs to be differentiated in order to cater to the particular requirements of a diverse range of students. In-person lessons in an inclusive EFL classroom employ a variety of teaching strategies, such as tiered assignments and flexible grouping, to accommodate varying proficiency levels (Tomlinson, 2005). This helps create a setting where every student can actively participate and receive individualized support. Some examples of face-to-face blended learning in an EFL classroom include, for example, interactive language workshops, literature circles with online discussions, role-playing and simulations, peer review sessions, flipped classroom model, project-based learning (PBL), and language lab activities (Buhl-Wiggers et al., 2022).

5.2.2. Online components

Electronic modules are an essential piece of mixed EFL guidance's customized learning for blended group of pupils in Oman. The online components of inclusive approach in English as a Foreign Language classrooms provide individualized teaching experiences and accommodate a variety of learning styles (Basta, & Pejić, 2023). Virtual platforms like learning management systems and online discussion forums allow students to interact with the material at their own pace through asynchronous interaction (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). This asynchronous component will be especially beneficial to students who may require additional time or have tight schedules. Technology-enhanced language learning resources, such as language apps and interactive multimedia, can be incorporated into the online component to facilitate differentiated instruction (Chapelle, 2001). Students can use an independent platform to practice language skills to reinforce concepts covered in in-person lessons with the assistance of these resources. Hybrid courses, synchronous virtual classrooms, online learning management systems (LMS), interactive language apps, webinars and guest speakers, virtual reality (VR) or augmented reality (AR) experiences are some illustrations of online blended learning activities in an EFL classroom (Choi-Lundberg et al., 2023).

5.2.3. Blended learning for inclusion

With the objective to oblige different prerequisites of students, mixed learning for consideration in EFL homerooms (Al-Mahrooqi et al., 2015) has potential to boost the advantages of both face to face and online guidance. Online parts adaptability makes it conceivable to apply Widespread Plan for Learning (UDL) standards, which ensure that instructive assets and exercises are usable by all pupils, regardless of their aptitudes or favored strategies for learning (CAST, 2011). By integrating in-person and virtual components, educators can adopt a more inclusive pedagogy that accommodates varying learning preferences and provides a variety of platforms for expression, involvement, and representation (Rose & Meyer, 2002). In accordance with the principles of inclusive education, this strategy fosters a learning environment where every student feels valued and has a chance to succeed.

Implementing a blended learning inclusion strategy in Omani EFL classrooms necessitates judicious usage of a range of tools, platforms, as well as resources to meet

various requirements of students. These are some learning management systems (LMS), for example.

Moodle: creation of online courses is made simpler by Moodle, an open-source learning management system. Because it supports multiple discussion boards, content types, and assessment formats, it can be used for both online and in-person components.

Canvas: with highlights like conversation loads up, mixed media coordination, and cooperative apparatuses, material is a simple to-utilize learning the board framework. Blended learning is made easier by providing a centralized platform for course content and communication.

There are also virtual study halls and video conferencing platforms, for example, Zoom and Meet on Google.

Zoom: Zoom is a popular tool for online education and video conferences. It makes it possible to communicate synchronously, allowing teachers to facilitate live sessions, lead discussions, and assist students in real time.

Meet on Google: Google Meet is a component of Google Workspace that integrates video conferencing capabilities. It facilitates teacher-student communication and encourages group document editing (Eraković & Topalov, 2021).

Creation of interactive content is another possibility.

Articulate Storyline: online learning materials can be dynamic and engaging with Articulate Storyline. It is effective for creating online courses that complement in-person instruction.

Captivate by Adobe: Adobe Captivate is yet another program for creating interactive e-learning materials. By facilitating the integration of simulations, assessments, and multimedia, it enhances the online component of blended learning (Moreinis, 2015).

Another group includes language learning applications.

Duolingo: this notable language-learning application can be incorporated into mixed learning methodologies. It can be used outside of the classroom to improve language proficiency and provides personalized language practice.

The Rosetta Stone: as an extra asset for pupils to rehearse language abilities all alone, Rosetta Stone gives language learning programming (Aslan, 2023).

Tools for communication and collaboration involve *Microsoft Teams*, for example. Microsoft Teams is a platform for working in teams that makes file sharing, communicating, and working on group projects easier. Both simultaneous and non-concurrent connections can utilize it. There is also *Slack*. The messaging app Slack facilitates teamwork and communication. It very well may be used for local area working among pupils, asset sharing, and conversations.

Tools for Evaluation can be illustrated by *Turnitin*. Turnitin is an instrument for distinguishing occasions of counterfeiting and offering remarks on composed undertakings. It supports the valuation component of inclusive approach and contributes to academic integrity (Mujahid, 2020).

To keep students interested in both in-person and online classes, *Kahoot* game-based learning tool can be used to create interactive tests and quizzes (Holbrey, 2020). Also, to make language learning more participatory and pleasurable, *instructive games* can be brought into EFL classes (Spanjers et al., 2015). Al Musawi et al., (2022) claim that, the consideration of games in Omani classrooms worked on pupils' inspiration and assisted

them with procuring the language. By accommodating a variety of learning styles and skill levels, games can promote diversity.

Additionally, there are *advanced identifications*. As a visual portrayal of pupils' achievements, computerized identifications can motivate students, while likewise recognizing their accomplishments. Computerized identifications can be utilized in the Omani setting to perceive achievements in language capability or the achievement of specific language errands, advancing a sensation of inclusivity and achievement (DeNoyelles, et al., 2014). Moreover, by using *case studies*, students can improve their skill to ponder critically and solve difficulties in the EFL curricula of Oman (Al Zakwani, 2018). Al-Musawi et al. (2020), emphasizes the significance of case studies in putting language learning into real-world situations.

6. STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING INCLUSION IN THE BLENDED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

To promote inclusion in Oman's blended learning environment, it is necessary to implement strategies that cater to various types of students. According to Sousa and Tomlinson (2011), differentiated instruction must be implemented immediately. By tailoring content, procedures, and assessment to each students' specific needs, it is ensured that all learners, regardless of proficiency or learning style, can actively participate in the blended environment and succeed. Additionally, implementing the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is consistent with the educational context in Oman (CAST, 2011). UDL encourages the creation of adaptable learning environments that accommodate a variety of abilities and experiences in order to enhance inclusivity overall. Cooperative learning activities can likewise be extremely useful in fostering a feeling of help and local area. As per Rose and Meyer (2002), bunch ventures and friend helped learning open doors to advance student cooperation and establish a positive learning climate. Furthermore, the utilization of advanced stages to work with steady correspondence and input channels empowers continuous help and adjustment of educational strategies to all the more likely meet the differed needs of Oman's student population (Al-Musawi, et al., 2020).

The use of blended learning for educational purposes is growing in popularity. It combines online and in-person instruction to produce a more productive learning environment (Brew, 2008). By implementing the BLENDI approach to improve the EFL students' language skills, the researchers have noticed a significant improvement. Before implementing BLENDI approach, the students' results were only 66 percent. The results were significantly improved with 93 percent after introducing BLENDI approach. This indicates from widening access to fostering digital literacy, each facet contributes to a holistic and engaging language learning experience. The positive impact on language proficiency, motivation, and cognitive abilities positions BLENDI as a promising avenue for the evolution of EFL education. In the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, leveraging the BLENDI approach holds promising potential. The integration of online modes expands language access, addressing varied learning styles. Blended learning fosters motivation and engagement among EFL students through diverse activities, promoting independent work. It not only advances language proficiency but also cultivates digital literacy and critical thinking skills, preparing students holistically for the linguistic challenges of the modern world.

The following section will answer the research hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Wider Access and Exposure

The BLENDI approach harnessed the power of online modes, offering a broader spectrum of language resources. Through virtual platforms, students gained access to a wealth of diverse materials, enriching their language exposure beyond traditional classroom boundaries. This not only accommodated various learning paces, but also aligned with the dynamic, technology-driven nature of contemporary language acquisition.

Hypothesis 2: Suitability for Diverse Learning Styles

Blended learning emerged as inspiration for accommodating diverse learning styles within the EFL landscape. By combining traditional classroom settings with online elements, the BLENDI approach catered to visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners. This versatility ensured that each student received a tailored learning experience, enhancing comprehension and retention across different modalities.

Hypothesis 3: Motivation and Engagement

BLENDI approach increased the motivation and engagement by introducing a variety of activities into the EFL classroom. Whether through interactive online exercises, multimedia presentations, or collaborative projects, students were invigorated by a dynamic learning environment. This not only cultivated a passion for language acquisition but also created a positive, interactive community among EFL learners.

Hypothesis 4: Promotion of Independent Work

The BLENDI approach empowered EFL students to take charge of their learning journey. Incorporating online components encouraged self-directed study, enabling students to delve into language resources independently. This fostered a sense of autonomy and responsibility, crucial elements for long-term language proficiency development.

Hypothesis 5: Development of Digital Literacy and Critical Thinking

Beyond language skills, BLENDI approach equipped EFL students with essential digital literacy and critical thinking abilities. Navigating online platforms, evaluating digital resources, and engaging in collaborative online discussions honed students' EFL skills vital for the current information age. BLENDI approach not only prepared students linguistically but also cultivated the learners' cognitive skills necessary for navigating an increasingly digital and interconnected world.

6.1. Execution Difficulties

Although certain scholars argue about the effectiveness of online education and skill acquisition, the appropriateness of online resources for academic goals, and the success of online language learning, others highlight the advantages of blended learning and CALL in general. Nevertheless, other scholars find little to no impact on learning outcomes for the various learning methods. According to Kofar (2016), EFL teachers encountered difficulties in the blended learning environment, such as growing workload of educators, availability of several modes of learning, and challenges with internet network connectivity. Teachers found it difficult to engage inactive and unmotivated students in a blended learning setting, as Fryer and Bovee (2016) confirmed.

One issue is the computerized partition, which mentions to the chance of inconsistent admittance to innovation and the web for students (Al-Musawi, et al., 2020). Because of this

dissimilarity, a few learners might be less drawn in and ready to take part in mixed realizing, which could decrease its viability. Oman's Cycle One pupils study with technology deeply ingrained in their education due to the rapid advancement of technology. With the intention of improving young learners' educational experiences, technological tactics and methodologies are included into the curriculum (Al-Musawi et al., 2020). As more and more higher education institutes transition to entirely online and blended learning settings, they face numerous issues in the classroom. According to Banerjee (2011), a student's level of contentment with blended learning is primarily determined by the difficulties of the material, the extent to which problem solving and autonomy in learning are necessary, and the potency of the pedagogies used to integrate in-person and online instruction.

According to Al-Musawi et al. (2020), the majority of Omani educators seem to employ Android apps like TeacherKit, QR code readers, and supplemented authenticity apps like HP Reveal to project lesson information onto displays for all students in attendance. Instructors have discovered that utilizing these programs enhances students' capability to surmise critically and solve problems. It is doubtful, though, that these educators are very knowledgeable in digital skills for the twenty-first century. Even though English is a powerful tool for achieving a variety of objectives, learning the language has never been easy for Omani students. As a result, findings were published in a study titled "A student perspective on low English proficiency in Oman" by Al-Mahrooqi, 2012. One hundred students of Sultan Qaboos University who had earlier completed public educational institutions made up the sample for the aforementioned study. According to the findings in the study, 85% of these students thought that their poor English proficiency was mostly due to the behaviors and output of their instructors. Specifically, these pupils mentioned teacher-centered, antiquated traditional learning approaches. According to Emenyeonu (2012), in a typical educational setting, learners only participate as passive recipients of knowledge from teachers. Additionally, the learning environment is set up with pupils working in straight lines without assistance from one another, which hinders communication and minimizes the use of the English language.

6.2. Future Perspectives

It is evident that the subject of educational technologies is one that is constantly evolving. Several scholarly investigations have demonstrated the impact of modern technologies and computer systems on the educational process across several domains, encompassing language instruction and acquisition (Schacter and Fagnano, 1999). But the majority of these researches have focused only on how e-learning affects performance without integrating any in-person training. When it comes to the efficacy of integrating online learning with regular classroom instruction, Omani English language instructors are divided on the subject. While some English language teachers believe that using electronic information with their pupils is unnecessary and a waste of time and effort, many prefer to utilize it no more than twice a week. To achieve the best results in English language instruction, some instructors of English support combining traditional content with electronic digital materials (Al Mashaikhi et al., 2020). Below is a discussion of some educational implications and suggestions for future perspectives.

Giving efficient digital input: although the majority of students stated that their instructors had given them adequate online feedback, several of them voiced discontent. This emphasizes how crucial it is to give students fast, helpful digital input. Future studies

should examine useful methods for giving feedback in virtual settings, such as utilizing technological platforms and instruments that provide customized and insightful input. Additionally, assessing the choices and expectations of students regarding their interactions with online education may be used to guide the creation of realistic educational courses that provide teachers the skills they need to effectively teach in blended learning environments (Al-Amrani & Al-Ghaithi, 2023).

Deep learning evaluations: a few learners expressed dissatisfaction with excessive emphasis on memorization in tests, advocating for a change to tests that encourage deeper learning. Future research should look into innovative blended learning evaluation strategies that improve knowledge usage, analytical thinking, and problem-solving abilities. This might be accomplished by including real-world and genuine evaluation tasks, utilizing summative, formative, as well as continuous tests to offer continuous input, and skillfully merging contemporary technology to facilitate engaging and collaborative examinations (Al-Amrani & Al-Ghaithi, 2023).

Satisfying learner requirements and interests: during the interviews conducted by Al-Amrani & Al-Ghaithi (2023), a number of learners revealed that they had different perspectives and preferences about blended learning environments. Future studies have to focus more on how individual variances in technical readiness and individual characteristics influence experiences of learners with blended learning. This knowledge may be used to build customized educational experiences, assist in the selection and integration of appropriate technology, and promote development of student-centered learning strategies in blended learning environments.

7. CONCLUSION

Considering English is now the language of choice for many fields like politics, science, international relations, communication, information technology, and many more, its significance as a global language cannot be understated (Bisong, 1995; Crystal, 2003; Altbach, P. 2010). Owing to its significance, Omani stakeholders have connected the nation's advancement and development to its citizens' fluency in the English language. English is therefore seen as a tool for communication with non-Arabic speakers worldwide, even if it is not as crucial for regulating technology and science in Omani society. It is also viewed as a vital launching platform that the nation may use to go to the leading edge of global growth (Al Mashaikhi et al., 2020). The blended learning approach helps students develop their digital literacy and critical thinking abilities in addition to their language proficiency. Because of its versatility, BLENDI can be used with a wide range of students and learning environments, which makes it an invaluable tool for EFL pedagogy. The BLENDI approach shows promise as a practical way to meet the changing needs of EFL students, as educators continue to navigate difficulties of language instruction in the digital age. Future studies should focus more intently on particular BLENDI implementation components, investigating issues like student motivation, teacher facilitation, and the long-term effects on language proficiency. In general, this study supports the incorporation of the BLENDI approach as a forward-thinking and successful technique for enhancing the language proficiency of EFL students in modern educational settings.

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COMMON PRONUNCIATION PROBLEMS IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

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Abstract. *This study focuses on pronunciation difficulties of certain segmental features related to Oman's local English language teaching environment that includes language learners of different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. The paper draws its conclusions from research findings, looks into some commonly mispronounced words, in and outside English language classrooms, explains the reasons behind such challenges and suggests some practical ideas to avoid common pronunciation problems in the context of the inclusive English language classroom.*

Key words: *pronunciation, practice, sounds, common errors*

1. INTRODUCTION

This research looks into some methodological and educational implications of pronunciation practice and instruction in language teaching in the Omani context that may be relevant to other language specialists working in the Gulf countries and outside this region. The Omani linguistic landscape is extremely diverse and includes a variety of local accents and dialects of Arabic. To illustrate, for some students, who come to study at the tertiary level from the southern province of Dhofar, Arabic is not their mother tongue. This socio-regional diversity has its influence on the teaching paradigm in the English language classrooms in Oman (Al Issa, 2020, Mashani 2015).

Thus, the main objective of the paper is to share some professional experiences of implementing various methods and techniques in teaching Omani students, inclusive of their different ethnic and linguistic background, and to discuss further ways of improving pronunciation skills in a wider geographical and pedagogical context. The inclusive aspect of this objective correlates with Oman's education policy that emphasizes diversity in education for all (Al Musawi et al., 2022; Tuzlukova et al., 2023).

1.1. Background theory: common views

Kelly (2000) makes two clear statements about teaching pronunciation. Firstly, according to Kelly (2000), teaching pronunciation is often given inadequate attention. Secondly, when pronunciation becomes important, it is usually in reaction to a particular problem.

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Dalton and Seidlhofer (2004) state that “it is the individual sounds which, to most learners, seem to be the most readily perceptible, most ‘tangible’ aspect of pronouncing a foreign language” (p. 143). On the same vein, Kelly (2000) highlights the reasons for pronunciation challenges that include the fact that there are certain sounds in English that learners do not have in their mother tongue. Kelly is also of the opinion that the learners’ L1 may have certain sounds or their combinations that cannot be found in English. This idea is echoed by Swan & Smith (2013) who believe that “a learner’s English is likely to carry the signature of his/her mother tongue, by virtue both of what goes wrong and what does not” (p. xi). In their opinion, this phenomenon is “most striking in the case of pronunciation” (ibid).

We often tend to make our initial judgement, which has formal or informal expression, by the way a person sounds. Pronunciation research, however, has lacked focus and attention on this point and often loses to grammar and vocabulary studies. The general trend has moved from the more classic audio-lingual method to its combination with the communicative approach to language teaching and its further integration into course books and ESL classroom. This change in attitude to teaching pronunciation is found in the research of Derwing and Munro (2005), Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin (2010), and Grant and Brinton (2014).

According to Grant & Brinton (2014), today there is a clear move from just a native speaker model to a variety of models and standards depending on the listener and the context. Traditional stand-alone pronunciation courses are replaced by integration into the content of different skills areas, mostly listening and speaking modules. Thus, the key goal of a language learner is not a perfect and ‘native-like’ type of pronunciation, but rather comfortable intelligibility.

Ideal pronunciation in its classic definition may no longer be seen as the ultimate goal in the academic or daily life, unless the mispronunciation of certain words does not bring meaning across and causes serious strain to the listener. In a Power Point classroom presentation, a slide with ‘jop’ instead of ‘job’ may not be so misleading. However, this is not the case of a student who writes on a classroom whiteboard the abbreviation *MT* for ‘empty’ and submits a file with a front ‘bag’ instead of a front ‘page’. Such instances can be misleading and cause serious cognitive difficulties. If disregarded, this may have some cognitive consequences outside the language classroom, e.g. a beautician’s office in a busy local neighborhood was working with the sign of a ‘Puty Center’ for a while.

Kelly (2007) summarizes this concept by stating that “a learner who consistently mispronounces a range of phonemes can be extremely difficult for a speaker from another language community to understand” (p. 11).

2. RESEARCH METHODS AND FINDINGS

This study looks into common pronunciation problems which learners of English in Oman often face. Thus, Omani English language instructors at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) were approached with the following research questions:

- Which English words do Omani people commonly mispronounce?
- What are the reasons for such mistakes?
- What are the best ways to deal with this problem pedagogically, in and outside the language classroom?

The reason for choosing Omani language specialists as a target group for the survey is based on the assumption that the local instructors may be more aware of the linguistic landscape in their region.

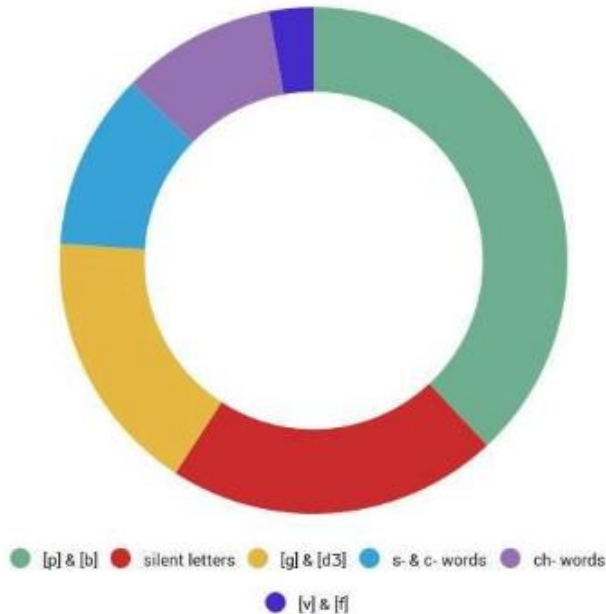


Fig. 1 Common pronunciation difficulties

As it can be seen in this donut chart, most respondents indicate the pronunciation of [p] and [b] sounds is the important issue to be considered, whereas the articulation of [f] and [v] sounds is the least topical. The respondents to the survey confirm what other scholars (Hewings 2004; Kenworthy 1999) see as typical pronunciation errors of Arabic speakers: [g] vs [k], [p] vs [b], and [gʒ] vs [g].

Let us look again into the second research question, which aims to find out the main reasons behind such pronunciation problems.

As we can see from Figure 2, the interference and influence of a learner's mother tongue is indeed the main reason for the common pronunciation errors of Omani learners of English. Silent letters and lack of awareness come second, followed by the specific phonological features of English and Arabic including its dialects.

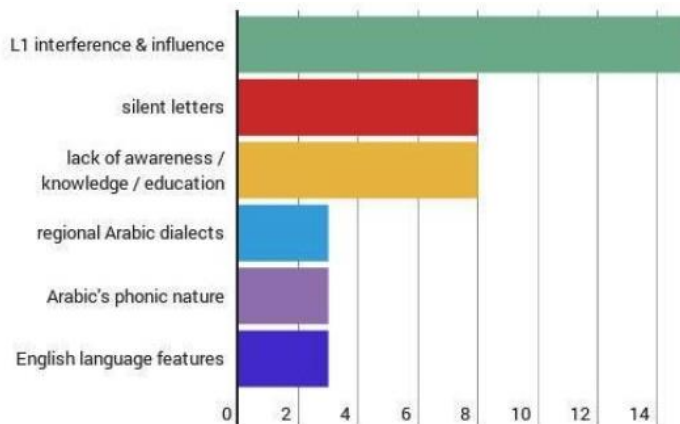


Fig. 2 Main reasons for pronunciation errors (summary)

The latter statement needs further clarification in Oman's regional context. Some local dialects of Arabic in Oman tend to pronounce the word جميلة 'jameel' (beautiful) not with an affricate [gʒ], but a plosive [g] or even [j] sound (e.g. when a speaker comes from the coastal town of Sur). Consequently, language instructors may witness this phenomenon in cases of such everyday words as *college*, *page*, *message*, *language* and *village*.

Finally, the researcher asked the informants about the steps that need to be taken to avoid these pronunciation challenges from a pedagogical and methodological perspective.



Fig. 3 The best ways to deal with pronunciation challenges (summary)

As we see in Figure 3, the least popular activity in Omani context is to sing a song and use a dictionary. Nonetheless, some approaches may be more culturally and pedagogically acceptable, which will be further discussed in more detail.

2.1. CLEAR PRONUNCIATION PROBLEMS

In the Omani ELT context, one of the most vivid pronunciation problem is the articulation of the affricate [dʒ], which, as Kelly (2007) describes, “occurs when a complete closure is made somewhere in the mouth and the soft palate is raised” (p.49). In its visual definition, Karnevskaia (1990), as well as many other classic books on English phonetics and phonology, illustrate the nature of the contrastive pair [p] vs [b], with [p] being unvoiced and weak, and [b] being voiced and strong. However, today when a learner has access to online tools and platforms, there is no need to bring a mirror to the English classroom. Instead, as Hincks (2015) suggests, you should add more technology to learning pronunciation. Likewise, a students can observe the actual process of pronouncing sounds on different YouTube platforms, e.g. BBC Learning English. What is important in the local context is to be selective as to which pairs to contrast, i.e. the main focus in case of Omani learners will be the production of the sound [p] and [dʒ]. The main reason for this choice is that Arab learners of English often rely on their local dialect, and in the case of [dʒ] naturally choose [g] instead. What we need to raise is the students’ awareness of the misunderstanding which is likely to occur when they say ‘gob’ instead of ‘job’ or ‘games’ but not ‘James’.

2.2. Pronunciation practice: ‘people’ and ‘problem’

Although some linguists (e.g. Morley, 1991) claim that you cannot approach pronunciation instruction with a one-size-fits-all methodology, in this research we will look at some practical activities that should be effective and efficient for Arab learners of English. Such activities are pedagogically and methodologically sound and are aimed to improve the quality of the target segmentals. During our study, the Omani teachers of English submitted a concise word list of most frequently mispronounced English words.



Fig. 4 Most frequently mispronounced words (infographics)

As it can be seen in Figure 4, the most frequently mispronounced word in our study is the word ‘people’ which is followed by the runner-up word ‘problem’. A closer look at the infographics will demonstrate that most of these words are based on the [p] and [b] differentiation.

What could be done about these particular problematic words? Hewings (2004) describes a popular technique of using a sheet of paper that the learners put in front of their mouth, and in the case of a strong consonant, they should feel a puff of air move the paper. In the case of the [p] vs [b], the author suggests we exaggerate the differences to develop student awareness. Kelly (2007) also suggests using diagrams and learner-friendly explanations to describe these pronunciation phenomena, e.g. sound chains and dictations. Yet another example of an activity focused on raising awareness can be found in Hancock's "Pronunciation Games" (2012). Here, the instructor chooses a rule and makes a list of words. The students follow on a model in small groups and contribute to the rule. Thus, our goal as language instructors is to make such activities not only aspirational but also inspirational.

There are common ways of dealing with uncommon pronunciation difficulties. In the case of the words *page*, *message*, *college*, *village*, and even the key word *language*, the sound [dʒ] has to be properly modelled, clarified and practiced to avoid confusion. One of the popular practical solutions to these pronunciation challenges is a set of relevant tongue twisters, in which *John enjoys his orange juice*, *Jack and Jill went up the hill*, and *Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers*. Students can be very creative, and when asked, make their own tongue twisters with the target sound and may come up with something about Steve Jobs and his great job.

Some other less common techniques and practices, which are not to be found in classic course books, also prove to be effective in this region when they are based on the local culture. Let us take an example of the local way of reading poetry. A student will read a tongue twister line by line, and the class will echo the last word in each line.

Davis & Rinvulcri (1994) offer an extensive list of dictations. The type of dictation used in the author's class is a kind of a 'musical dictation' that involves group work. Students get in groups and receive a sheet of paper and just one pencil. The teacher can play a simple rhyme from YouTube and students pass the pencil around. When the 'music' stops, the student who has the pencil at that moment must write down the work the teacher dictates. Others can help with the spelling but they cannot touch the pencil.

Having received some sophisticated feedback from Omani colleagues at SQU, let us try to feed forward some more classroom ideas for language instructors working in GCC countries, including other areas around the world:

- Thumb-up and thumb-down (pointed with the right hand) resembles the sounds [b] and [p] and should be visual and meaningful enough for the learners during the speaking or writing class.
- Tongue twisters pronounced with a local poetic twist or produced by the students themselves.
- Key words to be shown and exposed, taught and clarified, drilled and practiced can be put not in a traditional vocabulary bag, but in a cone-shaped paper locally known as a 'mahroot'.
- To raise awareness of target phonemes for lower level students, a Google Translate feature can be helpful. For example, when the teacher demonstrates the difference between 'park' and 'bark' with instant translation on a classroom whiteboard.

3. DISCUSSION: PERSPECTIVES OF PRONUNCIATION PEDAGOGY

As Derwing & Munro (2014) put it, “If we take a native-like accent as the goal, pronunciation teaching is destined to fall short” (p. 17). In the past, English major students would have to take traditional courses based on drills and stand-alone pronunciation activities with the goal of ‘native-speakerism’. Furthermore, Hewings (2004) states that ‘it is now generally accepted that the target of ‘native-speaker’ pronunciation is unachievable for the vast majority of learners of a second language’ (p.13).

We as ESL teachers need to be aware of students’ *accentedness* that refers to the extent to which an individual’s speaking English differs from a particular variety of the English language. English as lingua franca allows variation and change. We should also allow certain changes in teaching concepts to move toward the enhancement of intelligibility that ought to be interwoven in the fabric of the language course we teach. The key focus should be given to the pronunciation problems that hinder intelligibility. This concept and a change in the teaching paradigm is supported by research findings and recommendations (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Derwing & Munro, 2010). Indeed, our learners have different needs, aspirations and abilities. Thus, the ultimate goal of language instructors is also to be selective in the means and culturally accepted teaching tools that can fix the common pronunciation problems.

4. CONCLUSION

Although pronunciation is a feature of speech, it is closely linked to the element of writing, in particular spelling. Hewings (2004) believes that the relationship between pronunciation and spelling is “often thought to be complex and chaotic” (p. 9). In a wider pedagogical context, let us refer to a quote from Dalton & Seidlhofer (2004) who raise a crucial question about where our students come from. These authors conclude that we must “take the learners’ perspective into account with regard to their feelings about pronouncing a foreign language, their needs, their goals and to help them appreciate the relevance of pronunciation to real-life language use” (p.150). Common approaches and practice to eliminate common pronunciation difficulties may be of a universal nature and can be useful to many language specialists who nurture clear pronunciation. With proper practice with the emphasis on the learners’ intelligibility, in and outside the language classroom, the common pronunciation problems discussed in this article should not be so common after all.

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“BECAUSE I SPEAK JIBBALI ...”: A CASE STUDY OF THE USE OF MINORITY LANGUAGES IN DHOFARI EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

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Abstract. *The goal of this paper is to investigate the extent to which the linguistic diversity present in the Dhofar region located in southern Oman is reflected in educational settings for the purpose of creating inclusive teaching and learning practices. The goal of such practices is to enhance educational experiences of students. The paper specifically focuses on the use of Jibbali, an endangered indigenous South Arabian language as one of the minority languages spoken in Dhofar. The study aims to answer the question of the level of multilingualism in the Dhofar region, and whether such multilingualism is reflected in the educational settings. The methodology of case study is adopted where 5 multilingual female university students enrolled in a private university in Dhofar recorded two hours of their daily interactions both on and off campus, and a follow-up semi-structured interview was conducted with two of the participants. The results of the study show that participants draw heavily on their rich linguistic repertoires in their daily interactions; however, the current educational practices fall short of reflecting that reality. The results also show that participants are aware of the disparity between the level of multilingualism and the educational practices in the region. The major conclusion of the study is that shared indigenous language(s) primarily tag the context of the interaction as informal and intimate. A major implication of the study is that in addition to English, as a medium instruction, and Modern Standard Arabic, as the official language of the state, space should be given to the use of indigenous languages in educational settings. These settings can make a significant contribution by changing attitudes through creating awareness of the value of local languages, by serving as a forum for training, educating speakers of those languages on the maintenance and revitalization of those endangered languages, and by creating an educational space that allows for the use of minority languages, as a step towards achieving a more equitable, safe and inclusive learning environment.*

Key words: *diversity, minority languages, Oman, Jibbali*

1. INTRODUCTION

UNESCO considers education a universal human right. It emphasizes the importance of creating equitable opportunities for all students to learn. This emphasis on equity, inclusion and diversity in education changes pedagogical practices at all levels of education and takes into consideration cultural and linguistic rights of minorities. Many communities in the world are multilingual and therefore, the use of multiple languages in the daily lives of people constitutes normal practices. In this context, UNESCO emphasizes the importance of multilingual education, which includes the use of at least three languages: (i) the mother tongue(s), (ii) a regional or national language, (iii) the international language.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate to what extent the languages of minorities are included in the educational settings in the Sultanate of Oman. Specifically, it attempts to answer the question of whether or not the minority languages that are spoken in the Dhofar region of Oman reflect the linguistic diversity of this region. The claim is made here that it is important to acknowledge and include the minority languages in the educational settings. By sharing the space with Arabic, as the official language of the country, and English, as a lingua franca of the diverse expat communities that reside and work in Oman, the presence of the minority languages in the classroom would result in more equitable and inclusive pedagogical practices for the benefits of all students. Moreover, the inclusion of the minority languages and cultures into the classroom will facilitate supportive, effective and appropriate classroom environment and will enhance teaching and learning practices.

2. DHOFAR REGION AS A DIVERSE, MULTILINGUAL COMMUNITY

In one of her talks, Polinsky (2015) states that for many years, monolingualism was perceived as a norm rather than an aberration of the norm. The nationalistic agenda of many states dictated that people who belong to one state should speak the language of the state. Thus, for many years monolingualism was presented as an undisputable fact. Nowadays, the diversity of the world communities has been acknowledged and recognized in many international documents. For example, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) among other rights recognizes the linguistic rights of the minorities.

The Dhofar governorate of the Sultanate of Oman, which is located in southern Oman, presents one example of such diverse and multilingual community. Ethnologue (Eberhard et al. 2023) lists 10 living languages that have been spoken in Oman. For the purpose of this paper, a brief description of these languages is limited only to those that are used by the communities in the Dhofar governorate. These languages are Bathari, Dhofari spoken Arabic (herein Dhofari Arabic), Harsusi, Hobyót, Mehri, and Shehri, which is also known as Jibbali. These languages belong to the Afro-Asiatic language family and are known as Modern South Arabian languages. With the exception of Dhofari Arabic, these languages are endangered; however, they differ in their vitality status. For example, Bathari has no first language (L1) users, Harsusi and Hobyót have fewer than 10,000 L1 users, whereas Mehri and Shehri (Jibbali) has between 10,000 up to 1 million L1 users. Ethnologue states that Shehri (Jibbali) is used as the first language by a decreasing number of children. It should be noted here that all of these languages are spoken languages only and they do not have a writing system.

In addition to the indigenous languages, two other languages occupy a prominent position among the people residing in the Dhofar governorate, namely Arabic and English. The Basic Statute of the State that operates as the constitution in Oman, names Arabic as the official language of the State (The Basic Statute of the State, Article 3 1996). Although it is not explicitly stated in the document, the variety of Arabic that the document refers to is Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). English is used as the *lingua franca* of a very diverse population of the expat community, and it is also used as a medium of instruction (EMI) in all post-secondary institutions located in Dhofar. In addition, there are also languages of the expat communities that work and reside in Dhofar, such as Bengali, Tagalog, Hindi, Urdu, Malayalam, Tamil, and different varieties of Arabic (e.g., Egyptian, Jordanian, Syrian, Sudanese), to name just a few.

In order to protect the diversity and the rights of the linguistic minorities, Oman has signed a number of international conventions (Eberhard at al. 2023). One of them is the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) that acknowledges among other rights, the right of indigenous peoples to establish and control their educational systems according to their cultural traditions of teaching and learning. The Declaration also states that children, wherever it is possible, should have access to education in their own culture and language. On the level of the state, the rights of the cultural and linguistic minorities are protected by Article 17 of the Basic Statute of Oman (1996) where it is stated that all citizens in Oman have equal rights and duties, and therefore, there should be no discrimination on the grounds of language.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research (see e. g., Gözpinar 2018; Kana'iaupuni et al. 2017) has shown that the inclusion of indigenous cultures and languages in pedagogical practices enhances the linguistic, cultural, and affective strengths of minority students. Moreover, inclusive pedagogical practices positively affect the academic outcomes of minority students, increase their self-esteem and self-belonging to the community. It has been shown that the practice of bringing minority languages and cultures in the classroom results in building resilience, confidence and positive self-image of the students. This practice also assists in language revitalization and restoration of lost cultural practices and beliefs.

Many countries in the world build their education curricula around the inclusion of minority languages in the classroom where minority languages and cultures share the space with the dominant, national languages. For example, in Canada, in addition to English and French as the official languages of the country, attempts have been made to incorporate minority languages in the educational settings. For example, Cummins (2017) discusses the importance of substituting the term additive bilingualism with the term active bilingualism or better active multilingualism “that endorses the legitimacy of dynamic heteroglossic conceptions of bi/multilingualism, or the understanding that languages are intertwined in complex ways in the minds of multilingual individuals” (Cummins 2017, p. 406). In his discussion, Cummins refers to the experiences of educators, who expand the use of multilingual practices to monolingual contexts that are characterized by linguistic diversity. These practices are aimed at raising students’ metalinguistic awareness, as well as enhancing their critical understanding of the language and power relationship.

Research has also shown (see e. g., Henriksen et al. 2019) that when the classroom becomes more diverse by including other languages and cultures in the classroom, it also benefits the majority cultures. The benefits of acknowledging and embracing diversity in the classroom are in gaining personal insights, developing respect and understanding of the position of the other, and in removing biases and stereotypes. Studies (see e.g., McCarty et al. 2015) report that students who are involved in immersion or multilingual programs have improved their academic and holistic well-being.

In the Omani context, most of the research focuses on the results of the educational reforms or on the use of EMI (see e.g., Denman and Al-Mahrooqi 2019; Tuzlukova et al. 2023). However, to the best of the authors' knowledge, there are few studies that discuss the linguistic diversity of Oman and consider the impact this diversity and inclusion might have on pedagogical practices. One of the studies conducted in the Omani context discusses linguistic diversity through the issues of language planning and policy in Oman (Al-Issa 2020). In his study of the linguistic landscape of Oman, Al-Issa makes the following claims. First, he states that decades of using imported measures of proficiency, such as the use of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) to measure the level of English proficiency, seeking the help and expertise of western accreditation and quality assurance agencies, and the use of textbooks imported from English-speaking countries, such as the UK, Australia or New Zealand, have not resulted in high levels of proficiency in English among Omani graduates. Second, the adoption of imported textbooks from neighboring countries, such as Qatar, and later Jordan, in the teaching of MSA, has not helped improve the MSA proficiency of Omani students. He proposes a number of solutions to address the challenges of low language proficiency in English and MSA. One of them is to seek the expertise of highly trained local researchers and teacher educators in order to develop local instruments of teaching and assessment that can effectively measure students' proficiency in English and MSA. With regards to the indigenous languages of Oman (e.g., Jibbali, Mehri, Bathari, Harsusi spoken in Dhofar, and Baluchi, Zajali, Swahili spoken in other parts of Oman), he states that the adoption of indigenous languages in the educational system might not be a good idea, as it runs counter to the goal of the government of Oman to have Omanis perceive themselves as one nation that speak one language. This is the image that the government is determined to foster, as it is believed to help Oman move closer and faster towards modernity.

The present study addresses the gap identified in the literature by focusing on the study of linguistic diversity in the context of one private university located in the Dhofar governorate, and the impact that this diversity might have on the experiences of its students.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the description presented in section 2, the Dhofar governorate appears to be a diverse, multicultural and multilingual region of Oman where the rights of the linguistic minorities are acknowledged and protected by the international conventions as well as the state constitution. Thus, the question that is investigated in this paper is the extent to which this diversity is reflected in educational settings for the purpose of creating inclusive teaching and learning practices, the goal of which is to enhance the learning experiences of students. Specifically, this study answers two questions. The goal of the first question is to investigate the assumption about the extent of diversity and multilingualism of the Dhofar region by

observing the linguistic repertoire (LR) of the Dhofari students enrolled in a private university located in the Dhofar governorate. The second question focuses on the use of minority language spoken in Dhofar in educational settings, and the impact of its inclusion on the educational experiences of Dhofari students. Throughout this paper the term LR is used following Spolsky (2021) as an actual language practice or practices that are used by people living in multilingual communities. LRs are not fixed, as language users modify and adjust them depending on the linguistic varieties they are exposed to in their speech communities.

5. METHODOLOGY

Five female university students whose age ranges from 18 to 22 participated in this case study. The participants of the study identify themselves as multilingual speakers, as in their daily practices, they use the following languages: Hobyot, Jibbali, Dhofari Arabic, English, and MSA. For this case study, the participants were asked to record themselves for two hours within one week by using the recording devices installed on their smart phones. The recordings took place in different places inside the university campus (e.g., in the classroom, in the cafeteria) and outside the campus (e.g., being in the car while driving to the university). Selected samples of their recordings were transcribed and then glossed following the conventions established in the field of linguistics. In addition, selected participants took part in the semi-structured interview that was transcribed and analyzed for emerging themes.

6. MULTILINGUAL LINGUISTIC PRACTICES OF DHOFARI STUDENTS

The purpose of this section is to show that the LRs of the Dhofar university students are quite diverse. The languages that the participants use on a daily basis are not limited only to the languages prescribed to them by the institutional policy, which dictates the use of EMI, and Arabic, as the official language of the state. They use their diverse LRs (not always consciously) to achieve the communicative goals of their interaction practices. Consider excerpt (1) of a conversation that takes place on the university campus. The languages that are used in this excerpt are Dhofari Arabic and Jibbali. In this excerpt, three female friends discuss their visit to a mall once the classes are over.

Excerpt 1¹

Dhofari Arabic

A: ʃ-raar-kan al-yɔ:m naruħ al-mɔ:l?
 what-think-PRON.2PLF DEF-day go.1PL DEF-mall
 What do you think about going to the mall today?

¹ The following abbreviations are used in glossing the examples presented in this paper: 1 = first person; 2 = second person; 3 = third person; DEF = definite article; F = feminine; FUT = future particle; M = masculine; NEG =negative marker; PAST = past tense; PL = plural; PRED = predication marker; PREP = preposition; PRON = pronoun; Q = question particle; SG = singular

- C: la pli:z bukraḥ, al-yo:m ma agdar
 no please tomorrow DEF-day NEG can.1SG
 ʕend-i ʃoʔoʔ.
 PREP-1SG work
 ‘No please not today; I cannot; I have work to do.’
- B: zi:n bukraḥ raḥ naruḥ.
 Ok tomorrow FUT go.1PL
 ‘Ok we will go tomorrow.’

Jibbali

- C: ʔareira a-nyad k-muun?
 tomorrow FUT-go.1PL PREP-who
 ‘Who will we go with tomorrow?’
- B: ka-saaiey.
 PREP-driver
 ‘with the driver’
- C: keif a-ndafaʕ he-ʃ ayruʃaa-ʃ?
 how FUT-pay.1PL PREP-PRON.3SGM money-3MS
 ‘How will we pay him his money?’
- B: he a-lzam-ʃ aaxar-aary.
 I FUT-pay-3SM end-month
 ‘I will pay him at the end of the month.’

Excerpt (1) shows that the conversation between friends starts in Dhofari Arabic; however, when speaker A leaves the group, speakers B and C switch to Jibbali. Their switch to Jibbali happened for convenience purposes, as Jibbali is the language that they share in the absence of speaker A, who does not speak Jibbali. Their choice of Jibbali also signals closeness and belonging, as Jibbali is often perceived by its speakers as the language used to communicate with people from the inner circle, such as friends and family.

Now consider excerpt (2). In this excerpt, the friends discuss the arrival time for the driver to take them to the university. The LR of this excerpt includes the following languages: Dhofari Pidgin Arabic (DPA), Hobyot and Jibbali.

Excerpt 2

DPA

- Driver: bukraḥ fi: roh dzaamʕa saaʕah kʌm
 tomorrow PRED go university hour Q
 ‘What time are you going to the university tomorrow?’
 (literally: ‘Tomorrow be go university hour what?’)
- A: saaʕah waḥda fi: roh.
 hour one PRED go
 ‘We will go at one o’clock.’
 (literally: ‘Hour one be go’)

Dhofari Arabic

- B: mʌtakadah? aḥis ʔalatʔti. bukraḥ b-anebda b-anebda
 sure feel.1SG make.mistake.PAST.2SF tomorrow b-start.1PL
 saaʕah θinte:n.
 hour two
 ‘Are you sure? I think you are mistaken. Tomorrow, we start at two o’clock.’

Hobyot

A: ayah ḍayarabk walaakin heh berah yetaxar
 yes know.1S but he became be.2M.late
 wa t'wur yebut'? nus'ul a-mhad'arah mɔtaxar-aat.
 and sometime drive.slowly arrive.1PL DEF-class late-PLF
 ʕaʕaan t'anah ʕamurk hih yenkaʕ gabal.
 that's why ask.PAST PRON.3MSG come.3MS early
 'Yes, I know, but he has been running late recently and sometimes we arrive late to classes. That is why I told him to come early.'

Jibbali

B: aah saħ saħ as'laħ-j bej.
 Oh yes yes, do.right.PAST-3MSG PREP-PRON.3SM
 'Oh yes yes, you did the right thing with him.'

In excerpt (2), speaker A starts the conversation in PDA. The ungrammatical structure *fi: roh* 'be go' is used by speaker A to accommodate the driver. DPA is often used in Dhofar for communication purposes with members of the expat community, who come from Bangladesh, Pakistan or India. When the message to the driver has been delivered, speaker A switches to Hobyot signaling the privacy of the follow-up conversation. Speaker B chooses to respond in Jibbali, as two female friends have the receptive knowledge of each other's languages. The choice of Hobyot and Jibbali from their LRs signals the exclusion of the driver and the privacy of their interaction, where they express their dissatisfaction with the constant lateness of the driver.

Now consider excerpt (3) where Jibbali and Dhofari Arabic are used interchangeably. Speaker C starts the conversation and proceeds by using Jibbali, whereas speaker B insists on the use of Dhofari Arabic.

Excerpt 3

Jibbali

C: ʕaf t-u-n nyad a-kaftiria.
 in 2SF-PRON-1PL go.1PL DEF-cafeteria
 'Do you want us to go to the cafeteria?'

Dhofari Arabic

B: ma-gdar; mɔʕyuuulah.
 NEG-can.1SG busy.SF
 'I cannot, I'm busy.'

Jibbali

C: ku-hit ataherg ʕari:t?
 why-PRON.2SF speak.2 Arabic?
 'Why are you speaking Arabic?'

Dhofari Arabic

B: maaʕi; b-aroh, ʕendi klaas.
 nothing FUT-go.1S PREP-PRON.1S class.
 'Nothing; I will go; I have a class.'

Excerpt (3) demonstrates that in this conversation, every speaker insists on their own language and refuses to accommodate. Speaker C starts and continues her conversation in Jibbali, whereas speaker B chooses Dhofari Arabic. By insisting on Dhofari Arabic and

not willing to switch to Jibbali, speaker B communicates her dissatisfaction with her friend's behavior. Speaker B shows her intention of not switching to Jibbali, as this language is reserved for private interactions between friends and family. Speaker B chooses Dhofari Arabic to distance herself from her friend, as she wants her friend to know that she is upset with her.

In excerpt 4, the conversation takes place between a university instructor and a student. Both of them are speakers of Jibbali. Other students are also present in the classroom.

Excerpt 4

Jibbali

B: duktur bek s'ahaht emtehaan?
 doctor do.PAST.2MSG correct.PAST.2SM exam
 'Doctor did you mark the exam?'

Dhofari Arabic

I: lihad alaan la?
 until now no
 'Not yet; no.'

Dhofari Arabic

B: tamaam fukran.
 Ok thanks
 'Ok, thanks.'

In excerpt (4), speaker B, who is a female, uses Jibbali to ask her male instructor about the results of the exam. The instructor chooses to respond in Dhofari Arabic. His choice of Dhofari Arabic over Jibbali can be explained by his intention to keep this conversation with a female student formal, as Jibbali is often perceived by its speakers as an intimate language of communication between friends and family. Speaker B recognizes his intention by immediately switching to Dhofari Arabic. By doing this, she agrees with the instructor to keep this conversation formal and available to other students present in the classroom, who may not be speakers of Jibbali.

Excerpts (1-4) presented and discussed in this section demonstrate the languages used by the speakers of the Dhofar speech community. Multiple languages that are included in the rich LRs of Dhofari speakers are heard on the university campus. The excerpts also show that speakers' choices of language do not depend on the prescribed institutional or state policies designed to regulate the use of languages. Instead, speakers' choices of language are determined by the contexts and the communicative intent of messages that are conveyed to their interlocutors.

7. INCLUDING MINORITY LANGUAGES IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS: THE CASE OF JIBBALI

The purpose of this section is to answer the second research question that investigates the extent of the inclusion of Jibbali, a minority language, in educational settings, and the effect that this inclusion (or a lack thereof) might have on the educational experiences of the students. This question is answered by discussing the results of the semi-structured

interview with Raya and Maryam, two female multilingual university students, who participated in this study.

In addition to English, MSA and Dhofari Arabic, Raya and Maryam speak Jibbali. However, they have different experiences of how they use this language. Jibbali is used as a language of communication in Maryam's family, as her parents choose to communicate in Jibbali with their children. Maryam evaluates her proficiency in Jibbali as advanced. However, she states that sometimes she has problems communicating her ideas in Jibbali. From time to time, she has difficulties understanding her parents, as "they use some words that we do not use them [such as numbers], names of trees, some herbs, the names of the rocks". In addition to Jibbali, Dhofari Arabic occupies a prominent position in Maryam's life. Maryam and her family live in Salalah, and her secondary and post-secondary education has been in Salalah, a major city of the Dhofar governorate where the majority of the population use Dhofari Arabic.

When Maryam started attending school in Salalah, it was a common understanding among the students to use Dhofari Arabic only, as everyone at school spoke it. She explains, "when you enter school and see all people speak Arabic, you speak Arabic. You will be shy to speak Jibbali." When asked how she learned Dhofari Arabic since her home language is Jibbali, she responds that she learned it from school and her friends. She says, "I was confused when other children use the words that I did not know, like *sharpenner (baraya?)* I did not know ... [I asked] what? What? And then I learned it. I discovered new words in Arabic that I did not know at school." She also mentions the importance of TV and social media in her learning of Arabic.

When asked a question about the attitudes of her classmates and teachers who spoke Dhofari Arabic at school to Jibbali, Maryam recalls that children show interest and curiosity. She says, "one of the girls, Sudanese or Yemeni, they will come to ask [me] ... can you tell us the Jibbali words for these ...". When asked if teachers in her school were showing a similar interest towards Jibbali, Maryam responds by saying that teachers always spoke Dhofari Arabic. She further states that "if we see or hear the teacher who speaks Jibbali, this will be fascinating; I did not see that". She adds that she and her friends, who are Jibbali speakers, internalized the rule of not using Jibbali in front of the teacher. Sometimes she used Jibbali to chat with her friends during the breaks, "but we do not do that, we do not speak in Jibbali in front of the teacher." When asked the question of how she learned this rule of not speaking Jibbali in front of her teacher, she responds, "you can feel it from the atmosphere. You understand it. No one speaks Jibbali; ah maybe the teachers were Egyptian[s]. Other teachers, maybe [were] Jibbali but they [did] not speak Jibbali, but until now I cannot know." She recalls that in high school, she used to have a teacher who gave her instructions in Jibbali, "Maryam, come here. Maryam do this, in Jibbali. And I am like what? What? You are speaking in Jibbali?"

Maryam also reflects on the experiences of her cousins, who attend one of the schools located in the mountains of the Dhofar governorate. She says that contrary to her experiences, they use Jibbali at school all the time, "but school in the mountain is so different; I saw my cousins and they ... use only Jibbali; they do not use Dhofari Arabic." She mentions that Dhofari Arabic is used only when they have an official visitor from the Ministry. Maryam judges the proficiency of her cousins in Dhofari Arabic and in Jibbali and compares it with her proficiency in these two languages. Due to the widespread use of Jibbali at her cousins' school, she concludes that her cousins' proficiency in Jibbali is better; however, Maryam has a better command of Dhofari

Arabic. She states that her cousins speak “broken Arabic”. Maryam acknowledges the widespread use of Jibbali in the area where her cousins live. She says that everyone speaks Jibbali in there, even Bengali and Egyptian expats, who live and work in that area. Jibbali is also widely used at schools, according to Maryam. She says, ‘teacher[s] explain in Jibbali, especially for children in grade[s] one, two and three. She recalls that her friend told her that when children talk to a teacher, who speaks Jibbali in Jibbali, they might use some Arabic words. However, the teacher will not point it out or reprimand them for their use of Jibbali or for code-switching between the two languages, Dhofari Arabic and Jibbali.

Raya’s relationship with Jibbali is different from Maryam’s. Raya names Jibbali as her second language that she learned after Dhofari Arabic. She assesses her proficiency in Jibbali as a beginner speaker. One of the reasons for her low level of Jibbali is the lack of early exposure to the language. She says that she “did not have enough input in Jibbali in the early childhood” because [her] parents communicated in Arabic (despite the fact that her mother is a Jibbali speaker). The input in Jibbali was provided to her by other adults in the community. She also observes that if someone has to speak Jibbali, their proficiency in the language should be close to that of a native speaker, as errors are frowned upon by fluent Jibbali speakers and are even treated as signs of disrespect. Raya explains that the language of communication that is used in her family is Dhofari Arabic; however, the predominant language of people who live in her community is Jibbali. Raya and her family use Jibbali when they go outside or when they have Jibbali visitors to their house. When asked about the language of communication and instruction at school, she responds that her school was located in the area where the dominant language is Jibbali. She explains, “the teachers were using Jibbali while talking to each other but in [teaching], no”. She adds, “but Jibbali was spoken in my school not during classes but among teachers, among other students, with teachers they would speak Jibbali ... during breaks, when you have lunch, when you play together, but not during class time”.

When asked about the knowledge of Dhofari Arabic of those children who grew up speaking Jibbali, she states that children who came from the mountains and who were not exposed to any Dhofari Arabic, learned it from mass media. She says, “for this generation their Arabic is mostly mixed with Saudi dialect because most of the Arabic YouTubers are Saudis maybe, and the media in general is Saudi.”

In the interview, both Raya and Maryam mention that sometimes children at school are shy to speak Jibbali. Maryam attempts to explain their shyness by bringing up the contrast between formal and informal contexts that dictate the use of one language over the other. She says, “maybe because Jibbali is the language of home and you are comfortable at home with your family ... you are at school, formal place, you feel like you do not have to speak Jibbali it feels, no, you have to speak in Arabic”. Raya agrees with Maryam by saying that there is a social aspect to why some children prefer to speak Dhofari Arabic instead of Jibbali. One of the reasons is that the children want to fit in, and they do not want other children to make fun of them for mispronouncing some Arabic words. In addition, sometimes Jibbali children can be stigmatized into bad behavior and other Jibbali children do not want to be associated with them; therefore, they prefer to speak Arabic instead of Jibbali.

When Maryam and Raya are asked the question of whether Jibbali language and culture were acknowledged and celebrated in their schools, they responded that there were celebrations of languages and cultures at school but not for Jibbali or any other

minority languages (e.g., Mehri). Maryam mentions that “when you enter school, Jibbali language does not show that much. I cannot remember any event, any celebration for Jibbali language. Raya agrees with Maryam by saying, “[these celebration days] are only for Modern Standard Arabic; other dialects are not seen as languages”.

Both Raya and Maryam have a strong opinion about the importance of acknowledging minority languages at school. Raya thinks that “they should acknowledge the language maybe in some classes ... I think that it should be recognized as a language. It’s seen as a dialect that is not that important ...I think that it needed to be studied.” Maryam expresses her doubts of whether Jibbali can be considered a language or a dialect. In her response to this question, she comments on the importance of the media, for example a “TV program or a cartoon”. Then she adds that the language of the media can be Jibbali or Arabic, or both, where the speakers codeswitch between Jibbali and Arabic. During the interview, Maryam and Raya make references to the program titled *Mahat* that was shown on the Oman National TV during Ramadan some time ago. Maryam further notes that “it was fascinating to see in the media in your community someone who can speak like your language on television”. Both Maryam and Raya reflect that it was an opportunity for the whole family to gather together in front of TV after Iftar (a meal taken by the family to break their fasting during Ramadan). When the program disappeared, everyone was disappointed. Maryam discusses *Mahat*, the main character of the program, “it was funny how he deals with things; it was like reality when you do not want to go to work and then make excuse like I’m sick, something like that, and the character will speak Jibbali sometimes, we laugh when he will speak Jibbali”. Raya agrees with Maryam that it was a very popular program. She says that the programs that reflect the local language and culture should be offered; however, they should be less stereotypical. She elaborates, “maybe [it should show] less stereotypes because if we watch it now, it would be controversial; at that time everything was funny and OK.”

When asked about the use of Jibbali at the university, Raya thinks that at the university level, Jibbali is marginalized. Raya states that the use of Jibbali depends on the interlocutors’ gender. For example, it is fine for Jibbali male students to communicate with Jibbali speakers in Jibbali; however, female students are restricted in their use of this language. This is because Jibbali is perceived in the minds of its speakers as a language of a tight-knit community. Thus, it is inappropriate to choose it as a language of communication with a male instructor because this choice of Jibbali signals intimacy in a formal setting. Raya makes an observation that Jibbali at the university level is used less than at school, as this is the language that is not associated with the academic setting.

Maryam expresses her dissatisfaction with some of the members of the Jibbali community, who frown upon or even become angry when someone makes grammatical errors, mispronounces words or code-switches between Dhofari Arabic, Jibbali and English. She reflects, “When I use the Jibbali language with [some Jibbali speakers], they will immediately criticize you or say that it is something about you that you are weak in the Jibbali language... they do not accept switching from Jibbali to Arabic.” Therefore, she prefers to use English or Dhofari Arabic while speaking to Jibbali speakers, who do not come from the city. However, she states that Jibbali users can become quite sensitive and angry about the choice of language of a Jibbali speaker. Once Maryam observed the criticism towards her friend, a Jibbali speaker, for her choice of Arabic. A Jibbali female student confronted Maryam’s friend with the following question, “Why are you speaking Arabic; you know how to speak Jibbali, right?!”

Maryam believes that Jibbali should not be used in the academic setting, and she avoids using it with the teachers who speak Jibbali. She thinks of Jibbali as the language of communication with friends and family. She states, "Jibbali did not help me succeed academically because, to be honest, the scope of its use and benefit was only at home and for family events only." She reflects that when other students hear Jibbali in the classroom, they feel left out. They assume that if university instructors use Jibbali to communicate with the Jibbali students, they show their preference towards Jibbali speakers over those students who do not speak the language. Her colleagues from the Northern part of Oman believe that Jibbali should not be used in class; however, they express interest and curiosity about the language since they hear it on the university campus between classes. Thus, Maryam was approached and asked by some students to teach them some Jibbali words and phrases, so that they can keep them as souvenirs of their stay and studies in Dhofar, and brag about it when they go back home.

In the interview, Maryam and Raya reflect on the positive impact that Jibbali has had on their success in learning of English. It should be noted here that both participants have an excellent command of English and are very successful in their academic studies. Their names are included in the College of Arts and Applied Sciences Dean's Honour list. Both participants state that because they live their lives surrounded by multiple languages, they feel interested in and highly motivated to learn other languages, for example Modern Standard Arabic, and English. Specifically, Raya comments on the ease of learning English as her third language. She says, "after learning Jibbali, I started learning English, and it was a lot easier to learn English after learning Jibbali." Maryam states that because she was growing up surrounded by Jibbali, MSA and Dhofari Arabic, she was motivated to add English as her fourth language that she can use in her daily life. She adds that in general, she has become curious about other languages, such as Chinese, French, Russian, Spanish, and Sign Language. Maryam proudly identifies herself as a multilingual person; she considers it a special thing that distinguishes her from other people.

8. DISCUSSION

The results of this case study show that despite the fact that Jibbali occupies a prominent position in the lives of Dhofari multilingual speakers, it is not acknowledged as a language that can be used in the academic setting. The data show that Jibbali is primarily used as a language of communication between friends and family, and to signal intimacy and closeness among its speakers. Despite the fact that almost 50% of students in some schools of the Dhofar region are Jibbali speakers, Jibbali is rarely used for instructional purposes. According to the data obtained from the interview, Jibbali is used as a language of communication among teachers and students who speak Jibbali; however, the language of instruction is always perceived to be Arabic or English. Moreover, there are no classes or extracurricular activities where Jibbali language and culture are acknowledged and celebrated.

This case study has several implications. This is the first attempt, to the best of the authors' knowledge, to explore the status of the Jibbali language in the predominantly Arabic and English speaking educational settings in the Dhofar region. The first part of the paper shows that Dhofari speakers live their lives in multiple languages. The study also shows that unfortunately, the language of the minority is not taken into consideration

for pedagogical practices. The use of Jibbali is reserved for informal contexts only. As a result, many students are shy or reserved to use this language in a more formal setting of the school or university classroom. Our recommendation is to introduce classes, especially in the communities, where the speakers of the minority languages constitute the majority, that emphasize the importance of the Jibbali language and culture. For example, school curricula may integrate classes where students can use Jibbali in storytelling. These classes will also be beneficial for children who speak languages other than Jibbali, as students will have an opportunity to learn about the language and culture of their neighboring communities. These efforts can improve the attempts to reverse the course of language attrition among the Jibbali speakers and revitalize the language in the community. At the same time, it will also show to Jibbali speakers that their language should not be reserved only for home use in an informal setting. Jibbali can be used as the language of academic instruction.

At the university level, it is proposed that some courses should integrate Jibbali language and culture as well. For example, a university course, such as Field Methods can expose university students to Jibbali through the formal study of this language by collecting data, analyzing and describing the language. In addition, there should be more awareness among Jibbali speakers as to why some people can have accents when they speak Jibbali as their second language. Accents, grammatical errors, and code-switching should be accepted and not treated as a sign of disrespect. Overall, Jibbali speakers should change their perception of their language from the 'home' language reserved for communication with friends and family, to the language that can be used in different types of settings, including the formal setting of a school and university classroom.

9. CONCLUSION

This case study discusses one example of the linguistic diversity that is present in the Dhofar governorate of Oman. The statements made by linguists, sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists about the multilingual and diverse nature of many communities around the globe are illustrated by the rich LRs of the Dhofari students, who participated in this study. This case study has also shown the disparity between multiple languages that are used in actual communicative practices of the Dhofari students and the top-down language practices prescribed to them by the institutional and state policies. It is our belief that these policies should reflect the actual practices of people who live in multilingual communities. Following positive examples of many countries that include minority languages and cultures in the mainstream classroom, we argue for viewing diversity as a linguistic and cultural potential rather than an obstacle to the forming of the Omani identity. We believe that universities in Oman have an important role to play in raising awareness of the importance of including minority languages and cultures in educational settings. There is no evidence to suggest that the choice of only one language, be it MSA or English, in an instructional setting, can lead to the mastery of this language. The results of our case study have shown that to the contrary, multilingual speakers can have the efficiency and functionality of using their multiple languages in multiple contexts, and the insistence on one language only is not the mandatory prerequisite for a high proficiency in that language. Needless to say, more studies should be conducted in Oman to explore how minority languages can be brought into the classroom to enhance the educational experiences of the

Omani students. Ethnologue (Eberhard et al. 2023) mentions that Jibbali is an endangered language and the number of children who speak the languages is decreasing. One way to revitalize the language is to bring the language to the educational settings to the benefits of the language, its speakers and the broader community.

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EXPLORING ASPECTS OF INCLUSION TO ENHANCE ORAL PROFICIENCY IN HIGHER EDUCATION EFL CLASSROOMS


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Abstract. *Knowing English in today’s world is no longer an added advantage, but rather a necessity. At a time when globalization is increasingly leading to an interdependence among the world’s economies, cultures and populations, the status of English as a lingua franca on the global stage is inevitably strengthened. As such, there is a growing need to equip EFL learners with essential skills that will enable them to successfully navigate life outside the academic context. Hence, the importance of EFL communicative competence is further highlighted, as it becomes more and more evident that a more inclusive approach is necessary in line with the current global contexts. It is essential that learners receive proper guidance, support and scaffolding to help them improve their oral communicative skills as a vital segment of their communicative proficiency. Thus, we may need to rethink the way in which this is dealt with in the tertiary EFL classroom in terms of how it is presented, taught and evaluated, as higher education is essentially learners’ last step in the academic environment. Furthermore, care ought to be taken so that it is done in a more inclusive fashion to correspond to the new attitudes and expectations of the diverse ‘global village’ we are living in. This paper takes a closer look at various aspects related to inclusion for the purpose of enhancing EFL learners’ oral skills proficiency, addressing the potential need of materials development, and the importance of establishing and promoting clear and objective criteria.*

Key words: *inclusion, scaffolding, reliability, oral proficiency, communicative competence*

1. INTRODUCTION

The term *inclusion* in the context of education refers to individuals having access and equal opportunities to education and learning. As such, *inclusion in education* is defined as taking each individual’s needs into account and enabling everyone to participate and achieve together. The founding premise is that everyone can learn and that each individual has their own unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs (UNESCO). The update of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) clearly acknowledges the importance of quality inclusive education as a right of all citizens (Council of Europe 2018: 23). The aim of education, at any and all levels, is to equip

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individuals for life, and especially life outside the academic context, equipping them with the necessary (life) skills to become productive and contributing members of society. However, as education progresses to higher levels, there is an inevitable evolution from basic skills to more complex ones. By the time the tertiary level of education is reached, learners are expected to be able to confidently navigate through life and successfully deal with a variety of situations they may encounter.

In order to create a positive and beneficial learning environment, since the more comfortable learners feel, the more open and receptive they are to learning, care must be taken to ensure that it is inclusive. This inclusive learning environment consists of a number of factors and elements that are intertwined and complementary for optimal results. Language classrooms, and in this context, (E)FL classrooms as well, are seen as excellent environments for inclusive teaching and learning as they provide diverse settings with learners and instructors from many different backgrounds, offering a plethora of cultural diversity, experiences and traditions. Thus, much like real life, (E)FL classrooms become a melting pot of sorts.

Stadler-Heer (2019) states that the concept of *inclusion* is not new to language classrooms. In fact, related terms, however different in meaning they might be, such as *individualization*, *scaffolding*, *differentiation*, and *integration*, have been present in ELT discourse for some time. While these are usually conceptualized as practical measures taken by a teacher according to a learner's or a group's needs, the notion of inclusion also entails a transformed view of language teaching. It requires replacing conventional conceptualizations of individual differences in the regular classroom with a broader organizational, social or interactive perspective relating to all aspects of schooling, including infrastructure of buildings, financial resources, constructing school communities, and training of personnel. Out of the multitude of meanings stemming from *inclusion*, this paper focuses on aspects of *scaffolding* (Foley 1994) for discussion in enhancing oral proficiency in higher education EFL classrooms.

2. COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCES AND NATIVENESS

First and foremost, learners must be made aware of what characteristics a good speaker possesses and what a good speaker does (Florez 1999: 2). In this context, the enhancement of oral proficiency should lead toward the following, in no particular order: manages discrete elements such as turn-taking, rephrasing, providing feedback or redirecting; produces the sounds, stress patterns, rhythmic structure and intonations of English; uses grammar structures accurately; assesses the characteristics of the target audience, including shared knowledge or shared points of reference, status and power relations; selects vocabulary that is understandable and appropriate; applies strategies to enhance comprehensibility, such as emphasizing key words, rephrasing or checking for listener comprehension; and pays attention to the success of the interaction, adjusting components of speech such as vocabulary, rate of speech, and complexity of grammar structures to maximize listener comprehension and involvement.

Interestingly enough, EFL classrooms at the tertiary level of education are in an excellent position to pave the way to a smoother transition from an academic to a real-life context for their learners, as they can focus more on further improving and expanding learners' skills rather than on helping them acquire them, as it is expected that learners have already achieved

this at the lower levels of education, namely, at the primary and/or secondary level. Thus, at this stage, EFL learners have achieved the necessary *linguistic skills* (understanding and using appropriate vocabulary, various linguistic conventions, such as grammar, punctuation and spelling, as well as syntactic conventions, as in proper sentence structure), and can focus more on honing their *discourse skills* (understanding and employing patterns of organization and a variety of discourse markers to achieve smooth transitions and logical and consistent flow of ideas and train of thought), *strategic skills* (planning for effective communication by being able to make modifications and adjustments bearing in mind the target audience and the overall purpose, being fluent and achieving coherence and cohesion of thoughts and ideas, and being able to overcome various language gaps, all of which are connected to discourse skills), and especially their *sociolinguistic skills* (awareness of the social rules of language, such as tone and level of formality (register), various non-verbal behaviors, as well as cultural knowledge as illustrated in the appropriate use of idioms and other cultural references), all of which fall under the category of *communication skills* (Widdowson 1978).

It goes without saying that knowing English as a foreign language nowadays is no longer seen as an advantage but, rather, as an essential skill, like possessing literacy and numeracy skills. From early school years until later in life, learning and using English either in teaching scenarios or in everyday situations have become usual global citizen's activities (Dincă & Chitez 2021). In this context, it is not enough to just comprehend the language considered to be a global lingua franca, but also to be able to utilize it in practical, everyday situations. This is why it is of such great significance that the heart of higher education EFL classrooms should be aimed toward inclusion of the three communicative language competences: linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic. In addition, as Nešić and Hamidović note (2022: 482), though “language knowledge” and “language use” are similar phenomena, they should be understood differently, as knowing, i.e. understanding a language, does not imply the ability of using that language in certain situations and contexts, we must always be aware that improving oral proficiency will undoubtedly go hand in hand with improving learners' linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic skills.

Communicative competence for EFL learners need not be intertwined with the concept of ‘nativeness’ in phonological control, i.e. an unreal benchmark of speaking and sounding like ‘a native speaker’. In fact, one of the changes to the 2001 publication of the CEFR refers specifically to this term, as it has become controversial since the CEFR was first published. It should be emphasized that the top level in the CEFR scheme, C2, has no relation whatsoever with what is sometimes referred to as the performance of an idealized ‘native speaker’ or a ‘well-educated native speaker’. Level C2, while it has been termed “Mastery”, is not intended to imply native-speaker or near native-speaker competence, but rather to characterize the degree of precision, appropriateness and ease with the language which typifies the speech of those who have been highly successful learners. It could be extended to include the more developed intercultural competence above that level which is achieved by many language professionals (Council of Europe 2018: 37). Therefore, EFL teachers should make it clear to students that expectations for communicative competence are not based on ‘a native speaker’, and scaffold accordingly.

3. FEEDBACK

Speaking skills are considered to be one of the most important in achieving communicative competence due to the fact that they facilitate and enable communication at different levels and in different contexts, such as presentations, negotiations, debates, interviews and discussions, among others (Nation & Newton 2009). However, they, together with writing skills, are notoriously challenging to evaluate, as their assessment is seen to be quite objective and not very clear cut, unlike the assessment of grammar, listening or reading skills, for example. As such, it is of great importance that learners are provided with clear and objective criteria, which will ultimately help not only them, but also those doing the evaluation and providing the feedback.

Learning is more or less a trial-and-error process, which means that errors are an inevitable and beneficial part and need to be accepted as such by both parties equally. However, what is also vital is how they are dealt with, again, by both participants in the learning and teaching process, which is what ultimately determines how successful the end results will be.

Evaluating learners' oral proficiency can, indeed, be a challenging task without proper preparation, as this is where a number of other factors need to be taken into consideration, such as how a certain speaking task will firstly be taught, bearing in mind the variety of teaching methods and strategies, how it will be evaluated, how the feedback will be carried out, who will be involved in the actual evaluation and/or feedback, and what the expected outcomes will be, in the direction of a benchmark. It is of great significance how the learners will receive feedback concerning the various speaking tasks they have carried out, as this will ultimately determine whether, and to what extent, the learning outcomes will be successful.

One segment that may be worth looking at in more detail is the actual word choice for this phase of the learning process – whether we will use assessment, evaluation, feedback, review, or error correction. This is not as light a decision to make as it first appears to be since some of these words carry a negative connotation and are more anxiety-inducing than others, which are more learner-friendly and in line with the positive learning environment we wish to create. In addition, and in line with remaining true to creating a truly inclusive learning environment, we may also consider the fact that formal assessment may be a greater challenge to some learners than to others. Thus, it is worth considering other means that may be used as a replacement, or even adjustments that may be made to existing materials so that they are adapted to best fit the learners' needs, such as creating shorter tests with fewer items, or even doing away with tests altogether, circumstances permitting.

It goes without saying that the feedback stage, the most learner-friendly term in our opinion, is crucial for encouraging and consolidating learning. The occurrence of errors is a completely natural occurrence in (E)FL acquisition, and dealing with them in a timely and constructive manner is an important aspect of FL teaching, since proper feedback is essential to avoid fossilization; the permanent incorporation of incorrect linguistic forms leads to poor linguistic skills, and ultimately to poor communicative competence.

Corrective feedback through explicit correction, recasts, clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback, and elicitation or repetition each have a place in the EFL classroom. Lightbown & Spada (2021: 156-157) state that scaffolding takes place as the instructor's questions represent mediational tools within the dialogue between the instructor and the learners; in fact, questions should be examined within the framework of scaffolded interaction and with reference to the instructor's goals in a particular lesson or interaction.

Furthermore, feedback may be provided not just by the instructors but also by the learners themselves, in the form of peer-feedback, or even self-feedback, all of which are beneficial from several aspects, and not just in the classroom, but in real-life contexts as well. In this way they tie in neatly to learners not just being made aware of errors they have made and learning from them, but also having the opportunity to acquire life skills that will be useful to them outside the academic context. Self-feedback can take many forms, the most beneficial being phrased in positive self-appraisal comments, which will ultimately help learners become more self-critical and allow them to assume responsibility.

In line with enhancing oral proficiency, what we cannot emphasize enough is that oral competence is improved with communication, and, as such, it is essential that instructors provide a safe and comfortable environment for this, to free EFL learners of their inhibitions. The feedback stage is crucial and it is especially important that it is carried out in as non-threatening a fashion as possible, since willingness to communicate (WTC) in (E)FL classrooms is viewed both as a personality trait and a situational construct (Jelínková et al. 2023). In their work, MacIntyre and Charos (1996: 17) suggest that “the intention or willingness to engage in L2 communication is determined by a combination of the student’s perception of his or her second language proficiency, the opportunity to use the language, and a lack of apprehension about speaking.”

4. CLEAR CRITERIA AND RELIABILITY OF THE SPEAKING EXAM

Advances in technology have allowed numerous work and/or study opportunities, which were previously unheard of, or, at least, were not accessible to many. Nowadays, a great number of learners work and study at the same time, and even manage to do both remotely. This is another factor that needs to be taken into consideration in line with the evaluation phase in the learning process, as numerous options have become possible with the possibility of online and hybrid learning. With novelties in the EFL classroom, new trends in teaching and presenting the material call for new ways in which learners can be evaluated on their oral proficiency.

However, what has remained unchanged is the need for clear and objective criteria of the speaking exam, indispensable on one hand, yet considered to be the trickiest to carry out, on the other, since the said criteria can be potentially open for different interpretations and subjectivity. As such, it is not only helpful, but it is also absolutely necessary that learners are kept informed beforehand as to how their oral proficiency will be evaluated. For this reason, there are numerous rubrics that may be used or adapted, which, in line with the CEFR descriptors, facilitate greater objectivity.

The internationally-recognized speaking band descriptors are essentially a set of assessment criteria used to evaluate learners’ speaking performance. There are four main categories across nine bands. The former consists of (i) fluency/coherence; (ii) lexical resource; (iii) grammatical range/accuracy; and (iv) pronunciation, while the latter carries the following meanings: 9 (expert user); 8 (very good user); 7 (good user); 6 (competent user); 5 (modest user); 4 (limited user); 3 (extremely limited user); 2 (intermittent user); 1 (non user); and 0 (made no attempt). Depending on the situation and other corresponding factors, these may be adjusted to fit the given context (academic freedom), at the same time allowing learners to feel comfortable concerning the objectivity of their oral proficiency evaluation.

Reliability concerns the extent to which speaking exam results are stable, consistent and free from errors of measurement. It is a general principle that in any exam situation one needs to maximize reliability to produce the most useful results for learners taking the exam, within the existing practical and local constraints. As such, the emphasis of the Speaking section in the IELTS exam, for example, is on measuring learners' communication skills in the language in everyday situations, rather than on formal knowledge of grammar, vocabulary or other elements of the language itself. This orientation is captured through the term *communicative effectiveness*, which refers to learners' ability to talk at length on a range of topics displaying primarily functional and discourse skills alongside lexicogrammatical accuracy and comprehensibility of speech (pronunciation). This shows why speaking exam reliability is one of the most controversial areas of band standardization due to its difficulty to achieve total objectivity (Cambridge English Language Assessment 2016: 27).

For the purpose of inclusion in enhancing oral proficiency, higher education EFL instructors may follow the IELTS speaking exam format in their local contexts, yet they need to be aware of both the benefits and the potential drawbacks. The speaking exam is characterized by an unscripted and relatively unstructured format: the interviewers are generally provided with guidelines that suggest topics and general questioning focus, however specific questions are neither pre-formulated nor identical for each candidate as the interaction is intended to unfold in a natural conversational manner. Some consider the unpredictability and dynamic nature of the interaction to be a valid measure of conversational communicative competence because communication outside the academic context indeed unfolds in an unscripted and non-planned manner. However, it has also long been argued that this unpredictability may compromise test reliability, as the question that arises is whether a learner can be sure that they will get the same band for the speaking exam regardless of the instructor.

Fulcher & Davidson (2007: 263) use the term *topic-priming* to refer to supportive, scaffolding behavior as an attempt by the instructor to make the upcoming speaking exam questions understandable. However, as the strategy was found to be used by some instructors more than others, it is argued that such variation could lead to unfairness in assessment as those learners who are provided with this sort of scaffolding are likely to produce a better performance than those who are not given the benefit of assistance. In addition, there is the dilemma whether tokens by the instructor, such as 'mhm' and 'yeah', can be taken as feedback or turn-eliciting prompts. This leads to questioning the reliability of the speaking exam as learners do not get equal opportunities, hence inclusion is shown to be lacking in this respect. One possible suggestion for inclusion may be that instructors stick closely to a script and neither replace nor omit even a word, just as it is done with the Cambridge B2 First and C1 Advanced Speaking exams. Although the naturalistic interaction might not be so authentic, at least the reliability of the exam could be improved, since the instructors of the same higher education institution have the same starting point and do not use scaffolding or any other strategies to support learners.

5. MATERIALS DEVELOPMENT

Materials development refers to the study and practice of developing materials for the teaching of language, including principles and processes of designing, implementing, and evaluating materials (Tomlinson 2012). One of the main ways in which learners can attain the ability to speak effectively is the use of materials, and, according to Allwright (1990),

they should teach students to learn, they should be resource books for ideas and activities for instruction/learning, and they should give teachers rationales for what they do.

In line with our aim to approach the enhancing of EFL learners' oral proficiency, we will inevitably find ourselves facing the need to make certain adaptations to existing materials, both teaching-wise and assessment-wise, and even develop authentic materials, if the need arises. Hand in hand with the greater professionalization of the ELT community, there has been a tendency for higher education EFL instructors to explore corpus-based and task-based approaches, drawing on research insights about spoken interaction, independently of published materials and/or to engage in their own materials development for the aim of inclusion of all learners, thus still retaining a strong focus on prompts for discussions, role plays, and tasks to generate real-life interaction (Hughes 2011: 72).

As such, changes will be needed both in terms of how the material is presented, and in terms of how it is tested. Another advantage to all the various technological advances taking place is that we now have new and quite unlimited choices in these two areas, namely teaching and testing. We can use all the technological novelties that have made their way into our lives, as well as all the options that opened up during Covid times, and make them work in our favor. We no longer need to rely solely on coursebooks for teaching, or on pen-and-paper tests for evaluating; we can substitute them with new and innovative ways, which are more in tune with the times and better fit the learners' needs.

Thus, teaching can be carried out in a hybrid fashion, or even fully online, and learners will be able to access the materials from the comfort of their homes. They can be asked to do research during class, in real-time, and present it or even discuss it, rather than having to do it as a homework assignment. This will enable learners to take a more active role in their learning, which will undoubtedly have more beneficial results; learners will assume responsibility for something that will ultimately help them in a real-life context.

Enhancing learners' oral proficiency allows for flexibility in terms of the approaches, techniques and materials that may be used, adapted and even developed, all with the aim to make them as inclusive as possible as regards the different learners' needs and learning styles. Whereas it is more challenging to assess oral proficiency, it makes up in the range of available resources, especially at the tertiary level of education, where the learners are cognitively developed and preparing for the next stage in their life. As long as care is taken to take all these factors into consideration, and learners are offered stimulating and thought-provoking activities, adjusted to their level so as to avoid boredom and/or frustration, success is inevitable. Furthermore, as tertiary-level (EFL) learners are at the stage where they will soon be entering the real-life environment, it would be very useful to introduce them to the benefits, and possible drawbacks, various technological novelties may have, such as the relatively recent developments in artificial intelligence (AI), including ChatGPT. These may even be used as support, useful to all the participants in the learning and teaching process.

6. CONCLUSION

It goes without saying that the concept of inclusion is essential in facilitating successful learning outcomes, and nowhere is this more evident than at the tertiary level of education, where learners have reached the final stage of their formal learning. The higher education EFL classroom affords us excellent opportunities to make maximum use of inclusion in attaining

the best results possible, especially in terms of improving EFL learners' oral proficiency, bearing in mind all the segments we have at our disposal, from materials development to feedback, and everything else in between.

As noted previously, an inclusive approach to education encompasses taking individuals' needs into account, and involving all learners to participate and, as such, to achieve together. This underlines the need to make adjustments and tweaks to any and all segments in the learning and teaching process to ensure a safe and comfortable environment for all participants in the said process, at the same time ensuring objectivity and reliability in one of the most challenging segments for this, namely, oral proficiency.

In fact, at present, in this era of such numerous and rapid advances in communication, oral proficiency, or speaking competence, is seen by EFL learners as the most important segment to acquire, while, at the same time, the trickiest to objectively evaluate. As evaluation and feedback are crucial for improvement, it is vital that we find a way to incorporate all these points to ensure that EFL learners are successfully achieving their learning outcomes and are going out in the real-world fully prepared. This can be done by implementing a number of strategies, which will undoubtedly need to be adapted in different contexts, yet they are, nevertheless, present as a solid foundation.

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INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS, INCLUSION AND LEARNING EXPERIENCES IN ESP (ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES) COURSES - STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS AND VIEWS

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Abstract. *The purpose of this article is to review and examine students' perceptions and views on intercultural awareness and inclusivity in the context of tertiary education and ESP (English for Specific Purposes) setting. For the purpose of this article, a survey is conducted among students in the ESP groups, consisting of both local and international students, coming from diverse ethnic, national and cultural background. The research aims to explore students' awareness of inclusion and diversity existing in the groups and students' awareness of the intercultural similarities and differences. Furthermore, the study aims to explore students' attitude towards the learning environment in ESP courses and teaching and learning practices which foster students' intercultural awareness, the necessity of these practices and the ways to improve intercultural awareness and the awareness of the characteristics of diversity and inclusion. Finally, the article will suggest teaching practices which will facilitate inclusivity and promote intercultural awareness in the context of ESP courses.*

Key words: *intercultural awareness, cultural background, diversity and inclusion, students' perceptions*

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to explore students' perceptions of inclusion, diversity and cultural awareness in the context of language courses and ESP (English for Specific Purposes) courses at South East European University in the Republic of North Macedonia. The study examines the views and opinions of students who attend the English for Information Technology courses in their third semester of studies, following a review of relevant literature on students' perceptions of intercultural awareness and results from the survey. The article attempts to provide insight into the necessity of teaching and learning practices which foster intercultural awareness and inclusivity in a language learning classroom, as well as recommendations regarding the ways to incorporate relevant teaching practices and methods.

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2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This article will attempt to provide the background and the definitions of the notions inclusivity and intercultural awareness. Furthermore, the article will attempt to analyse the implications of inclusivity and intercultural awareness in higher education teaching and learning processes, as well as to explore students' perceptions and views on the importance and necessity of inclusivity and intercultural awareness.

2.1. Inclusivity

The arguments to promote the incorporation of diversity, equity and inclusion and inclusive teaching practices in education are numerous and supported by substantial research. This article will present an overview of several theoretical foundations and definitions of the notions inclusivity and intercultural awareness.

Gonzales et al. (2021, p.2), define the values of diversity, equity and inclusion as follows: "Specifically, diversity work aims to increase the number of historically underrepresented people in a space, while inclusion work attempts to reform organizational cultures and structures so historically underrepresented people might feel a sense of belonging inside the organization. Equity work seeks to resolve organizational barriers that impede equitable outcomes for underrepresented people". According to this definition and applied in the context of teaching and education, inclusivity implies reforms in educational practices and structures in order to create the sense of fitting in an educational setting. The current trends in education show that these settings are becoming more diverse in every sense: international students are more frequently part of these educational settings, as well as students from different ethnic, national, linguistic or religious background. Thus, the need for inclusive education is more frequently (and accurately) perceived, especially in the context of higher education.

The need for inclusivity in education is analysed by Sorkos and Hajisoteriou (2020, p.4), who state the following: "Contemporary phenomena such as increased migration, globalisation and super-diversity intensify the urge to recognise the continuously evolving character of individual and group cultures and languages. Arguably, the need to develop culturally-sustainable education policies is imperative." Similarly, Doucette et al. (2021, p.1260) define the need to incorporate inclusive teaching practices in the following way: "It is imperative that educational leaders reflect on their ideas regarding equity pedagogy and social justice to improve the educational experience of students."

Sorkos and Hajisoteriou (2020, p.2), describe the need for inclusive education and the impact on empowering change and social culture: "In a globalised and super-diverse world, both paradigms of inclusive education and intercultural education are important in establishing a sustainable philosophy of change that particularly relies on empowering and transforming the school culture and social beliefs."

2.2. Intercultural and cultural awareness

An important aspect of inclusivity is raising and fostering students' intercultural awareness in education and language education. In order to describe the concept of intercultural awareness, Zhu, H. (2011, p.116) provides the following definition:

Intercultural awareness can be regarded as the foundation of communication. It involves two qualities: one is the awareness of one's own culture; the other is the awareness of another culture. In other words, it involves the ability of standing back from our own point and becoming aware of not only our own cultural values, beliefs and perceptions, but also those of other cultures. Cultural awareness becomes essential when people communicate with people from other cultures.

Zhu, H. (2011, p.116)

The definition above indicates that cultural awareness is essential in an array of different contexts, including educational context. The importance of intercultural awareness is crucial when educational realities reflect the diversity in the classroom. Furthermore, the emphasis on intercultural awareness has an impact on curriculum development. Intercultural awareness involves a shift from traditional teaching methods to more contemporary methods, which cater to students' needs and the needs arising from the diversity in the classroom.

Cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity are defined by Kopylovskaya and Ivanova (2014, p.719) as follows: "Here, we would view cultural awareness as general cultural knowledge, i.e. the knowledge of global cultural heritage. Cultural awareness involves cultural sensitivity which is often understood as desirable empathy or readiness for cooperation and communicative strategies in those cases where the multicultural communication is in focus."

Yilmaz and Özkan (2016), in their study analysing EFL instructors' and students' intercultural awareness, concluded that it is necessary to develop a curriculum and materials which will introduce the elements and increase intercultural awareness in English language courses, in addition to professional development and teacher training program which will equip the teachers to transmit intercultural awareness in EFL classroom.

Bandura (2011) argues that foreign language learning and teaching is inseparable from incorporating elements of intercultural awareness and learning about the target culture. However, Bandura emphasises that the status of English as *lingua franca* implies that it is both necessary and possible to incorporate a variety of cultural backgrounds, thus promoting intercultural competence.

The elements of intercultural awareness are integrated through a variety of teaching practices. Danowitz and Tuitt (2011, p.44) suggest the following teaching practices:

- Focus on students' intellectual and social development;
- Development of materials and educational resources to enhance students' learning;
- Creating appropriate educational setting and environment which is both challenging and encouraging for the students, aiming to reinforce learning and development;
- Exploring the potential of the cultural differences and the potential those differences have to enhance the teaching and learning environment;
- Forming a classroom setting which encourages individual and group learning.

When examining interculturality and teaching practices, Smaoui (2022, p.87) concludes that intercultural awareness can be presented through an array of range teaching practices.

Liddicoat (2004, p.4), when describing intercultural competence and awareness, refers to intercultural language users as a target population and provides the following characteristics:

- Intercultural language users are aware that cultures are relative and that different people use language in different ways to achieve similar goals.

- Intercultural language users know some of the common cultural conventions in the language they are learning.
- Intercultural language users have strategies for learning more about culture as they interact.
- Intercultural language users have the capacity to reflect on their own linguistic behaviour and that of their interlocutors.

Liddicoat (2004) recommends several pedagogical principles of intercultural language teaching and learning:

- **Active construction:** the principle that learners need to create their own knowledge about the culture, which means that the learners need to be able to notice intercultural differences, construct knowledge and learn. Thus, the role of the instructor is to facilitate these observations, rather than teaching and presenting culture.
- **Making connections:** learners are encouraged to make their own comparisons and connections between their cultures, language knowledge and compare with the new experiences in the classroom.
- **Social interaction:** intercultural awareness is through communication and social interaction with other individuals.
- **Reflection:** reflecting on differences is a crucial component in the development of intercultural awareness.
- **Responsibility:** learners should accept the responsibility for successful communication, thus developing awareness which values other cultures, individuals and languages.

Liddicoat (2004) recommends allowing the students in the language classroom to learn these skills through reflection, understanding and comparing their own culture with characteristics of other cultures. He emphasises that the effectiveness of implementing teaching practices which promote intercultural awareness depend largely on learners' experiences and insights.

3. RESEARCH METHODS, TARGET POPULATION AND RESULTS

3.1. Research methods and target population

One of the aims of this study was to explore students' awareness and perceptions on inclusivity and intercultural awareness. The target population of the study consisted of a cohort of 49 undergraduate students enrolled in the undergraduate program of the Faculty of Contemporary Sciences and Technologies, Department of Computer Sciences at South East European University, Republic of North Macedonia. The target population consists of 25 female students and 24 male students. Their age range is between 20-22 years old. The study participants attend an ESP (English for Specific Purposes) course, English for Information Technology, scheduled in two timeslots per week. The structure of the target population is diverse in terms of ethnicity, nationality, race, language and cultural background, thus contributing to the relevance of the study and the importance of examining students' perceptions and views. Out of 49 participants in the study, 38 participants are local students from the Republic of North Macedonia, and 11 are international students from the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The diversity exists among local students as well: 24 are ethnic Albanians and 14 are ethnic Macedonians. The international students are from different regions of Pakistan. The undergraduate study programme for international students offered at the Faculty of Contemporary Sciences and Technologies is conducted in English.

This study was guided by the following hypotheses:

- The learning environment in ESP courses can increase students' intercultural awareness.
- The learning environment in ESP courses can increase students' awareness of inclusivity.

For the purpose of research, the study adopted a survey distribution to the target population group. The survey included 12 statements based on the Likert scale and an open-ended comments section. The statements and the comments included in the survey examined students' perceptions of inclusivity and intercultural awareness the context of ESP and general English language courses. The survey was distributed through Google Forms and posted on the learning platform Google Classroom used for the course English for Information Technology.

3.2. Research results

Out of 49 participants in total, 39 responded to the questionnaire. The following section presents the summary of the results. The first section of the survey asked the participants to provide their opinion on the way to increase their intercultural awareness. The following section presents their opinion and perceptions. The comments are included in their original form as written by the students, with minor grammar and spelling corrections.

Section 1

You have the opportunity to study with students coming from diverse cultural background. Provide your thoughts and comments about the learning environment and ways to increase your intercultural awareness.

- *Interacting with students from diverse cultures has always been a great opportunity of learning. I think one of the way to increase intercultural awareness is by organizing debates, project and group work where students have different backgrounds can work together.*
- *It is the best thing ever, socializing with students coming from diverse cultural background helps you understand a lot of things, you learn more about their culture, about their religion, about their holidays, ways of living, you can find also similarities. You can accumulate these info to live your best life apart your culture.*
- *I would like to study with students and to learn about their culture.*
- *It is very interesting to study in a diversified environment. At first there were some issues but we time we were able to tackle them and now we are used to this environment. But I think there are no any out door or indoor activities through which we can make this environment more interesting and beautiful and we can learn more from each other .I found these activities only in our English course which was really fruitful.*
- *In order to increase intercultural awareness there should be events organized by the university where students could participate and interact.*
- *I appreciate the opportunity to share my positive experience studying with a diverse group of students in the English for IT course. It was truly a rewarding time spent engaging in discussions that covered a wide range of topics, allowing us to explore and understand each other's values, cultures, commonalities, and differences. I am grateful to the professor for creating such a conducive and enriching learning environment.*
- *Regardless of the fact that we study with students from a different cultural area, communication between students should be open for cooperation, tolerance and trust. My opinion is that language is not a barrier to communication and socializing and those different cultures should be exchanged and respected.*

- *Having this kind of opportunity is one of the best things in SEEU. We get to know other cultures and learn new things from them; also learn our similarities and diversities. This kind of interactions that we have with each other makes us more intercultural aware and we develop our social skills.*
- *In our class we have especially a big number of students coming from different cultures. It is always a pleasure to learn more about their lifestyle and their hardships, it grows me as a person and it also gives me an insight on how to avoid offending them due to different aspects of our cultures. I believe every person who's educated enough tends to do this but to this day I believe we're not so close with the international students. Be it different friend groups or discrimination against them. Even though I tend to say we're educated, discrimination still exists between us due to different races and ethnicities and I'm hoping one day this vanishes. I say proudly, especially in English class our professor always makes them included, shows interest and treats them the same. I'm thankful!*

The following chart presents the overview of the survey and the responses to the statements.

Table 1 Students' perceptions towards the importance of inclusivity and intercultural awareness

Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. The English language courses and ESP courses at SEEU raised my intercultural awareness.	17	19	3	0	0
2. I believe that intercultural awareness is very important.	26	12	0	0	1
3. I know the meaning of the words intercultural awareness and inclusivity.	21	14	3	0	1
4. I believe that our learning environment practices intercultural awareness and inclusivity.	21	14	0	2	2
5. I am aware of the existence of different cultural backgrounds in our English language and ESP groups.	24	15	0	0	0
6. Learning about differences and commonalities of different cultures is motivational.	22	13	4	0	0
7. Class debates and discussions help me develop intercultural awareness.	16	22	1	0	0
8. Working in groups with students from different backgrounds helps me develop intercultural awareness.	22	17	0	0	0
9. I believe that there is no real communication and willingness to communicate with students from other cultures in our learning environment.	4	9	12	9	5
10. I believe that learning about other cultures prepares the students for their future careers.	12	20	7	0	0
11. Language courses topics should include content about intercultural awareness.	21	13	4	1	0
12. I appreciate when the professors demonstrate interest in students' cultural background.	23	12	2	1	1

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Conclusions

Upon analysing the results of the survey and the comments provided on behalf of the study participants, several conclusions can be reached. According to the survey results, the following can be summarized:

1. The vast majority of the study participants (36 out of 39) strongly agree or agree with the statement that the learning environment in the language and ESP courses can promote students' intercultural awareness and 38 participants share the belief that intercultural awareness is important.
2. The majority of the study participants (35) believe that the learning environment practices inclusivity and intercultural awareness. However, 4 study participants disagreed with this statement. All of the study participants (39) confirm that they are aware of the existence of diversity among students in terms of the cultural background in the study sections.
3. The vast majority of the study participants stated that learning in a diverse learning environment is motivational and that class debates, discussions and group work help them develop their intercultural awareness. The majority of the study participants (32), agrees with the statement that learning about other cultures help students with their future career preparation.
4. The majority of the study participants (33) believe that English language courses and ESP courses should include content which develops intercultural awareness. The same number of study participants agrees that the professors need to demonstrate interest in the students' cultural background.
5. The participants' comments reflect the survey results. The majority of the comments confirm that studying in groups which are culturally diverse is motivational and an excellent opportunity to learn more about other cultures and to become more aware of the ways of communication in a culturally diverse environment. However, a participant's comment indicated that this communication should be improved in terms of inclusion of the international students. The comments indicated that events outside the learning environment contribute to inclusivity and foster interpersonal relationships among students from diverse cultural background.

4.2. Recommendations

The review of the relevant literature and the survey conducted and described previously verify the importance of inclusivity and intercultural awareness in language learning and teaching contexts and in ESP courses, similarly to other educational contexts. In the dynamic setting of higher education which tends to be more and more diversified, both student and academic staff population wise, raising intercultural awareness and promoting inclusion is an imperative. Furthermore, the process of inclusion and inclusivity as the end product empowers the students and the academic institutions alike.

There are multiple ways to foster students' intercultural awareness in a language learning and ESP classroom. Cakir (2006) emphasises the importance of focusing on the similarities rather than differences, when teaching cultural elements in language instruction. Kuorova and Modianos (2013) suggest multidisciplinary project based work in groups.

Baker (2015) suggests exploring the relationships between culture, exploring the media and arts and engaging in intercultural communication via different media.

Ennis (2017) recommends exposing the students to various texts and a variety of contexts from diverse English speaking settings and different, even opposing perspectives on a specific issue. Related to the practice of exposing the students to two different perspectives in order to raise their intercultural awareness, Ennis (2017, p. 154) states the following: “This ensured that students were not only exposed to new perspectives but would also have to understand opposing perspectives in order to complete the unit. More importantly, this content offered the possibility for students to practice appropriating aspects of both views in the formulation of their own opinions during the capstone output task, which is not only a critical thinking skill associated with intercultural competence, but one that is associated with academic honesty.”

Regarding the activities which reinforce learning about cultures and intercultural awareness is suggested by Bakić-Mirić et al. (2023, p. 504) stating the following: “One of the ways in which the ESP teacher can involve students more in the process of culture-specific language acquisition, is by assigning them activities that are both research-based and reflective in nature. Such exercises will encourage the learners to be actively involved in their learning by not only considering the experiences and expectations that they bring to the classroom, but also how they hope the learning of English (or any language, for that matter) and target cultures will be of benefit for their future endeavours.” Thus, it can be concluded that research activities and reflections can be useful in the context of promoting inclusion and intercultural awareness.

Following the review of relevant literature, the following suggestions can be taken into consideration when working in culturally diverse environments and increasing students’ intercultural awareness.

1. Curriculum and syllabus design which promotes inclusivity, including content and materials which present diverse cultural environments. Assessment which includes group assignments and projects which give an opportunity to the students from various cultural backgrounds to work together.
2. In class communication: discussions, group work and debates, where communication on various cultural aspects, stereotypes and bias is encouraged and both differences and similarities are addressed.
3. Integrating language and culture teaching, with activities which promote both intercultural awareness and understanding. Research-based activities and projects, as well as reflections, are examples of the activities which integrate both language and culture acquisition.
4. Development of cultural sensitivity, with emphasis on empathy, understanding and communicative skills development.

The abovementioned approaches are several options out of many which promote inclusivity and developed intercultural awareness. These approaches lead to meaningful and fulfilling participation in a language learning classroom and a learning environment in general. We, educators, have to remember that we are contributing to the development of future professionals, leaders and citizens.

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HYBRID ESP COURSES AS A PART OF AN INCLUSIVE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract. *Against the backdrop of societal changes, technological advance and developments in pedagogical methodology, inclusion and modern education can be considered in terms of learning modes and language teaching. Hence the article presents a study of the students' and faculty's attitudes and perceptions to hybrid academic ESP courses. A survey was conducted in 2023 at a Bulgarian university and its results are discussed with regard to course design and the introduction of inclusive and innovative practices that lead to increased involvement, motivation and opportunities for learning in an academic context.*

Key words: *ESP, ESP courses, hybrid ESP courses, inclusive environment, inclusion*

1. INTRODUCTION

Based on equality, inclusion in education has been in the focus of experts, researchers and policymakers for several decades and encompasses all educational components, such as curricula, teaching and pedagogy. Throughout the years, different aspects of inclusion mattered more and required action and effort: gender, race, religion, ethnicity, disability, exceptional gifts, social background. If inclusion in education is successful, then inclusion in society will be successful as well, and more people will be able to realise their potential and strive for accomplishment. This development can be traced in literature and documents, for instance UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960, registered at the UN in 1962) aimed at "furthering for all universal respects for human rights and equality of educational opportunity" (UNESCO, 1962, p. 2), UNESCO Education 2030 Framework for Action, Sustainable Goal 4 (2015) where UN member states reaffirmed the importance of inclusion and equity in education with a focus on participation and learning outcomes.

Scholarly thought investigated various aspects of inclusion in order to develop relevant, sustainable and thorough educational policies and solutions. Florian (2008) deals with the differences between "special" and "inclusive" education following United Nations' policies and in the context of human and educational rights. Kirschner (2015) considers inclusive education based on diverse disabilities and learning needs. Discussing inclusion as a term in a narrow and broader sense, she notes its relation to social justice -

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the access of all marginalized social groups to education. If equity in class is ensured, then educational needs can be met and personal accomplishment achieved. Hence inclusive classroom becomes of underlying importance.

According to Schuelka (2017), inclusive education aims to overcome barriers to the access to school for everyone and to provide environment that facilitates learning process. In addition, Ferreira (2022) highlights the significance of resource planning, stakeholders' involvement and teachers' role. Mirzakhmedova et al. (2023) see equal opportunities for all students, disabled and able-bodied, as a way to "pursue higher education" and a prerequisite to become "worthy successors for tomorrow" (Mirzakh-medova et al., 2023, p. 2). Silva and Oliveira (2022) focus on digital inclusion and its contribution to the facilitation of teaching and learning in line with Levy's view (1993) that technological inclusion is beneficial in the digital era and for the digital generations with regard to knowledge dissemination and acquisition by contributing to the formation of networks of experiences and interactions. As far as inclusive interactive learning environments are concerned, Molina Roldán et al. (2021) state that "based on the existing knowledge ... learning interactions among diverse students are a key component of educational inclusion" (Molina Roldán et al., 2021, p. 1). The Council of Europe (2018) considers inclusion "a right of all citizens" (CEFR, 2018, p. 13) when developing and updating the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and hence sees it as an opportunity for everyone to improve and have better chances for personal and career development in a globalised world. In this respect, Stadler-Heer (2019) points out that games, computer-assisted technology, project work and drama techniques enhance student engagement and motivation for learning and result in improved learning achievements.

In the position paper on inclusive English language teaching that Oxford University Press presented in 2020, experts in the field draw the attention of the ELT community to pedagogy and the materials produced and provided in language teaching based on inclusive practices. With this regard, Kormos (2017) concludes that "the communicative and collaborative approaches in language teaching offer valuable opportunities for inclusive learning" (Kormos, 2017, as cited in OUP Position Paper, p. 8). Further on, she sums up:

"The communicative methodologies and materials commonly used in English language classrooms promote a largely learner-centred and interactive learning environment, in contrast to the more traditional teacher-led methods often used in other subjects. Communicative ELT activities can sometimes highlight communication or social interaction difficulties. At the same time, the English language classroom is an environment which is particularly suitable for inclusive practices because of the opportunities it provides for promoting cooperation between learners." (Kormos 2017 as cited in OUP Position Paper, p. 7)

In the same paper, her colleague and co-author Daloiso (2017) states that:

"Guided by a principle of equity, teachers can make the most of the materials available to offer an inclusive learning experience to their learners by following guidelines on differentiation, classroom management, multisensory and multimodal learning, and learning strategies." (Daloiso, 2017, as cited in OUP Position Paper, p. 25).

It becomes evident that implementing inclusive policies, creating inclusive environments and applying inclusive methodologies are major aspects of modern education as a basis of sustainable personal and societal development.

With reference to the author's university, inclusion is taken into consideration at an institutional level and in line with both academic autonomy and globally accepted educational standards. The university efforts involve the following aspects: environmental – ensuring an accessible environment for disabled students, as well as for all students by using modern technologies; encouragement of gifted students – introduction of initiatives aimed at these students' personal accomplishment along with the opportunities for scholarships, international mobility and exchanges, internships in ministries and leading business organisations, participation in competitions and contests; development of curricula involving technologies and new modes of training. It is these curricula and new modes of training as a way to include students who for some reason cannot attend face-to-face classes that came into the focus of the research presented in this article.

2. ACADEMIC ESP COURSES

2.1. ESP courses

The ESP courses that universities offer depend on their profiles and are usually based on the labour market requirements within a knowledge-based economy. At the University of National and World Economy (UNWE), students study English as a first and second language for the specialties admitting applicants with language tests and as a foreign language for the specialties without language admission tests. This means that the former do a two-year course and then sit a state exam, while the latter do a one-year course and take an ordinary exam at the end of the summer semester. The levels vary between B1 and C1 of CEFR: B1 for the specialties without language admission tests, B2 for the second foreign language of the specialties with language admission tests and, correspondingly, C1 for their first foreign language. The ESP curricula for all students are based on the specifics of the subject matter, which means that professional terminology is paid special attention along with the acquisition of functional communicative competence – the specialised knowledge and skills students need in order to function successfully in professional contexts. Course syllabi are based on communicative methodology meaning that the key objective is the balanced acquisition of all skills (reading, listening, writing and speaking) and the educational process involves modern technologies so as to ensure training that students find motivating and engaging, as well as based on authentic situations and materials from real professional contexts and daily routine. They are designed for face-to-face traditional classes and using them for online or hybrid courses results in lower effectiveness and lower stakeholder motivation and engagement. Attendance is obligatory and there is ongoing assessment which means that unless students come to the university and participate actively in the learning process in class, they will be unable to acquire the material planned and will be unsuccessful in doing the course and passing the exam. Given the economic and social situation in the country, the majority of students start working in their first year of study in order to cover their expenses and to be able to afford to graduate. It makes it difficult or impossible for them to attend lectures and seminars regularly even if they are willing to and make efforts to meet course requirements. Hence taking into account the pandemic experience and the rapid emergence of new educational technologies and teaching approaches, developing hybrid ESP courses stands out as a viable option to achieve several

goals – being flexible and thus attractive to more students, offering high quality courses based on and involving recent scientific developments, enhancing learner and teacher motivation in the learning process.

2.2. Hybrid ESP courses

The advent of new technologies resulted in changes of social and business life. Modern devices and ways of communication introduced people to new realities at home and at work – using computers and mobile phones to reach people in distant corners of the world or to prepare reports, process information, make arrangements or meet. The new generations grow up using a variety of devices to learn, interact and work, which leads to differences in their values, behaviour, perceptions. All these facts require careful consideration and adjustment in education. At the same time, technological advance allows the use of modern technologies in order to solve problems in education and implement policies in support of inclusion and learning facilitation. Thus, distance learning emerged and learners from remote places were enabled to educate themselves. The electronic mode of teaching and learning made it possible for learners from disadvantaged groups to study and improve their lives and career prospects.

During the pandemic, higher education institutions (HEIs) were faced with the challenge of teaching and examining via the Internet and of using platforms for content and learning management regardless of the voices against the new modes of teaching. Educational institutions switched to e-learning for almost two years. At UNWE, the educational process during the pandemic started in the e-mode, but at the end of the period and having considered these voices, it transformed into a hybrid one. The reasons for this were the need stakeholders had to communicate and attend classes face to face, the weaknesses of e-learning related to assessment, feedback and the perception that the traditional face-to-face mode provides for more effective acquisition and performance.

Among the challenges of the emergency introduction of the electronic and hybrid modes of instruction was the lack of materials tailored to the remote and hybrid courses. Adjustment was a temporary option that could not ensure maximised educational results. However, these two modes revealed a potential worth exploring and availing of. Regardless of the fact that the e- and hybrid modes might be more expensive in terms of hardware and software, their implementation showed that the opportunities they offer make them part of modern education. Therefore, taking into account the university mission and policy to provide quality education to learners from different backgrounds, the development of hybrid academic ESP courses became a need and desire. Alberts et al. (2010) conclude that by blending two modes of instruction – traditional and online ones it is possible to take advantage of the strengths each of them has and at the same time minimise the negative effects of their weaknesses. This view is supported by Snart (2010) for whom hybrid learning is “a fusion without a loss” (Snart, 2010, p. 57). In addition, Hall (2010) points to the flexibility of the hybrid mode in terms of time, location and learning pace. Dziuban et al. (2018) see hybrid education as the new traditional educational mode and Singh et al. (2021) find the introduction of academic hybrid courses a practical option leading to “improvement in students’ time management skills, critical thinking skills, and comprehension skills” (Singh et al., 2021 p. 144).

Alberts et al. (2010) recommend a set of pedagogical principles that should be followed in the design of hybrid courses: learning should be based on expected outcomes in terms of course content and a range of cognitive skills; learning programmes should require students' active involvement; students should be encouraged to communicate and collaborate with the teacher and peers; teaching should create a learner-centred environment; it should accommodate different learning styles; it should provide timely and constructive feedback on learning; it should support learners to become autonomous; and should encourage and provide opportunities for student reflection on learning (Alberts et al., 2010, pp. 189-195). Kersten (2023) emphasizes the beneficial use of online analytical and knowledge-based systems that result in an engaging and collaborative environment facilitating ESP acquisition.

3. A STUDY OF FACULTY'S AND STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TO HYBRID ACADEMIC ESP COURSES

In order to design and develop hybrid academic ESP courses and, in particular, courses that meet the needs of the students majoring in economics, law and socio-political studies, a UNWE project was initiated with a focus on this issue. The project team includes four faculty members and is led by the author. The study includes a survey of UNWE students and faculty aimed at finding out what their attitudes are to this type of courses. The research team was interested in establishing how the respondents perceive the hybrid mode in comparison with the traditional and online ones in terms of ESP acquisition, relevance to students' future careers, assessment, teaching materials, performance, inclusion. Based on the survey results and after an extensive literature survey, hybrid academic ESP courses will be designed and materials banks for teachers and students provided. A questionnaire was prepared, on the basis of the teams experience and the principles suggested by Alberts et al. (2010), including twenty-one questions of which two intended to collect personal data such as year of study and specialty for the student respondents and years of experience and professional field for the faculty respondents. One question, question 19, is an open-ended one intended to collect comments about the courses, that could complement the data collected with the rest of the questions and allow for the development of adequate guidelines for course design and selection of materials for the material banks. The rest of the questions are either based on a five-point Likert scale or are multiple choice ones. A structured online survey was carried out and responses were received from thirty-four lecturers and two hundred and forty students. The student sample includes respondents from 17 programmes/specialties, of whom 48% freshmen and 40% sophomores. The faculty sample includes mostly experienced lecturers: 29% with experience of over 25 years, 29% - 16-25 years, 39% - 6-15 years and only 3% - 1-5 years. Of them 68% teach subject, 21% - English and 11% teach both subject and English.

Tables 1 and 2 provide an overview of the responses for the rest of the questions in the survey.

Table 1 Likert scale questions

Questions	Students	Faculty
1. Hybrid academic ESP courses are part of modern education	31% strongly agree; 53% agree; 13% neither agree, nor disagree; 3% disagree; 1% strongly disagree	44% strongly agree; 50% agree; 6% disagree
2. Hybrid academic ESP courses provide for greater flexibility	38% strongly agree; 50% agree; 8% neither agree, nor disagree; 3% disagree; 2% strongly disagree	56% strongly agree; 38% agree; 6% neither agree, nor disagree
3. Hybrid academic ESP courses enable students to work and study	37% strongly agree; 42% agree; 12% neither agree, nor disagree; 6% disagree; 3% strongly disagree	12% strongly agree; 71% agree; 12% neither agree, nor disagree; 3% disagree; 3% strongly disagree
4. Hybrid academic ESP courses increase learner motivation compared to traditional and online courses	21% strongly agree; 40% agree; 25% neither agree, nor disagree; 9% disagree; 5% strongly disagree	12% strongly agree; 41% agree; 32% neither agree, nor disagree; 9% disagree; 6% strongly disagree
5. Hybrid academic ESP courses enhance learner achievements compared to the traditional and online ones	8% strongly agree; 46% agree; 28% neither agree, nor disagree; 8% disagree; 10% strongly disagree	9% strongly agree; 32% agree; 32% neither agree, nor disagree; 21% disagree; 6% strongly disagree
9. Students are interested in creating content for their ESP course (giving ideas, suggesting topics/activities, etc.)	14% strongly agree; 49% agree; 29% neither agree, nor disagree; 6% disagree; 2% strongly disagree	18% strongly agree; 44% agree; 23% neither agree, nor disagree; 9% disagree; 6% strongly disagree
13. Hybrid academic ESP courses are more appropriate for modern learners' style of learning and communicating	27% strongly agree; 50% agree; 14% neither agree, nor disagree; 6% disagree; 3% strongly disagree	24% strongly agree; 44% agree; 21% neither agree, nor disagree; 6% disagree; 6% strongly disagree
15. ESP learning is more effective and modern if students have access to banks of multimedia resources and materials for hybrid training	35% strongly agree; 46% agree; 14% neither agree, nor disagree; 3% disagree; 2% strongly disagree	32% strongly agree; 53% agree; 12% neither agree, nor disagree; 3% disagree
16. Do you think that the creation and exchange of banks of multimedia resources and materials for hybrid training lead to enhanced learner motivation?	25% strongly agree; 49% agree; 19% neither agree, nor disagree; 5% disagree; 2% strongly disagree	18% strongly agree; 62% agree; 14% neither agree, nor disagree; 6% disagree
17. Do you think that the creation and exchange of banks of multimedia resources and materials for hybrid training lead to enhanced course effectiveness	25% strongly agree; 50% agree; 19% neither agree, nor disagree; 5% disagree; 1% strongly disagree	24% strongly agree; 56% agree; 14% neither agree, nor disagree; 3% disagree; 3% strongly disagree
18. Hybrid ESP courses prepare students for their work in the future by creating an environment similar to their professional environment after their graduation	27% strongly agree; 45% agree; 21% neither agree, nor disagree; 4% disagree; 3% strongly disagree	21% strongly agree; 44% agree; 26% neither agree, nor disagree; 6% disagree; 3% strongly disagree

Source: author's project research

Table 2 Multiple choice questions

Questions	Students	Faculty
6. In your opinion, which are more beneficial and effective for students' future career:	59% - hybrid; 25% - traditional; 16% - online	65% - hybrid; 32% - traditional; 3% - online
7. Hybrid academic ESP courses cannot ensure:	33% - objective assessment; 34% - detailed feedback about progress; 31% - discussions with the teacher about performance; other*	43% - objective assessment; 26% - detailed feedback about progress; 31% - discussions with the teacher about performance
8. Which mode provides for the contact with the teacher that you need:	45% - hybrid; 45% - traditional; 10% - online	38% - hybrid; 59% - traditional; 3% - online
10. Students are more involved in the learning process if the course is:	43% - hybrid; 44% - traditional; 13% - online	44% - hybrid; 53% - traditional; 3% - online
11. Which mode of assessment is the most effective one:	47% - hybrid; 40% - traditional; 13% - online	21% - hybrid; 76% - traditional; 3% - online
12. Which mode is more effective in terms of student skills and knowledge of specialised English:	48% - hybrid; 39% - traditional; 13% - online	47% - hybrid; 50% - traditional; 3% - online
14. The academic ESP courses that equip me with the specialised knowledge and skills I need for my future career are:	54% - hybrid; 32% - traditional; 14% - online	65% - hybrid; 32% - traditional; 3% - online

Source: author's project research

* Other – indicated more options as more than one answer is possible: a & c; a, b & c; b & c; a & b

Analysing the data, it is possible to make the following inferences: general attitude of both groups favours the hybrid mode in terms of flexibility, modern education, opportunity to work and study. They seem equally convinced in the advantages of hybrid training. With regard to motivation, it should be noted that although over half of the respondents from both groups find the hybrid mode more motivating, there is a hesitant fraction within each group – a quarter of the students and a third of the lecturers, which should be given consideration. A similar situation is observed with the perceptions of performance and content creation: more than 50% of the sample agree that learning outcomes improve and interest in content creation is greater, but there are some differences, as well as questions to answer. With regard to question 5, over half of the students believe that this is so, while only 41% of the faculty see it this way. Within the faculty group there is a third of hesitant respondents and a little more than a quarter who disagree and find the other two modes more beneficial. Over a quarter of the student respondents have no definite opinion about the level of achievements. A good starting point would be to elaborate and find the reasons for this position. This could provide insights into the optimised design of course syllabi and avoidance of methodological mistakes that could exacerbate the weaknesses of the modes instead of amplifying the effect of combining them. As for the responses to question 9, the same percentage of each group (63-62%) are positive, but the subgroups of those who are not convinced or disapprove are worth examining. Is it because they would not like to bother about improvements or is it because they expect university management (for the faculty) or the lecturer (for the students) to take care of this and be the resourceful stakeholder in the educational process?

When asked about the appropriateness of hybrid courses in the modern social and occupational contexts (question 9), almost two thirds of both respondent groups are positive that they provide the best option of the three modes. However, the number of students and faculty members who hesitate comprises about a fifth of the sample, which could give a direction for future investigation.

Questions 15-17 are designed to collect information about the respondents' views of the preparation and exchange of banks of materials and learner access to them. An impressive majority (some 80%) is convinced in the beneficial effect of this measure which confirms the research team's belief that having such banks could facilitate ESP acquisition, contribute to more objective assessment and stimulate greater learner engagement.

An interesting finding was the respondents' reaction to question 18 about the connection between the material taught and its relevance to the students' future careers in terms of environmental specifics. Although the vast majority of both respondent groups see the connection, a fifth (21%) of the students and a surprising quarter (26%) of the lecturers are hesitant. This raises questions with regard to the awareness of the students' professional context, appropriateness of the materials used and of the teaching methodology applied. Establishing the reasons for this result would contribute to the selection of the most appropriate approach for the development of the course and the preparation of materials banks.

As far as the analysis is concerned of the data gathered about the multiple-choice questions focused on student involvement in the learning process, quality of ESP acquisition, impact on students' career prospects, assessment, disadvantages and contact with the teacher, it can be concluded that:

- The hybrid mode is perceived as the most beneficial of the three modes;
- The weaknesses of the hybrid mode mentioned in the questionnaire or what hybrid courses cannot ensure (objective assessment, feedback from the teacher about learner progress and discussions related to performance) are considered equally significant in terms of learner success and satisfaction with hybrid training, with lecturers feeling that objective assessment poses the greatest challenge to teaching in a hybrid mode. When assessment alone is discussed, faculty are definitely in favour of traditional classes, whereas students find the hybrid mode a little more effective compared to the traditional one;
- Faculty find traditional face-to-face contact with students most effective and beneficial to the educational process, while students perceive traditional and hybrid modes as equally beneficial;
- Asked about course effectiveness, lecturers consider traditional courses a little more effective than the hybrid ones, while students share the opposite opinion. However, in terms of course relevance to students' future careers, both respondent groups see the hybrid mode as the most appropriate option. This could be explained with a similarity of the work and learning environments and the belief that the training is based on authentic situations, materials and activities.

4. CONCLUSION

Following the strenuous research activity of the university ESP division, including a surveys of specialised vocabulary acquisition (Gatev, 2023), e-assessment (Ruskova-Todorova, 2023), student needs (Stefanova, 2021), the study of the attitudes to the hybrid

academic ESP courses conducted at UNWE will help to find out the emphases to be laid in the development of courses providing for a language training meeting the needs of learners and stakeholders through the facilitation of the acquisition of functional communicative competence in a stimulating and inclusive environment. What is more, the results from the survey will contribute to the creation of banks of adequate and relevant materials in terms of teaching and assessment. In addition, the courses and materials banks prepared following the guidelines based on the study can be used as a benchmark for the development of hybrid courses for courses in other HEIs and for other subjects thus reflecting the new socio-economic realities in education. In turn, this could result in ensuring a learning-enhanced environment (Burskaitiene & Sliogeriene, 2018), greater motivation for learning, improved student performance and, finally, more qualified graduates on the labour market.

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ENGLISH FOR STUDENTS FROM MARGINALIZED SECTIONS AT THE TERTIARY LEVEL: AN INCLUSIVE APPROACH

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Abstract. *The present qualitative study reviews the status of tertiary-level English education in India and suggests a more inclusive approach wherein the needs of students pursuing degree courses in traditional disciplines viz., Arts, Commerce, and Science are addressed. Adopting the participant observation method, the study puts forth some of the observations related to English pedagogy and learning outcomes at the tertiary level in Indian higher education institutes (HEIs), especially in rural and semi-urban areas made by the present researcher during his academic career both as a student and teacher. The observations reveal that most learners at the tertiary level need help in developing basic English skills. English in their curriculum becomes the hurdle in the academic performance and achievements of these learners. Indeed, English is one of the major reasons for the increase in dropout rate at this level. Based on the observations and underscoring the relevance of communication skills in English for these learners at the tertiary level, the study suggests an inclusive approach to pedagogy and learning outcomes, emphasizing the needs of learners from marginalized sections.*

Key words: *English, inclusive approach, marginalized, tertiary, traditional disciplines.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The discussion on inclusive education has come to the forefront recently. Many studies (Ainscow, 1999; Carrington, 1999; Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Allan, 2010; Winter, 2020; Claes, 2021; Norwich, 2022) have emphasized and discussed the need to develop inclusive education that provides access to mainstream education for all learners regardless of differences by considering the needs of all learners. Inclusive education has become a major concern for educational systems in both developing and developed countries. Ainscow & Sandill (2010) underscore the crucial role of ‘leadership practice’ in equipping education systems for ‘inclusive values and bringing about sustainable change’ and emphasize the organizational conditions needed for developing a conducive environment and fostering ‘inclusive cultures’. An inclusive approach aims at enabling learners to accomplish their goals by accepting and validating their learning needs and creating appropriate learning environments accordingly. Thus it ensures the inclusion of students at a whole-school level

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through the inclusive policy. According to Winter (2010), “A key aspect of inclusive education is the philosophical approach underpinning the inclusion of all students in the education environment based on inclusive attitudes, beliefs, and values of all stakeholders and founded on principles of social justice and human rights.” The study by Carrington (1999), underpinning the role of ‘teachers’ beliefs and values in inclusive education, discusses a critical aspect of the changes needed to develop inclusive schooling and the associated professional development for teachers. Ainscow (1999) puts forth ‘theories about inclusive schooling that arise out of a detailed scrutiny of practice’. Norwich (2022) while reviewing the research in inclusive education attempts to answer the question about the scope, reach, and limits of research in inclusive education. Allan (2010) discusses the prospects and possibilities for inclusion in Scotland and Europe and acknowledges the significance of the barriers to inclusion. She argues that there is an urgent need to address the competing policy demands within education and the problems associated with fragmented provision. Exclusive education refers to the education of students by selective merit or exclusion and may or may not involve discrimination by educational authorities, representatives, or other stakeholders (Winter, 2010). Constantinou (2023) talks about the multifaceted role of the ESP practitioner stemming from the specialized needs of learners and the multiple duties they are expected to perform. In the editorial note of the special issue of ESPEAP, Bakić-Mirić (2021) focuses on the issues that are changing perceptions of relevant topics in teaching ESP and EAP.

2. IS ENGLISH EDUCATION IN INDIA INCLUSIVE AND EXCLUSIVE

In light of the above discussion, the present study argues that English education in India, although claimed to be ‘inclusive’, has always been ‘exclusive’ in reality. Although English has established its deep roots on the Indian subcontinent for more than four centuries, it has remained the language of a ‘select few’ (Dasgupta, 1993; Montaut, 2010, p. 83). Despite the command these ‘select few’ have gained in the English language, the English in outer-circle countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, and Tanzania is often looked down upon as a “low standard non-native variety” (Kachru, 1985; Higgins, 2003). However, within the “outer circle, the hierarchical stratification is discernible. In India, the English spoken by the urban upper class, learned in reputable private institutes, enjoys the prestige of being a standard variety while the urban middle class, understanding the role of English for lucrative careers, strives to expose their children to a better variety of English by admitting them to private institutes with English as the exclusive medium of instruction (MI) imparting high standard English education.” (Chaudhary, 2002, p. 49; Kachru, 1986) Likewise, some moderate or low-income parents from urban or metropolitan areas, knowing the significance of English education, manage to send their children to private English medium schools (EMSs) charging moderate fees by minimizing the expenses incurred in their daily needs to pay off the school fees. Of course, schools imparting education in English medium (EM) have spread their wings to reach semi-urban areas too. However, the standard of English taught in both these contexts could be better on account of the unavailability of well-trained teachers to teach English. Trained teachers with the required fluency and accuracy in English are unwilling to join these private schools mainly because they are paid low salaries. Besides, they do not like to work in semi-urban areas as they aspire to be part of urban or metropolitan culture. Nonetheless, urban, semi-urban, and rural parents, with high and moderate incomes, aspire for better

career opportunities for their children but are ignorant of the existence of the ‘so-called standard variety of English’ and the importance of trained teachers for teaching English, are obliged to admit their wards to such schools.

Interestingly, social stratification is reflected in the boards these private EMSs are affiliated with. The private EMSs affiliated with the International Baccalaureate Board (IB), the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE), the Cambridge International Examinations (CIE), the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE), and the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examination (CISCE) enjoy the prestige of being reputed schools (Borkala, 2022). The upper-income groups prefer sending their wards to such schools with high fees, while the parents with moderate incomes have to be content with the EMSs affiliated with the state boards. Thus, the importance of English education is underscored through the aspiration of parents from different income groups to provide their children with better exposure to English at an early age.

One other group of parents, although aware of the value of English education in the career of their children, cannot afford to send them to any of the above schools. There is yet another group of parents who are neither aware of the value of English education in the career of their children, nor can they afford to send them to private EMSs as they are busy struggling to meet their daily ends. The children belonging to these socio-economically ‘marginalized sections’ must study in government-funded schools imparting education in local languages. Of course, English is taught as one of the three languages, along with Hindi, the official national language of India, the official and regional language of the concerned state¹, under the ‘three-language’ policy² adopted by the Government of India. Although many government/government-funded schools introduce English from class I itself, it is taught merely as one of the subjects in the school curriculum not as the ML, and the teachers there, though well-paid by government, are either not competent enough or lack the apt training required to teach English to these children. Besides, the pedagogy of English is less learner- and outcome-oriented. Consequently, English is taught and learned only for the sake of passing examinations; the learning outcomes are seldom taken into account.

The present study observes that children from privileged sections, especially from urban and metropolitan areas, get better exposure, at an early age, to English and its correct usage in real-life situations with accent and decent. Further, other semi-urban privileged children have also been getting good exposure, although not satisfactory, to the English language from an early age. However, their counterparts from the socio-economically underprivileged sections learn English as one of the subjects without appropriate exposure to its usage at primary, secondary, and higher secondary levels for twelve years. Still, the outcomes are seldom visible in their learning. Rather, learning English becomes a kind of ‘burden’ for these learners. Some of them, managing, anyhow, to get passing marks in English at all levels, enter the tertiary level to carry this burden on their shoulders further, while others never reach this level as they collapse in between by the weight of English (Sultana, 2018). There are studies (Steinberg et al., 1984; Stevenson et al., 1991; Driscoll,

¹ There are 29 states and 8 union territories in the federal union of India. A state in India is a self-governing administrative division formed by the major homogeneous linguistic groups residing in the given geographical territory.

² The policy was recommended in 1961 and implemented in 1968 by the education commissions. As per this formula, students in Hindi speaking states have to learn English, Hindi and any modern Indian language while students from non-Hindi speaking states have to learn English, Hindi and one Indian language of their respective states.

1999; Sheng et al., 2011; Maxwell, 2011; Morton et al., 2018; Rodriguez et al., 2020) concerning the factors contributing to high 'dropout' rates. The studies by Sheng et al., 2011, Maxwell, 2011; Rodriguez et al., 2020 attribute it to the failure of English language learning (ELL). Further, the gap between the students' marks - either high or low - in their English exams and manifested language skills, keeps room for doubt about the reliability and validity of the overall evaluation system. The examiners often tend to be lenient in assessment as teachers are held accountable for students' low performance or high failure in their subjects.

The concern here is for the learners from these 'underprivileged' sections who reach, anyhow, the tertiary level by getting passing marks, often on account of 'examiners' leniency' (!), in their English examinations and continue to bear the 'burden' of English which is taught as one of the mandatory subjects in their curriculum for one, two or three years, as per the directions by the concerned university to which the higher education institute (HEI) is affiliated. The argument above may underscore certain negative implications of English education in India. Still, the present study is not against English education, nor does it doubt the government's and policymakers' honesty of intention behind giving appropriate exposure to English to underprivileged students at the tertiary level. Indeed, it recommends teaching English to these students, but the ways to make the English pedagogy more inclusive and outcome-oriented must be explored. In other words, the study suggests that these learners' ELL needs must be taken into account while designing the English curriculum and determining the evaluation system at the tertiary level. This suggestion is crucial in the context of the implementation of the new National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 (NCERT) which aspires for equitable and inclusive learning for all at all levels of education in India.

3. METHODOLOGY

Adopting the qualitative approach, the present study, first, reviews the nature of English education in India. Further, the English curriculum at the tertiary level is analyzed in light of some of the representative Indian universities. The universities selected for the present study represent all four regions - East, West, North, and South of the country. Finally, the study proposes a course in English that can be more inclusive. The proposed course uses the model of the Certificate Courses in German which are offered by Prof. Milind Bramhe of IIT Madras, through SWAYAM, the MOOC platform run by the Government of India.

4. GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS TO PROMOTE ENGLISH EDUCATION IN INDIA

English has been an integral part of the Indian education system since 1835 with the enactment of Macaulay's Minutes (Chaudhary, 2002:38). Since India gained independence from British rule in 1947, the governments in India - both central and state- have strived, with the concern for social welfare, to integrate it at all levels of education by implementing the 'three-language formula' as recommended by various education commissions formed by the government of India (Kachru, 1994:497). English is recognized as one of the 22 official languages listed under the Eighth Schedule of the Indian constitution (Agnihotri and Khanna, 1994).

After independence, English was, initially, introduced as one of the language subjects at Class VIII. Later, it would be introduced in Class V and now it is introduced in Class I in government and government-funded schools (Chaudhary, 2002:49; Dutt and Bala, 2012: 4). However, the government/s permits private schools with English medium instruction (EMI) right from the playgroup and nursery level. Thus, children from privileged sections have an advantage in learning English early. Unlike their counterparts from underprivileged sections, they learn all subjects, except one of the Indian languages, of the curricula in English and the medium of instruction for all pedagogical activities is exclusively English. Although the option to choose the school is available to parents, the fees charged by private schools with EMI are too high to afford for economically underprivileged families, mainly from socially marginalized and rural communities. The seeds of discrimination in the Indian education system are sown herein. While the proponents of mother-tongue-based education (Skutnab Kanga, 2007), including UNESCO, underscore its vitality in a child's emotional and educational development, some other studies have pointed out the challenges involved in it in terms of career opportunities. Kioko et al. (2014) talk about the frustrations of foreign language learning among children and the misconceptions about mother tongue and success in education. Some studies (Reith-Hall, 2022) talk about the availability of careers and the success ratio of graduates with good communication skills, and many other studies specify the relevance of good communication skills in English (Graddol, 2010). The point here is not the controversial debate on 'mother tongue education versus English education', it is the imbalanced provision of good or poor exposure to the English language in the education system. The education system in India ostensibly reveals this imbalance in English education. English in India has been a language of 'confidence and opportunity' for a select few, while for the majority, it has always remained the cause of 'fear and anxiety' (Author, 2015) in their educational and professional journey.

Having set the background, the foci of discussion, in the subsequent sections, would be English, introduced to the students of the faculty of Arts, Commerce, and Science, in tertiary education in India. The discussion on English at primary and secondary levels is out of the scope of the present study. We will first review the English curricula and evaluation system at the tertiary level which is thought to be 'inclusive,' but results in excluding a large population of students from marginalized sections from the opportunity to learn English through their curricula. Then we will discuss some suggestive measures to make English education at this level more inclusive and outcome-oriented.

5. REVIEW OF ENGLISH CURRICULA AND EVALUATION SYSTEM AT TERTIARY LEVEL EDUCATION IN INDIA

Many studies on English Studies (Gupta, 2016; Mahanta and Sharma, 2019) in Indian universities and colleges refer to teaching English as one of the special/major subjects that students opt for at the tertiary level. As mentioned above, English is taught as one of the mandatory subjects in Indian schools and colleges to develop good communication skills in English among students. The University Grants Commission (UGC), New Delhi, which is a statutory body under the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, the Government of India, set up in 1956 to regulate the standard of higher education in India. It recommends 'some instruction in English' as an integral part of all undergraduate programs in all faculties and disciplines. In light of these recommendations, the study of the curricula in

English of some universities in India would help analyze the overall approach to English language teaching at the tertiary level in India. It is beyond the limits of the present study to refer to the curricula of all universities in India. There are 1,113 universities in India as per the press information released by the Ministry of Education, Government of India (PIB, Delhi, 2023).

The analysis of the curricula of Compulsory English in some representative universities from four major regions of India: East, West, South, and North, reveals that the major focus of the curricula is on teaching poetry and prose from the selection of English literature, mainly British literature. For example, one of the universities from the North-East introduces 06 poems (04 British poems and 01 American and Indian poem in English, along with passages for comprehension tests, letter writing (formal and informal), and report writing. The same university introduces an alternative course in English with 03 short stories in the Prose section and 03 poems in the Poetry section along with Grammar and Composition (correction of errors in Verb-subject agreement; use of tense transformation of sentences, Comprehension test of unseen passages). The other university from the same region introduces elementary grammar (Articles, Tense, Direct and Indirect Speech, Prepositions), composition (Essay Writing, Letter Writing, Comprehension, Précis/ Report writing), 04 poems (02 British and 1 American and Indian poem each), short stories (1 each from Russian and American and 02 Indian). One of the universities from the East introduces British Poetry as Compulsory English I and another course for the Arts, Commerce, Science Honors Program with the title Communicative English which includes content such as Language and Theory of Communication (Theory of Communication, Types and modes of Communication: Verbal and Non-verbal (Spoken and Written), Personal, Social and Business Communication, Barriers and Strategies, Intra-personal, Interpersonal and Group communication), Speaking Skills (Monologue, Dialogue, Group Discussion, Effective Communication/ Mis-Communication, Interview, Public Speech (Oral Presentation/ PowerPoint Presentation)], Grammar (Clauses and Sentences, Agreement of Subject and Verb, Vocabulary, synonyms, antonyms, one-word substitutes, Common Errors), Reading and Writing Skills [(Close Reading and Comprehension (passage with short questions & vocabulary test), Documenting, Report Writing, Making notes, CV and job applications, Formal Letter Writing].

Another university from the East offers multidisciplinary courses in Academic Writing and Composition (1. Introduction to Convention of Academic Writing: Strategies for Writing, Institutional Contexts; 2. Critical Thinking: Syntheses, Analyses, and Evaluates; 3. Writing in one's own words: Summarizing and Paraphrasing: Paraphrasing, Transitions, Summary writing, structuring an argument, Writing as a practice; 4. Citing Resources), Creating Writing and Business Communication.

The English curricula of one of the universities from the West include two units each of prose, short stories, poetry, grammar, and communication skills during the four consecutive semesters. One of the universities in the North directs the Board of Studies to include three textbooks consisting of 15 poems under Poetry and a section on grammar etc. 6 to 7 short stories under Short Stories and 6 to 7 pieces of prose essays for B. A. I. In B.A. II, there is the inclusion of 7 pieces of Short Stories and Prose Essays and a section of grammar, 15 poems, and 5 to 6 One-Act plays. There are 15 poems, a section on grammar, one British play, and an Indian novel in English in B.A. III. The university directs the Textbook Committee to include poems, short stories, and prose essays in consultation with the Convener of the Board of Studies. One of the universities from the

South introduces two units each on poetry and short stories and one unit on developing grammatical competence during the first semester. The same structure is followed in the second semester, except that the units on short stories are substituted by two units on essays.

The focus of the assessment/evaluation in most of the university courses is on testing the students' memorization and writing skills. A university from the North includes a question on explanation concerning the context of the passages set from the textbook for 5 marks each. Most of these universities rely on comprehension-based questions and questions related to testing writing skills through letter writing, paragraph writing, etc. Besides, the question papers consist of some questions about grammar and vocabulary.

However, it is observed that the curriculum and methods of teaching English at this level do not play any significant role in accomplishing the expected results as the learning outcomes are by and large not visible in their communication skills in English among the majority of learners in India who have been learning English for 12 years or so by the time they enter the tertiary level. Hence, the present study argues that English education in India, although claiming to be inclusive, has always been exclusive, as quite a large number of students from marginalized sections remain deprived of the opportunities for socio-economic empowerment in the absence of the required competency in English. In this light, the present study proposes a revision in the English course curriculum and approach to make English education more inclusive.

6. SUGGESTIONS

The first and foremost suggestion is that there should be two options, English for Advanced Level Learners and English for Elementary Level Learners, within the Compulsory English courses taught in Indian universities. The course meant for advanced learners may consist of content including poetry, short stories, literary essays, etc., as the competency level of these learners is assumed to be as per the expectations of the English curriculum designed for the tertiary level. However, the learners from the marginalized, as stated above, are often found to be lacking the required level of proficiency for learning the English language through literature and the advanced level of grammar and vocabulary. Hence, the present study proposes an alternate Compulsory English course for these students and it may be taught either for four or six semesters at the tertiary level. It proposes that this course should be designed at three levels: Elementary, Intermediate, and Advanced. The model is based on the course content of the Course in German offered by Prof. Milind Bramhe, IIT Madras, and it is subject to modification in terms of content and grammar. The elementary level course may be taught during the two semesters of their first year and it may comprise topics like:

Elementary Level

Topic 1: Introducing oneself and others; Grammar: WH-questions, personal pronouns, subject-verb concord, simple sentences, etc.

Topic 2: Talking about hobbies, the week, numbers, the alphabet, months, seasons / Grammar: articles, plural, the verbs: to have and to be.

Topic 3: In the city/naming places and buildings, means of transport, basic directions/ Grammar: definite and indefinite articles; negation; imperative.

Topic 4: Talking about food, drink, family/groceries, and meals / Grammar: Prepositions and Possessive pronouns.

Topic 5: Talking about Everyday life, telling time, making appointments/Grammar: prepositions; modal verbs.

Topic 6: Talking about Leisure activities, celebrations / Grammar: Simple present

Topic 7: Contacts, writing letters / Grammar: Punctuation, Capitalization, basic sentences

Topic 8: My apartment, rooms, furniture, colors / Grammar: changing prepositions

Topic 9: Professions / Grammar: perfect tense

Topic 10: Clothes / Grammar: perfect tense

Topic 11: Health and the body / Grammar: the imperative and modal verbs

Topic 12: Holiday and weather

The next level should be intermediate. This level of the course can be taught at the second year of the degree (tertiary level).

Intermediate Level

Topic 1: Cooking and cuisine, eating habits, expressing feelings / Grammar: clauses with 'because', reflexive verbs, direct and indirect objects.

Topic 2: School and after, subjects, school types / Grammar: past tense of modal verbs, changing prepositions – position and movement

Topic 3: Media in daily life, film / Grammar: comparative and superlative, clauses with 'that'

Topic 4: Festivals and events, invitations and responses / Grammar: clauses with 'if', adjectives

Topic 5: Professions, work, train travel / Grammar: Nouns and their forms

Topic 6: Public transport, cars, getting to work / Grammar: clauses and prepositions

Topic 7: Learning, presentations, exams / Grammar: Gerunds and participles

Topic 8: Sports, fans / Grammar: clauses, action verbs

Topic 9: Living, shifting, conflicts at home, pets / Grammar: simple present, simple past

Topic 10: Music, describing pictures / Grammar: interrogative 'what kind of', indefinite pronouns, relative clauses

Topic 11: Time / Grammar: verbs with prepositions, Wh questions with prepositions

Topic 12: Festivals, stereotypes / Grammar: clauses, relative clauses

The next level should be advanced. This level of the course can be taught at the third year of the degree (tertiary level).

Advanced Level

Topic 1: Travel-related vocabulary, narrating experiences; Grammar: clauses with infinitive constructions, simple past, used to, and would.

Topic 2: Tech and gadgets – related vocabulary, understanding information about gadgets and technology; Grammar: simple present, modality.

Topic 3: Milestones – Historical and Personal – related vocabulary, understanding and narrating about the past; Grammar: Past Tense, temporal prepositions, expressing consequences.

Topic 4: All about Work-related vocabulary, job search, advertisements etc.; Grammar: Mood, Verb-Preposition combinations, Clauses

Topic 5: Environment-related vocabulary, Environment protection; Grammar: Comparative and Superlative adjectives.

Topic 6: Looking ahead – talking about plans, reading longer texts; Grammar: Future Tense (I), Relative Clauses and with Prepositions

Topic 7: Relationships – related vocabulary – men/women/family/conflicts; Grammar: Past Perfect, temporal clauses and their sequence

Topic 8: Body and Health – related vocabulary – Health, Hospitals, Schools, etc., offering help, talking about habits and memories; Grammar: Reflexive pronouns (continuation), Negation, Conjunctions

Topic 9: Art and Culture – related vocabulary – Art / Theatre / Films / Museums, adding emphasis to sentences, talking about art, films, etc.

Topic 10: Community / Living Together – related vocabulary – Social Values, Europe, Politics, understanding information about the EU, making a short presentation; Grammar: Passive Voice, Prepositions.

Topic 11: All about Money – related vocabulary – Banks and Money in a Globalized World, Conversations in a Bank, understanding instructions.

7. CONCLUSION

Finally, it should be noted that, whether it is liked or disliked, English has become the language of socio-economic and cultural empowerment not only in India, but also in many other countries. It is certain that the ‘Englishless masses’ will remain at the periphery if they are denied the opportunity of learning it. The universities and colleges should take the initiative to make it more accessible to students from marginalized sections of the society by considering their learning needs. The English curricula at the tertiary level should be made more inclusive by making it more need-oriented and learner-friendly.

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A CLAUSE COMPLEX ANALYSIS OF PROBLEM STATEMENT SECTIONS IN MPhil THESES ACROSS THREE DISCIPLINES IN A GHANAIAN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract. *Academic writing is considered persuasive (Hyland 2008) and as post-graduate-students negotiate their entry into the research community, they are expected to build a formidable argument to create a research space for themselves in their research problem statements. As such, how they build logical connections of ideas in their problem statements is key, varying from one discipline to the other. This study explores the Problem Statement sections of MPhil theses, using Halliday and Matthiessen's (2004/2014) notion of clause complexing in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Specifically, the study focused on the tactic and the logico-semantic relations of the Problem Statements sections of three disciplines: Mathematics, Nursing, and English Language in the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. The findings reveal that regarding the basic clause complex structure of the three disciplines, English Language uses a lot of clause complexes compared to the other disciplines. Also, all three disciplines use considerable hypotactic relations and hypotactic projection of locution instead of idea since in the problem statements, writers report what others have said and not their own thoughts. In terms of relations of expansion, there are variations in the three disciplines, with English language favoring elaboration whilst Mathematics favor extension and enhancement. The use of expansion relations for Nursing is closer to that of English language. It is suggested that clause complexing is not only determined by genre and mode but also conventions of academic discipline. The findings have implication for theory and disciplinarity in academic writing.*

Key words: *Academic writing, SFL, Clause complex, Disciplinary variation, Problem statements*

INTRODUCTION

Academic writing has become an area of scholarly interest and a lot of literature have concentrated on its development (Hyland 2004; Janks 2012; Paltridge and Starfield 2007). Academic writing can be viewed as an analytical process of writing that focuses on different perspectives, theories and concepts. Hyland (2011) posits that academic writing is persuasive and makes use of arguments demonstrated through “absolute truth, empirical evidence or flawless logic” (p. 194). Graduate students, as part of their degree

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requirements, face different writing tasks as they work to earn their desired degrees (Swales and Feak 2004), and one of the requirements is for them to produce a thesis at the end of their studies. This requires them to identify an area of interest and to formulate a problem that must be researchable in order to fill a gap in the research space within the research community.

Every research begins with a problem. The problem statement of theses or research articles (RAs) is one of the key ways through which one negotiates entry into a research community (Ankomah and Afful 2019). In writing problem statements, researchers are expected to be persuasive and relate their independent beliefs to shared experience (Hyland 2008). They offer a solid justification for the research by presenting a convincing argument for the need to undertake the new research (Ankomah and Afful 2019). It is in the problem statements section that researchers establish a niche which they occupy to make their research relevant in their fields of study. Shoket (2014) posits that research problem statements encompass “areas of concern, a condition to be improved, a difficulty to be eliminated, or a troubling question that exists in scholarly literature, in theory, or in practice that points to the need for meaning understanding and deliberate investigation” (p.512). Research problem statements, therefore, give the focus or reason for undertaking any research or scholarly investigation and also situate researchers within the research space.

One viable framework for investigating how researchers carve a niche for themselves is Swales (1990) CARS (Create-A-Research-Space) model. Since the inception of Swales’s (1990) CARS model, various studies have used the model to investigate how researchers create and occupy a niche in research from various disciplines, looking at the rhetorical move structure and the lexico-grammatical features that typify those moves (e.g., Abdullah 2016; Adika 2014; Afful 2010; Ankomah and Afful 2019; Kanoksilapatham 2007). The disciplines explored include Engineering (Anthony 1999; Abdullah 2016), English and Applied Linguistics (Abdullah 2016; Ankomah and Afful 2019; Dabamona et al. 2022; Kawase 2021; Ozturk 2007), Mathematics (Graves et al. 2014; Moghaddasi and Graves 2017; Moghaddasi et al. 2019). These studies reveal that establishing a niche is an important strategy for making argument for new research in various disciplines. However, there seems to be no generalized model for all disciplines since patterns of the writing styles of various disciplines differ. For instance, Graves et al (2014) identified “establishing presumptions” as important for making arguments in Mathematics RA introductions. He observes that Mathematics uses their presumptions in addition to variations in the CARS model to create a research space, arguing that this is due to the hypothetical nature of mathematical concepts and the grounds that Mathematics is a “logic-driven, argumentation-mediated discipline. This affirms McGrath and Kuteeva (2012) who note that Mathematics does not share common grounds with the Hard Sciences; that is, it has epistemological uniqueness and is not easily classified as empirical, unlike Natural Sciences, and is not dependent on interpretation of data but usually limited to a binary true or false. This makes it important to further explore how writers within the discipline organize language coherently at the clausal level to make their argument for a new research - a gap this study seeks to fill by examining the clause complex relations of research problem statements in MPhil theses across three disciplines.

Moreover, the study of language variation in academic discourse has also received impetus following the interest in works such as Halliday’s register theory, Swales’s

(1990) genre analysis and Hyland's (2006) variation in academic discourse. Many studies have looked at disciplinary variation in various aspects of academic writing, including citation (Afful and Janks 2013), statement of purpose (Chen 2017), marked theme in method sections (Ebrahimi, 2016) and rhetorical choices (Afful and Mwinlaaru 2012; Hardy and Romer 2013). Variation in logical connections between clauses in academic writing has not received much scholarly attention. It will, therefore, be interesting to look at how researchers in some selected disciplines link clauses in order to present their arguments as textually-related ideas in their problem statement sections where they persuasively make a case for their research.

Swales and Feak (2004) identify six important characteristics of academic writing which must be given important consideration: audience, purpose, organisation, style, flow and presentation. 'Flow', according to Swales and Feak (2004), is important for successful communication in academic writing and it involves the establishment of a clear connection of ideas to help readers comprehend the text. This connection encompasses linking words, phrases, clauses, sentences etc. to join ideas together. The present study considers the 'flow' between the clauses in the problem statements of MPhil dissertations across three disciplines.

Specifically, the study investigates the logical flow of meaning in the problem statements across the disciplines of Mathematics, Nursing, and English Language and this is achieved by answering the following research questions:

1. What is the basic clause complex structure of problem statements across the three disciplines in MPhil dissertations?
2. What is distribution of taxis relations in the problem statements across the three disciplines in MPhil dissertations?
3. How are the logico-semantic relations used to realise problem statements across the three disciplines in MPhil dissertations?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is a linguistic theory that views language as a social practice. The central claim of systemic theory is that "language is a resource for making meaning" (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004: 23) and that meaning is inherent in the systemic patterns of choice. Referring to language as choice, systemic theorists like Halliday (1994), Eggins (2004) and Martin (2010), give priority to the paradigmatic uses of language since the linguistic choices made by writers and speakers within the context of other potential choices that the user could have made are of maximum importance. SFL also maintains that language performs three meta-functions (Eggins 2004; Halliday and Matthiessen 2004/2014) which are the ideational, interpersonal and textual. However, this study adopted the logical meaning under the ideational meta-function since it involves the logical structure of the clause complex to encode meaning.

Clause complex refers to the grammatical and semantic unit that is formed when clauses are linked systematically (see Eggins 2004; Downing and Locke 2006; Halliday and Matthiessen 1994; 2004; 2014; Thompson 2014, for detailed description). It occurs in both spoken and written discourse. It deals with "how the flow of events is construed in the development of text at the level of semantics" (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004: 365).

Eggs (2004) refers to it as the “logical chaining of experientially related meanings” (p. 258). Thus, a clause complex deals with how two or more clauses are combined and presented as a textually-related message with explicit signals, such as conjunctions, indicating their interdependence. A clause complex analysis, therefore, helps to capture “significant dimensions of *flow* or *packaging* in a grammatical unit” (Eggs 2004, p. 256), provides resources for construing logical connections between events and for developing meaning in any grammatical unit. There are basically two sub-systems under the system of the clause complex: taxis and logico- semantics.

The system of taxis refers to the type of interdependency relations between the linked clauses in the clause complex (Eggs 2004; Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 2014). This relates to dependent and independent clauses in Traditional Grammar terms. This system is made up of two categories: parataxis and hypotaxis. In paratactic relations, the clauses relate as equal independent entities, whereas in hypotactic relations, there is a dependency relationship. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) propose (1, 2, 3) and (α , β , γ) to represent paratactic and hypotactic relations respectively. Thus, a clause complex is made up of two or more interdependent clauses which may be either paratactic, hypotactic or both, and it is simplified in Table 1 below:

Table 1 The system of Taxis (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 376).

	Primary	Secondary
Parataxis	1 Initiating	2 Continuing
Hypotaxis	α (dominant)	β (dependent)

Paratactic clauses are linked by simple punctuations such as *comma*, *semi colon*, *colon*; and paratactic conjunctions such as *and*, *so*, *but*, *yet*, *neither...nor*, *either ...or* etc., whilst hypotactic clause boundaries are marked by relative pronouns (eg., *who*, *that*), hypotactic or subordinating conjunctions (eg., *while*, *although*, *because*), and verbal conjunctions (eg., *supposing that*, *provided that*). All non-finite clauses are also hypotactic.

The system of *logico-semantic* relations refers to the type of semantic relations between the linked clauses in the clause complex, whether dependent or independent. This system is sub-categorised into *projection* and *expansion* (Eggs 2004; Halliday and Matthiessen 2004/2014; Thompson 2014). The system of *projection* indicates the attribution of what someone said (*locution*) or what someone thought (*idea*). Projection cross-selects with taxis. *Locution* and *idea* are represented by the symbols (“) and (‘) respectively. The system of expansion develops the clause in three ways: *elaboration*, *extension* and *enhancement* (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004/2014; Eggs 2004; Thompson 2014; Nguyen 2013). *Elaboration* describes the relationship of restatement, where one clause restates or elaborates the meaning of another by providing an exposition or clarification, and it is represented by (=). The system of extensions describes relations of addition, variation or alternation represented by (+). It is marked by additive ‘and’, negative addition ‘nor’, adversative ‘but’; conjunctions like *instead of*, *except for* and alternation ‘or’, *either or*, *if not*. The last system enhancement, which is the largest sub-category under logico-semantic, describes relations of time, space, cause, condition, manner, consequence, concession, etc., and is represented by (×). Enhancement, according to Eggs (2004), is parallel to the circumstantial elements in transitivity structure of the clause. The system of expansion also cross-selects with taxis, so we can have hypotactic expansion or paratactic expansion. In

conclusion, Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) assert that clause complex patterns are determined by contextual dimensions of genre and mode. Also, written texts use less intricate clause complexes compared to spoken texts and that complexing is associated with spoken discourse.

Many researchers have employed the clause complex model to analyse texts from different perspectives, such as media discourse (Adjei and Opoku, 2017; Eid, 2016; Nasution, 2019), or literary discourse (Huang, 2021; Kurnia and Hidayat, 2019; Mayasari, Lubis and Putri, 2021; Wulansari, 2017). From the perspective of academic discourse, Leong (2021) studied forty research articles from the humanities and the hard sciences, with the argument that the two disciplines constitute two distinct varieties. The findings show the same distribution of dependent and independent clauses in the writings of the two disciplines. Also, the sciences make considerable use of clause simplexes and paratactic extensions, whilst the articles in the humanities make substantial use of embedded clauses and projections in their writings. The study emphasises that writing in the sciences makes more use of simple clause structure than writing in the humanities. The study is significant, as it demonstrates disciplinary variation in the use of tactic and logico-semantic relations. Other studies within academic discourse have concentrated on biodata (Mwinlaaru 2017), abstracts (Rapatrui 2022), undergraduate students' writing (Yuniar 2018; Ngongo 2018), and citation (Jomaa and Biden 2019). All these studies reveal a substantial use of *expansion*.

DISCIPLINARITY IN ACADEMIC WRITING

Disciplinarity has received scholarly attention, following Becher's (1989) exposition on academic territories which emphasises the importance of academic 'tribes' and 'territories' and the uniqueness of each discipline in terms of the conventions that influence how they do things. An academic discipline "is a field or site of scholarly inquiry (often linked to a profession outside the academy) having a central object of study, set of questions, or activity that causes people with related projects to identify with the discipline" (Wardle and Downs 2018, p. 112). Similarly, Hyland (2006) views discipline as "institutional convenience, networks of communication, domains of values and modes of enquiry" (p.18) which are recognized in the academia by the existence of departments (Becher and Trowler 2001). Becher (1994) categorizes the disciplines based on the nature of knowledge in the discipline. For instance, he groups them into hard-pure (pure sciences, e.g., Physics), soft-pure (Humanities, Social Sciences, e.g., Anthropology), hard-applied (Technologies such as Mechanical Engineering), and soft applied (applied Social Sciences such as Education and Law). Wardle and Downs (2018) argue, "disciplinarity offers institutional standing crucial to the development of a field of study and to the ability of its participants to make meaningful change in the areas they study" (p.110). Thus, the behaviour and values of academics are strongly determined by knowledge structures of their disciplines.

Disciplines bring about the concept of discourse community and research affirms the distinctiveness of genres around the concept of discourse community. Genres and communities are mutually defining (Swales 1990; Hyland 2006), and the interests of researchers have been directed towards how genres are written, used, and the responses they generate from individual members of the social group. Becher (1989) describes the communities as tribes with its own set of conventions, mode of enquiries, etc., and they

essentially draw on contexts to produce and interpret written and spoken discourses (Hyland 2006). Academic contexts and texts are, therefore, an embodiment of social negotiations of disciplinary inquiry which reveal how knowledge is construed and negotiated (Hyland 2004). Communication is, therefore, key to the academic enterprise. As posited by Becher and Trowler (2001), “academic cultures and disciplinary epistemology are inseparably intertwined” (p. 23). Hyland (2004) argues that disciplines are defined by their writing, and writing creates disciplines by determining their members, how members relate to each other and what they count as knowledge. Hyland (2008) posits that writers make rhetorical choices to connect their texts to their disciplines. He observes that sciences accept new knowledge based on experimental proofs, while the humanities rely on narratives and case studies, with claims that are accepted and based on the strength of arguments. This presupposes that each discipline values different kinds of arguments and writing tasks. These variations in the discipline, according to Lampi and Reynolds (2018), differ from one context to another with the students’ contextualized learning environment shaping the conventions of the discipline. Samraj (2005) also observes that disciplinary variation in academic writing does not only manifest in rhetorical structures, but also in their relationship with other genres.

Various studies have demonstrated that there are disciplinary variations in various aspects of academic writing, such as statement of purpose (Chen 2017), citation (Afful and Janks 2013; Charles 2006), rhetorical choices (Afful 2010; Afful and Mwinlaaru 2012; Hardy and Romer 2013), readability and clarity of written texts (Hartley, Sotto and Fox 2004), and authorial identity and disciplinary constraints (Hyland 2009). Hartley, Sotto and Fox (2004), for instance, employed computer-based readability measures to study the clarity of texts in the Sciences, Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities. Findings revealed that scientific texts use shorter and simple sentences and were easier to read than their parallel texts in other disciplines. The common trend in disciplinary studies reveal that not much consideration has been given to how the disciplines of Mathematics, Nursing and English Language vary in terms of the systematic meaningful ways in which they combine two or more clauses to present their arguments in writing problem statements. This study fills this gap by looking at how three disciplines build logical connections between the clauses in their research problem statements for the overall coherence of their message.

DATA AND METHOD

The study adopted the qualitative research method, considering the exploratory nature of the study, to investigate the interdependence and the logical relations in the clauses of the problem statements of the three disciplines. Qualitative research focuses on making meaning of a particular phenomenon, and understanding a process by analysing words or pictures. According to Creswell (1994), this design is flexible in its application and appropriate for expanding and describing specific phenomenon. Specifically, we used the qualitative content analytic approach since it is most suitable for analysing documents such as texts. Hsei and Shannon (2005) define qualitative content analysis as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (p.1278). We employed both the directed and summative content analytic approaches to the study. The directed content analysis helped us to employ the clause complex system of SFL to

develop the coding frame of the data, whilst the summative content analysis allowed us to quantify the patterns and present the results statistically.

The institutional context for the study is University of Cape Coast, a top university in Ghana. The university is ranked by the 2021 Times Higher Education World University Ranking as the number one in Ghana and West Africa, top five in Africa, and number one globally, for research influence. The University strives to produce highly qualified and skilled manpower for both locally and globally, which is also the core mandate of all the departments within the University. In the university of Cape Coast, there are one hundred and sixteen (116) academic departments administratively organised into eighteen (18) faculties/ schools and five (5) colleges. The academic disciplines within the university are situated within various departments. For the purpose of this study, the Departments of Mathematics, Nursing and English Language were chosen.

The data for the study consist of the Problem Statement sections of thirty MPhil dissertations downloaded from the University of Cape Coast repository (<https://ir.ucc.edu.gh>). The thirty dissertations were made up of ten from each discipline. They were selected from 2018 to 2021. The data was conveniently sampled, starting with the most recent from 2021 till we got the required number. The data were assigned labels, EPS1, MPS1 and NPS1 for the first set of dissertations from English Language, Mathematics, and Nursing respectively, where PS represents problem statement and the initial alphabets E, M, and N represent the disciplines respectively.

With regard to the procedure of analysis, we employed Halliday and Matthiessen's (2004, 2014) notion of clause complex which deals with univariate structures. The problem statement sections of each of the dissertations were extracted and typed into an excel sheet for the clause complex analysis. We followed the coding frame of Eggins (2004) for the clauses and so for easy presentation, each clause was indicated on a separate line indented from left to right. Embedded clauses were shown in parentheses. The study presents two layers of analysis; that is, the clause is analysed for taxis and logico-semantic relations. We gave samples of the analysis to two post-graduate students to go through after giving them prior orientation on the coding system of the clause complex model. The results showed 90% and 91% agreement respectively. The points of disagreement were referred to a senior scholar in SFL who helped to resolve them.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis and discussion were centered on the distribution of taxis and logico-semantic relations used by the three disciplines in their problem statements analyzed. Simple descriptive statistics were used to present the occurrences of the various relations in percentages for easy understanding. The results of the analysis are presented as follows.

Basic Clause complex structure across the three disciplines

Table 2 shows the summary of the basic clause complex structure for all three disciplines including the distribution in percentages.

From Table 2, there is a similar ratio of text length in terms of the number of words and sentences used by Nursing and English language, which is 5553 and 5321 respectively. The discipline of Mathematics, however, has an equivalence of almost 40% lower in text length when compared to Nursing and English language. This suggests that writing Problem

Statements in Mathematics uses relatively shorter text length compared to Nursing and English language; thus, affirming Afful (2016), Hartley, Sotto and Fox's (2004) observation that writers in the sciences produce shorter sentences. However, Nursing which has a text length equivalent to that of English ignites the debate whether the Nursing discipline belongs to the hard or soft sciences. VanLandingham (2014) argues that the 'hard' and 'soft' science label is meaningless when it comes to public health. Generally, nursing does not only draw from the hard sciences, but also has relations to professional practice which incorporates elements from health and social sciences.

Table 2 Basic Clause Complex structure summary for all three disciplines.

	Mathematics	Nursing	English Language
No. of Words	2821	5553	5321
No. of Sentences	114	193	171
No. of Clause Simplex	55 (48%)	91 (47%)	47 (27%)
No. of Clause Complex	59 (52%)	102 (53%)	125 (73%)
No. of Embedded Clauses	-	16	14
No. of Clause Complex of 2 Clauses	39	65	45
No. of Clause Complex of 3 Clauses	14	24	44
No. of Clause Complex of 4 Clauses	1	8	21
No. of Clause Complex of 5 Clauses	4	3	7
No. of Clause Complex of 6 or More Clauses	-	1	7

In terms of the distribution of clause simplex and clause complex, it can be seen from the table that both Mathematics and Nursing display similar percentages for their use; that is, 48% and 47% for clause simplex, 52% and 53% for clause complex distribution between Mathematics and Nursing respectively. The difference in percentage of clause simplex and clause complex suggests that Mathematics and Nursing favour a seemingly equal distribution of clause complex and clause simplexes in their problem statements. There are almost as many clause complexes as clause simplexes. However, it can be observed from the Table 2 that English language tends to favour the use of more clause complexes in their problem statements, accounting for 73% use of clause complex as against 27% use of clause simplex. This corroborates Leong (2021) who also noted that the sciences use more clause simplexes than the humanities with a statistically significant difference.

The use of clause simplexes is associated with academic writing because of its frequent use of nominalisation, affirming Hyland's (2006) observation that academic writing is characterized by nominalized style, and in terms of lexical density, it is also very dense. Compared to English Language, Mathematics and Nursing use more simplexes. Let us consider the examples below from the Mathematics discipline:

Extract 1

- Clause simplex 1 Finding *the roots of a system of nonlinear equations* is *one of the important problems in most numerical computations* especially in areas associated with engineering applications.
- Clause simplex 2 However, *the convergence and performance characteristics* is highly dependent on *the good initial guess of the solution*.

(MPS1)

From Examples 1 and 2, it can be seen that the sentences are full of noun phrases, the only verb phrases in Sentence 1 are ‘finding’ and ‘is’. The higher use of nominalisation shows that there is high lexical density in the writings of Mathematics. English language is, however, geared towards spoken style. For the dominant use of clause complex by the English language discipline, it can be argued that the writings of English language in the problem statements is closer to spoken style than the sciences. Let us consider the clause complex below:

Extract 2

α	3i	This is essential
x β	3ii	because one needs
x γ	3iii	to consider the gradient nature of language
x δ	3iv	and understand
= ϵ 1	3v	that linguistics need not necessarily be a report on what is ideal
+2	3vi	but must first account for all possible options
+3	3vii	and thereafter determine the ideal categorial predictor
+4	3viii	or evaluate the strength of the predictors (Bresnan & Ford, 2010; Bresnan, 2007; Gries, 2003).

(EPS10)

From Clause Complex 3 above, the use of the coordinators ‘and’, ‘but’ ‘or’ and information density, the higher proportion of verbs used compared to that of Mathematics makes it more geared towards spoken style in their problem statements as Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) assert that clause complex is particularly associated with texts since it represents the ability to put together long and intricate patterns and simultaneously maintain the flow of discourse.

Moreover, this picture challenges Eggins (2004), Halliday and Matthiessen (2004; 2014) who argue that spoken language tends to favor dynamic patterns of clause complexing than written texts. They further argue that the difference between spoken and written language in terms of complexing is reinforced by the dramatic difference in the use of embedded clauses. Their argument here is that clause complexing is mostly used by spoken texts, whilst written texts make use of embedded clauses. From the table 2, it can be seen clearly that Mathematics does not favor the use of embedded clauses. The embedded clauses are only seen in the writings of Nursing and English language and their instances in the texts are 16 and 14 respectively. Leong (2021) also observes lower occurrence of embedded clauses in Science articles. This, therefore, affirms that academic writing in sciences is structurally simpler than that of the humanities.

Also from Table 2 it can be seen that in terms of distribution of the number of complexes, there is not much significant difference, as all the three disciplines use dynamic patterns of complexes with English Language using significant dynamic patterns of complexes of 7 clauses with more than ten instances. From the above discussion, it can be argued that the view by Eggins (2004) and Halliday and Matthiessen (2004/2014) that frequency and types of clause complex is related to genre and mode is not always the case; it can also be related to discipline.

Taxis relations

Table 3 below gives a summary of the taxis relations for all the three disciplines. It must be noted that taxis will exceed the clause complex numbers.

Table 3 Summary of Taxis for all Three Disciplines

TAXIS	Mathematics	Nursing	English Language
Parataxis	44 (29%)	67 (25%)	55 (14%)
Hypotaxis	107 (71%)	205 (75%)	351 (86%)
Total	151	272	406

From the Table 3 above, the tactic or dependency relations show that there is a greater difference in the use of paratactic relations. There is a quasi-equal proportion of the use of hypotactic relations between Mathematics and Nursing; that is, 71% and 75% respectively. English language on the other hand makes significant use of hypotactic relations, accounting for 86% usage in their problem statements. This means that for all the disciplines, they make considerable use of hypotactic relations, affirming Leong (2021) who also observed that in terms of the distribution of dependent and independent clauses in the articles of both the sciences and the humanities, both disciplines favor the use of independent clauses in establishing flow in their writings. The examples below illustrate the taxis relations from English language, Mathematics and Nursing respectively.

Extract 3

- α 4i Such a consideration will help establish the strength of the many factors
 $=\beta$ 4ii that determine either singular or plural agreement. (EPS10)
- α 5i The present study attempts
 $x \beta$ 5ii to explore other methodologies in characterizing the prices of these products. (MPS4)
- α 6i It is therefore not known
 $x \beta$ 6ii if the nursing care provided for the older adults in the hospitals meet their peculiar healthcare needs as older adults. (NPS9)

From the examples above, it can be seen that all the three disciplines use the hypotactic relations either to elaborate or to clarify, and to provide enhancement.

Projection

This section discusses the results for logico-semantic relations of projection for all disciplines summarized in Table 4 below. In projection, one clause links the other clauses by telling us who said or thought something. The linked clauses then reports or quotes what was said or thought about.

Table 4 Summary of Projection for all Disciplines

Logico-Semantic		Mathematics	Nursing	English Language
Projection	Locution	4	34	37
	Idea	-	-	1
	Total	4 (5%)	34 (22%)	38 (14%)
Hypotaxis	Projection	4 (5%)	33 (22%)	38 (14%)
Parataxis	Projection	-	1 (1%)	-

According to Table 4, all disciplines make considerable use of projections of locution instead of *idea*. Locution is attribution to sources (Eggins, 2004) and it is evident that all the disciplines use scholarly sources to build logical arguments in their problem statements. Comparatively, Nursing and English make frequent use of projected locution as compared to Mathematics. There is only one use of projection of ‘idea’ and this can be attributed to the fact that in academic writing, writers report or integrate literature on what researchers say, observe, note, etc., rather than their thoughts. The clause complexes below illustrate hypotactic projection of locution from Nursing, English Language and Mathematics respectively.

Extract 4

α 7i Opoku-Boateng (2016) revealed
 " β 7ii that caregivers experience a low quality of life. (NPS1)

α 8i He argued
 " β 8ii that native speakers can through intuition guess
 " γ 8iii that active is preferred over passive structures; positive over negative forms, declarative over interrogatives; this over that;
 " δ 8iv but will be uncertain about the relative frequencies of singular and plural forms. (EPS10)

α 9i Li et al. (2015) explained
 " β 9ii that, these algorithms are too complicated
 " γ 9iii or expensive to calculate (MPS1)

The hypotactic projection of locution in the three disciplines also suggests that in problem statements of MPhil dissertations, writers do not construct themselves as authorities and, therefore, it becomes imperative for them to source comments to others. Also, writers use hypotactic locution to avoid direct quotations and by using hypotactic locution their ‘voice’ stands out in the argument.

Relations of Expansion

In the relations of expansion, elaboration relates to restatement or clarification, extension relates to addition, variation or alternation and enhancement relates to ways by which one clause develops on the meaning of another by dimensions of time, condition, purpose, concession etc. Table 5 below gives a summary of the relations of expansion for all three disciplines.

Table 5 Summary for Logico-semantics of all three Disciplines

Logico-semantic		Mathematics	Nursing	English Language
Expansion	Elaboration	21 (26%)	50 (42%)	103 (45%)
	Extension	23 (28%)	27 (23%)	40 (18%)
	Enhancement	37 (46%)	42 (35%)	84 (37%)
	Total	81 (95%)	119 (78%)	227 (86%)

From Table 5 above, it can be seen that with regards to the relations of elaboration, Nursing and English Language make significant use of elaboration as compared to Mathematics. It can be argued that, in Mathematics, there is nothing to elaborate; there are no 'in other words' for formulas as compared to the problem statements in English and Nursing. This affirms that Mathematics is logic-driven (Graves et al. 2014) and limited to a binary true or false (McGrath and Kuteeva 2012). English Language, on the other hand, makes use of arguments, meaning that writers explain more to make their arguments convincing. This confirms Hyland's (2008) observation that the scientists accept new knowledge based on experimental proofs, whilst the Humanities researchers base their claim on the strength of their arguments. The more elaboration, the more argumentative a text is; this accounts for more clause complexing in the English language data. The problem statements from Nursing also tend to follow this direction. Below are examples of elaboration from Nursing and English language respectively.

Extract 5

- α 10i The above explanation shows clearly
 $=\beta$ 10ii that the health/nursing care of the aged has attracted little attention in Ghana. (NPS9)
- α 11i It becomes imperative
 $=\beta$ 11ii then that we shift attention from the traditional approach of literary or thematic analysis
 $=\gamma$ 11iii which previous studies on the novel employed. (EPS7)

In relation to extension, that is where writers add new information, it can be seen that Mathematics, surprisingly, use significant percentage of extension. From the data, although there is little argumentation in Mathematics, there is more addition of new information, with each of the clauses saying a different thing. The examples below illustrate relations of extension from the three disciplines, Mathematics, English and Nursing respectively.

Extract 6

- 1 12i Like previous works, we build hierarchical graph for the hemoglobin Protein domain
 $+2\alpha$ 12ii and use graph invariants and graph centralities (MPS8)
- 1 13i Increasingly, the perspective that new varieties are legitimate means of communication in their own right is gaining acceptance
 $+2$ 13ii but the other perspective [that new varieties are errors] still lingers on
 $+3\alpha$ 13iii and the only way to put it to rest is (EPS5)
- 1 14i Moreover, in developing countries, taking care of the sick is mostly informal (unpaid services) and
 $+2\alpha$ 14ii this role is carried out frequently by IFCs (NPS1)

With regards to enhancement relations, it can be seen that Mathematics, (46%) uses more enhancement compared to the two, Nursing (35%) and English Language (37%). The kind of enhancement used here is more formulaic, meaning that Mathematics uses formulaic language for enhancement. Thus, the language itself mirrors the discipline. Let us consider the examples below from Mathematics.

Extract 7

α 15i The results by Adivar & Raffoul (2012) and Funakubo et al. (2006) on stability of solutions of Volterra integro-differential equations (VIDEs) does not extend to linear Volterra integro-differential equations of the form ###
 $x\beta$ 15ii where $\tau_i > 0$ is a constant, $q_i : [0, \infty) \times [-\tau, \infty) \dots$

(MPS9)

α 16i Raffoul (2006) obtained sufficient conditions for the zero solution of the difference equation ###

$x\beta$ 16ii to be asymptotically stable.

1 17i This equation however is a scalar equation

+2 α 17ii and so the stability results do not apply to the system of difference equations ###,

$x\beta$ 17iii where, # is an ### matrix.

(MPS6)

From the examples 15ii, 17iii above, it can be seen that enhancement is used to give modification information on a formular, whilst enhancement in 16ii is used to indicate purpose.

In conclusion, it can be seen from the analysis of the tactic and logico-semantic relations of the clause complexes, that there are some similarities and variations in the logical meanings of problem statements from the three disciplines.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study set out to examine how logical connections are built in problem statements of MPhil theses in three disciplines at a Ghanaian University, with the help of Halliday and Matthiessen's (2004) notion of clause complex under the ideational meta-function of SFL. Specifically, the study sought to investigate the basic clause complex structure, the distribution of taxis and logico-semantic relations across three selected disciplines: Mathematics, Nursing and English Language.

The analysis of the data brought to light four key findings. Firstly, in terms of the basic clause complex structure of the three, English Language uses more clause complexes in their problem statements compared to the two disciplines. Secondly, all three disciplines favor the use of hypotaxis as against parataxis; however, English uses it more than the other two disciplines. Thirdly, all the three disciplines use hypotactic projection of locution instead of idea as they attribute source to what people say instead of think. Finally, there are significant variations in the use of logico-semantic relations as English tends to use more elaboration, whilst Mathematics favors enhancement in relation to the other categories. The findings discussed demonstrate that the conventions of the disciplines of the researchers shape how they link ideas in their problem statements.

The key findings (and conclusions) of this study have implications for theory and scholarship on disciplinary variation in academic writing. First, the study confirms SFL's notion that language users make systematic choices in order to convey appropriate and intended meanings to an event (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004). Eggins (2004) indicates that clause complexing patterns are mainly sensitive to contextual dimensions of genre and mode. This study advances the argument that patterns of clause complexing in academic writing can be influenced by disciplinary variation. The study has demonstrated the three disciplines differ in terms of certain linguistic choices they make to build arguments in the problem statements. Academic writing, therefore, must be handled in a discipline-specific manner, as writing is shaped by the conventions of each discipline. The study also contributes to literature on academic writing and disciplinarity.

Due to time and space, this study was limited to only ten dissertations from only three disciplines. It will be interesting in future studies to increase the data from the three disciplines in order to extend generalizations (and consideration be given) to other disciplines; thereby throwing more light on disciplinary writing.

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TEACHING TECHNICAL VOCABULARY: ARE MATCHING EXERCISES THE THING OF THE PAST?

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Abstract. *This article examines the effectiveness of matching exercises as a method for teaching technical vocabulary within an ESP context. More specifically, it investigates the advantages of matching exercises in terms of their efficiency to help students acquire technical vocabulary, students' perception of their efficiency, and student motivation, and compares the impact of modality on the aforementioned elements. The research describes two versions of an experiment conducted over two academic years on psychology students. Whereas written definitions were used in the first version, in the second version, definitions were presented in an oral form. The data were collected through questionnaires administered at the end of the class. The results indicate that matching exercises are, indeed, a valuable tool for the study of technical vocabulary, particularly receptive vocabulary. The participants generally evaluated the matching exercises as useful for vocabulary acquisition although their motivation towards such exercises was moderate. Moreover, the visual modality consistently outperformed the auditory modality in terms of efficiency, student perception, and student motivation. Despite some limitations, this study highlights the potential of matching exercises in teaching technical vocabulary. Matching exercises can serve as effective supplementary activities in ESP classes, allowing students to enhance their grasp of specialised language.*

Key words: *ESP, technical vocabulary, specialised vocabulary, modality, language learning and teaching, matching exercises*

1. INTRODUCTION

In 1962, Barber (p. 37) wrote that ESP practitioners do not normally teach technical terms to their students due to the heterogeneous nature of ESP classes and due to the fact that students acquire specialised vocabulary by themselves while “learning the subject.” Similarly, Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 1708-1712) stated that technical vocabulary, proportionately less present in “scientific and technical writing”, was less problematic to ESP students who could infer the meaning of such vocabulary from “a knowledge of the subject matter and common word roots.” Dudley-Evans and St John (1998, p. 80-81) reiterated the idea: “...in general, we agree that it should not be the *responsibility* of the ESP teacher to teach technical vocabulary...” Therefore, as it seems that technical vocabulary does not represent any particular difficulty for ESP learners and as, on the

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contrary, ESP practitioners are more likely to struggle with such vocabulary due to a lack of “specialist subject knowledge” given their original training (Anthony, 2011, p. 6; Nation, 2001, p. 307), the teaching of technical vocabulary is sometimes omitted from ESP curricula.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy to mention that even though it is often believed that technical vocabulary should not be the focus of ESP teaching, contrary to semi-technical and core vocabulary, frequently employed in scientific and technical literature, the ESP practitioner’s role is to ensure that students understand technical vocabulary. Moreover, more recent research highlights the importance of technical vocabulary and the necessity to help students tackle the difficulties associated with it (Hirsh & Coxhead, 2009; Nation, 2001). This article adheres to the second category of research and examines how technical vocabulary can be efficiently taught and learnt in an ESP context. In particular, it explores the advantages of matching exercises and offers a comparison of how the modality type impacts the efficiency of such exercises and student motivation.

In the first part of the article, we shall define technical vocabulary, describe its different types and approaches to teach it. The second part will present the experiment that was conducted in order to examine the role of matching exercises in the acquisition of technical vocabulary. Next, we shall present the results of our experiment concerning the efficiency of matching exercises, students’ perception of their efficiency, student motivation to do such exercises, and the impact of the modality on the aforementioned elements. Finally, we shall discuss how the cognitive overload, confirmation bias and correlation between the students’ perception of the efficiency of matching exercises and the ability to provide correct answers might interfere in the interpretation of the results; we shall conclude the paper by explicating the limitations of the present study and by providing a few final remarks concerning the practical implementation of matching exercises.

2. TECHNICAL VOCABULARY AND WAYS TO TEACH IT

This section proposes a definition of technical vocabulary and explores various methods to teach such vocabulary.

2.1 What is technical vocabulary?

In general English, it is common knowledge that vocabulary is crucial in order to understand and use a language (Hirsh & Coxhead, 2009). Hence, in an ESP context, mastering ESP vocabulary should be of a similar importance. Before continuing any further, it seems important to understand what ESP vocabulary stands for.

Different authors use different terms to refer to ESP vocabulary: special purpose vocabulary, specialised vocabulary, technical vocabulary, sub-technical vocabulary and semi-technical vocabulary (Coxhead, 2013). However, all these terms “usually refer to the vocabulary of a particular area of study of professional use” (Coxhead, 2013, p. 116). In a recent work, Woodrow (2018, p. 43) tried to bring more clarity to these terms by providing a clearer classification of ESP vocabulary based on the research in the field (*cf.* Nation, 2001, pp. 302–303). According to her, there are three categories of ESP vocabulary: technical vocabulary, semi-technical vocabulary, and general vocabulary. The first category, also known as specialist or specialised vocabulary, is composed of

“vocabulary specific to the discipline and not widely used or understood outside this area” (*op. cit.*). The second category, also referred to as sub-technical vocabulary¹, consists of vocabulary “commonly used in the discipline which may have a specific usage or meaning” (*op. cit.*), meaning that such vocabulary can be found outside a particular field, but its meaning may vary. Finally, the last category refers to everyday vocabulary “necessary for any communication in the language” (*op. cit.*) (see Fig. 1).

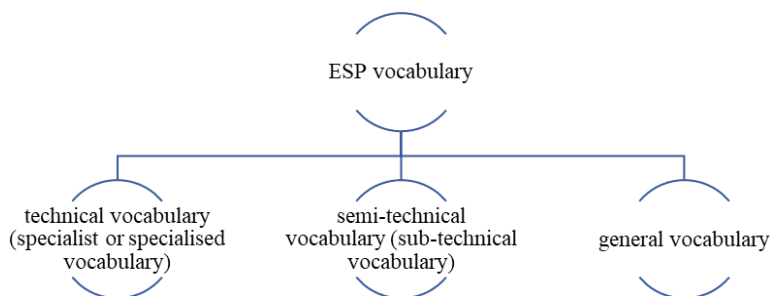


Fig. 1 Types of ESP vocabulary

While this tripartite distinction makes sense and the categorisation of vocabulary items into the three categories is almost always possible, the concept of the degree of technicalness (Nation, 2001, p. 316–317) seems to be more appropriate to apply. Words can be placed on the continuum depending on the degree of their technicalness. Level-1 vocabulary is used both inside and outside a particular field even though its use is more frequent in the field, and the meaning bears “little or no specialization” and can be precised by field specialists in more detail (*op. cit.*). Even if level-2 items are also employed inside and outside a particular field, they contain a specific meaning and are more frequently used inside the given field. The vocabulary of level 3 is more specialised and does not have the same meaning when used outside or inside the field. Level-4 elements are almost never used outside the field, and their meaning is not readily inferred by non-specialists.

To make the distinction more palpable, we can illustrate it with a few examples drawn from the field of psychology. The term *depression* belongs to Level 1 as it is used both outside and inside the field of psychology: for outsiders, it means “a medical condition that makes you very unhappy and anxious and often prevents you from living a normal life” (Longman) or “a feeling of sadness that makes you think there is no hope for the future” (*op. cit.*) while for insiders its meaning is more detailed in terms of symptoms:

a negative affective state, ranging from unhappiness and discontent to an extreme feeling of sadness, pessimism, and despondency, that interferes with daily life. Various physical, cognitive, and social changes also tend to co-occur, including altered eating or sleeping habits, lack of energy or motivation, difficulty concentrating or making decisions, and withdrawal from social activities. It is symptomatic of a number of mental health disorders. (American Psychological Association)

¹ Nation (2001, p. 24) precises that sub-technical vocabulary is also academic vocabulary, which contains formal vocabulary and not necessarily technical vocabulary.

The term *storage* could illustrate Level 2 of technicalness. The word is used in general English to principally refer to “the process of keeping or putting something in a special place while it is not being used” (Longman) whereas in psychology, *storage* signifies “the state of an item that is retained in memory, after encoding and before retrieval” (American Psychological Association). Although the word has a particular meaning in psychology, it can be easily accessed through its meaning in general English. The term *illustrator* exists in general English and in English for psychology; nevertheless, the meanings have nothing in common: in general English, an *illustrator* is “someone who draws pictures” (Longman) whereas in psychology, it refers to “a gesture that accompanies speech and that depicts, clarifies, or amplifies what is being said” (Colman, 2015, p. 365). Finally, the term *ahylognosia*, which stands for a “loss or impairment of the ability to recognize and understand the nature of objects through touch” (American Psychological Association), is undoubtedly part of the technical vocabulary as it is not employed outside the field of psychology.

2.2 Ways to teach vocabulary

Vocabulary is essential to understand and to use a language (Hirsh & Coxhead, 2009); hence, the distinction between receptive and productive vocabulary should be made when teaching vocabulary. Whereas the former refers to the passive use of vocabulary in reading or listening activities, the latter refers to the vocabulary that a person actively uses when speaking or writing (Woodrow, 2018). Nation (2007) put forward an idea that language courses should represent a balanced environment consisting of four strands: meaning-focused input (listening and reading), language-focused meaning (direct study of linguistic elements), meaning-focused output (speaking and writing), and fluency development – where each strand should occupy “roughly the same amount of time... to cover both receptive and productive skills” (p. 8). The four-strand principle can be applied to the teaching and learning of vocabulary: vocabulary can be studied through listening and reading tasks as well as speaking and writing ones, fluency enhancing activities, and through language-focused instruction.

Given various language teaching and learning approaches, the teaching of vocabulary can be done in a number of different ways. Cook (2008, pp. 62–63), for example, explains that the use of pictures is typical of the audio-lingual method, translation is common in traditional language teaching, and no particular techniques are used in the communicative approach or task-based learning and teaching as the meaning “is built up out of hearing it [the word] in different interactional contexts over time.” According to the lexical approach² by Lewis (2008, pp. 89–91), basic exercises³ are identifying chunks, matching, completing, categorising, sequencing, and deleting. Anchored in cognitive principles of learning, Gairns and Redman’s proposition (1986, pp. 103–170) advances five types of vocabulary activities: (1) activities with visual aids, (2) reading-based

² In the lexical approach, “language consists of chunks which, when combined, produce coherent text” (Lewis, 2008, p. 7).

³ In this paper, we respect the distinction between *activity*, *exercise*, and *task* as it is articulated by Richards and Schmidt (2010, pp. 9, 208, 584): whereas *activity* means “any classroom procedure that requires students to use and practise their available language resources”, *task* refers to any “activity which is designed to help achieve a particular learning goal”, and *exercise* refers to any “activity that is designed to practise a learning item.”

activities, (3) teacher-designed contexts and dictionary-based activities, (4) speaking activities, and (5) games, questionnaires and problem-solving activities. In addition to the activities aiming to present new vocabulary, Thornbury (2002, pp. 93–105) suggested that there should be integration activities to help learners integrate it into their mental lexicon. In his mind, these activities could be grouped into three categories: decision-making tasks, production tasks, and games (see Fig. 2).

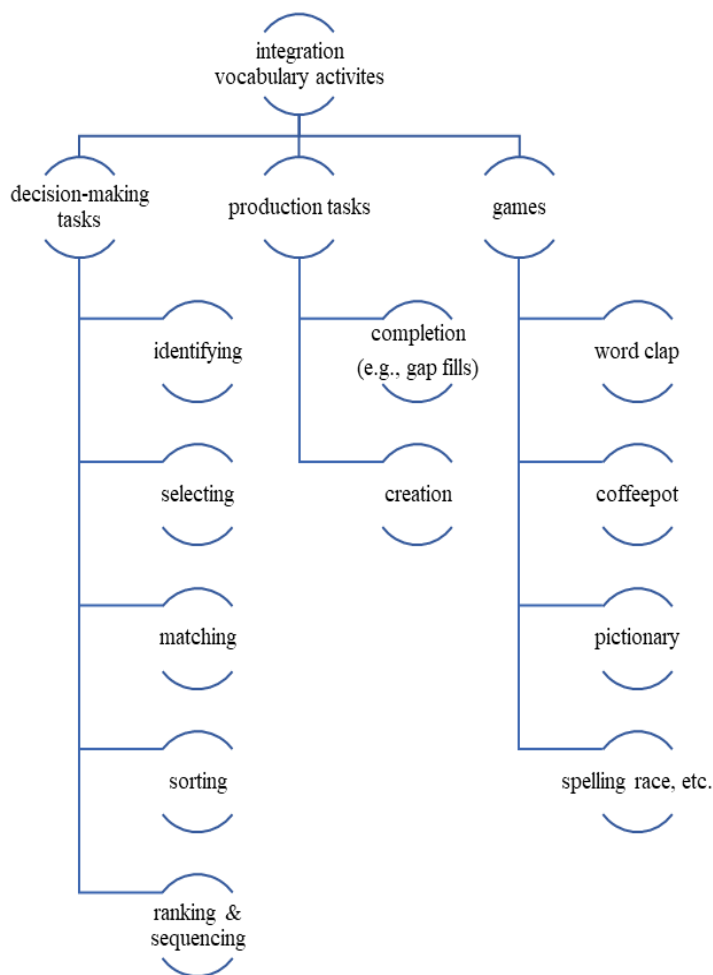


Fig. 2 Thornbury's three types of integration activities⁴

All the previously mentioned types of activities and tasks deal with general vocabulary; the literature is much scarcer when specialised vocabulary is concerned. One

⁴ The decision-making tasks are presented from the least cognitively demanding to the most cognitively demanding tasks (Thornbury, 2002, p. 93).

of the rare references in relation to science-specific vocabulary comes from Hirsh and Coxhead (2009), who distinguished ten ways to focus on such vocabulary: split information tasks (*cf.* jigsaw technique), investigation of the company words keep in texts, ranking activities, focusing on aspects of words through direct instruction⁵, use of strategies to enhance vocabulary learning, use of dictionaries to explore aspects of target words, fluency building, summarising activities, wider reading and listening in the sciences, and learning through assessment (pp. 7–12).

As the reader might have noticed, various classifications of vocabulary activities and tasks exist depending on the theoretical approach adopted by the author(s), and unsurprisingly, certain overlap, or even complementarity⁶, between the classifications can be observed.

2.3 Matching exercises

Matching exercises have been part of general English and ESP studybooks for a long time; they are present, for instance, in *Advanced grammar in use* (Hewings, 2005), *Advanced language practice* (Vince, 2003), *New Headway: Pre-intermediate* (Soars & Soars, 2000), *New inside out* (Kay & Jones, 2009), *English vocabulary in use* (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2001), *English phrasal verbs in use* (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2004), *English for the oil industry* (Frendo & Bonamy, 2011), *English for logistics* (Grussendorf, 2009), *Basic English for computing* (Glendinning & McEwan, 1999), *Academic encounters: Life in society* (Brown & Hood, 2002), *Studying English for psychology: A practical guide* (Makeieff, Jalliffier-Merlon & Zouaoui, 2019), *English for psychologists* (Kerridge & Lieury, 1991), etc. These examples show that even though they are used in a wide range of teaching and learning settings, they are principally employed to teach grammar, general vocabulary, or specialised vocabulary.

According to Thurnbury (2002), matching exercises involve:

first recognising words and then pairing them with – for example – a visual representation, a translation, a synonym, an antonym, a definition, or a collocate. (p. 97)

To complete this definition, we shall refer to Nation (2001), who added a grammatical component to matching exercises as the latter can ask learners to match two halves of a sentence.

In vocabulary teaching, matching exercises can be advantageous to the study of productive as well as receptive vocabulary (Nation, 2001). As the vocabulary is studied deliberately, they represent language-focused learning (Nation, 2007), they allow to focus on particular aspects of a word through direct instruction (Hirsh & Coxhead, 2009), they are dictionary-based exercises (Gairns & Redman, 1986), which belong to the lexical approach (Lewis, 2008).

Despite the quasi-omnipresence of matching exercises in English studybooks, their efficiency has not been proven yet, at least not to our knowledge. Given innovative trends

⁵ Moreover, the advantages of explicit teaching and learning of vocabulary are highlighted by several researchers in ESP and EAP field (*cf.* Tokar & Fainman, 2018; Vega, 2016).

⁶ Nation (2001, p. 28) wrote that specialised vocabulary, like any high frequency vocabulary, “should be taught and studied in a variety of complementary ways.” This suggestion can be extended to vocabulary in general, and the usefulness of the complementarity approach to teaching any type of vocabulary can be underlined (Vega, 2016).

in education and in an ESP setting in particular (Anthony, 2018; Woodrow, 2018), the socio-constructivist approach to teaching and learning languages has been gaining in popularity: task-based, problem-based, project-based approaches as well as case studies. One of the strengths of these approaches lies in the fact that they allow for incidental learning, *i.e.*, unplanned or unintentional learning (Sharpley et al., 2015), or implicit learning, *i.e.*, learning where learners are not necessarily aware that learning is happening as it occurs “naturally, simply and without conscious operations” (Krashen, as cited in Ellis, 1999, p. 360), to take place. Indeed, matching exercises represent explicit learning, thereby belonging to the traditional approach to teaching and learning, and thus, should be efficient as “the material to be learnt is relatively ‘simple’” (Ellis, 1999, p. 642).

In the next section, we shall examine whether matching exercises are efficient to study technical vocabulary and whether students appreciate such exercises and find them useful to acquire specialised vocabulary.

3. METHODS

3.1. Context and participants

The present study is the by-product of the PhD research we conducted in 2017-2021 on ESP teaching where we tested the efficiency of the specialisedness-based approach (Van der Yeught, 2016) in terms of knowledge acquisition and student motivation (Lyu, 2017). In order to attain the objectives of this research, we designed an English for psychology course into which we integrated traditional classroom activities together with the activities mimicking those that psychologists carry out in their professional lives. Amongst traditional activities, there were matching exercises, multiple choice, true-or-false, open-ended questions to test reading and/ or listening comprehension; the experimental activities consisted primarily of case studies, projects, and problems. However, the activities, both control and experimental ones, were all content-based and were always in relation to the field of psychology.

Approximately 200 psychology students pursuing their first master’s degree at the University of Liège (Belgium) participated in the experiment in 2018-2019 and 2019-2020. The course consisted of ten three-hour teaching modules, each of which was based on a particular psychology-related topic. The matching exercises were designed for two modules: a module on age estimation and agnosia and a module on memory. The former consisted of three activities whereas the latter was comprised of four.

3.2. Instruments

In order to measure the efficiency of the matching exercises and students’ motivation as well as their perception of the efficiency of such exercises, we administered questionnaires⁷ at the end of each class. The efficiency of the matching exercises was evaluated through open-ended and multiple-choice questions for productive and receptive vocabulary respectively (Fig. 3). The question “Which activity was the most interesting?⁸” was meant to measure

⁷ The Socrative platform was used to administer the questionnaires.

⁸ For instance, in a recent study on the acquisition of medical vocabulary, Zafirovska and Xhaferi (2022) asked the participants to choose the vocabulary activity they liked the most and found out that only 8.7% of the students preferred matching exercises.

student motivation in relation to the activities present in the module, and the question “Which activity taught you most in terms of technical vocabulary?” permitted to analyse the students’ perception of the efficiency of the activities offered in the module.

3.3. Experiment 1

In 2018-2019, the matching exercise in the module on age estimation and agnosia contained 13 definitions (Appendix A) whereas the matching exercise in the module on memory consisted of 18 definitions (Appendix C). All the definitions were taken from psychology books (Bauer, 2006; Baugh, Desanghere & Marotta, 2010) and were presented in a written form. The questionnaire contained one multiple-choice question to test the acquisition of receptive vocabulary and one open-ended question to test the acquisition of productive vocabulary. Figure 4 illustrates the questions used: questions 19 and 20 were used in the module on age estimation and agnosia whereas questions 8 and 9 – in the module on memory.

19. The type of agnosia in which a person cannot recognise weight or texture of objects.
(don't use your notes to answer this question)

- A** ahylognosia
- B** integrative agnosia
- C** optic aphasia
- D** sensory amusia

20. The type of agnosia in which a person recognises different elements of an object, but cannot recognise the object itself.
(don't use your notes to answer this question)

8. Which type of memory involves conscious recollection?

- A** non-declarative
- B** implicit
- C** declarative

9. Which type of memory refers to future actions? (write one word)

Fig. 3 Measurement of the efficiency of matching exercises (2018-2019)

3.4. Experiment 2

In 2019-2020, in order to diversify the course content and decrease the amount of written text, we decided to modify the modality in which the matching exercises were presented: we asked a native speaker to record the definitions⁹ of the matching exercises (Appendices B & D). Moreover, recent research shows that multimodal learning, which allows “instructional elements to be presented in more than one sensory mode” could bring positive results (Sankey, Birch & Gardiner, 2010, p. 853).

According to psychologists, a sensory mode, also called sensory modality, can impact the presentation of information – the phenomenon known as modality effect (Colman, 2015, pp. 471, 686). For instance, when simple verbal information is presented through the auditory modality, better immediate recall of the last part of a message is observed; when complex verbal information is presented through the visual modality, better long-term recall is documented (*op. cit.*).

Although some researchers believe that spoken and written languages are treated similarly, that is “as a general process with little room for modality-specific effects” (Wolf, Muijselaar, Boonstra & de Bree, 2018, p. 1759), it seems intuitive to imagine that the two types of language undergo different cognitive processes. Indeed, the advances in neuropsychology show that to understand spoken language, words first pass through the auditory area to reach Wernicke’s area whereas written language is processed through the visual area and then the angular gyrus (Nolen-Hoeksema, Fredrickson, Loftus & Wagenaar, 2009, p. 50). Moreover, spoken language, presented through the auditory modality, activates the processes of the whole brain whereas written language, presented through the visual modality, rather activates the left hemisphere of the brain (Buchweitz, Mason, Tomitch & Just, 2009). The last element to consider is the working memory, responsible not only for temporary storage of information, but also for its simultaneous manipulation. Being of a limited capacity, the working memory can be easily saturated (Tindle & Longstaff, 2015, p. 147). Even though the visual modality represents a more challenging task for the working memory as the former adds more workload to the latter, the auditory modality associated with note-taking could be as challenging.

As the items of the questionnaires were preserved, the modality change allowed for a more detailed analysis of the matching exercises after the data were collected in 2019-2020.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Overall efficiency of the matching exercises

The results we present in this section were calculated on the basis of the number of the correct answers provided for each question testing the acquisition of technical vocabulary. The overall percentage of the correct answers for the two years of the experiment was 56% with 42% of the correct answers to the questions related to age estimation and agnosia and 70% of the correct answers to the questions related to memory (Table 1). The results are significantly better in the memory condition: this difference might be due to the fact that the students were

⁹ The matching exercise in the module on memory contained 16 definitions, instead of 18 used in 2018-2019: we eliminated *declarative* and *non-declarative memory* as the two are synonyms of *explicit* and *implicit memory* respectively.

more familiar with the subject on memory as it is one of the key topics in psychology and that they are more likely to have extensively read the memory-related literature in English.

Table 1 Efficiency of matching exercises

Topic	No. of correct answers
Age estimation and agnosia	106/253 (42%)
Memory	161/231 (70%)

The first number corresponds to the number of the students who provided the correct answers; the second number refers to the total number of the students who filled in the questionnaire.

4.2. Students' perception of the efficiency of matching exercises

When asked which activity of the module allowed for better acquisition of technical vocabulary, slightly over 50% of the students chose the matching exercises. The analysis per topic shows that 48% of the students in the age and agnosia condition stated that the matching exercise was the most useful in terms of the technical vocabulary acquisition in comparison to the other activities offered in the module, and that 54% of the students in the memory condition reported the usefulness of the matching exercise (Table 2).

Table 2 Students' perception of the efficiency of matching exercises

Topic	No. of the students
Age & agnosia	121/253 (48%)
Memory	125/231 (54%)

4.3. Productive vs receptive technical vocabulary

When we compared the results of multiple-choice questions (receptive vocabulary) with open-ended questions (productive vocabulary), we obtained quite straightforward results: the students provided much better results on multiple-choice questions (Table 3). In the agnosia condition, 58% of the students correctly answered the multiple-choice question whereas only 23% managed to answer the open-ended question. In the memory condition, 72% of the students provided the right answer to the multiple-choice question whereas 59% correctly answered the open-ended question. However, the difference between the two in the memory condition is less pronounced.

Table 3 Acquisition of productive vs receptive technical vocabulary

Topic	Receptive	Productive
Age & agnosia	147/254 (58%)	58/254 (23%)
Memory	161/224 (72%)	133/224 (59%)

4.4. Student motivation

To test student motivation in relation to matching exercises, we asked the participants to indicate the most interesting activity of the module. In particular, this question aimed

at looking into students' intrinsic motivation. Only 16% of the respondents reported that the matching exercises were the most interesting ones.

4.5. Modality

As a reminder, in 2018-2019, the matching exercises contained written definitions, so the modality used was visual whereas in 2019-2020, the definitions were presented in an oral form, so the auditory modality was employed. Hence, in order to analyse the effect of modality on the study of technical vocabulary, what we need to do is to compare the data obtained in 2018-2019 and 2019-2020.

First, we propose to reexamine how the modality intervenes in the efficiency of the matching exercises. In both modules, the same trend can be observed: the number of the correct answers decreased almost by 20% when the auditory modality was used (Table 4).

Table 4 Modality vs efficiency of matching exercises

Topic	Visual modality	Auditory modality
Age estimation and agnosia	68/137 (49%)	38/116 (33%)
Memory	106/133 (80%)	55/98 (56%)

Second, the comparison of the data shows that in the visual modality condition, 65% of the students reported that the matching exercise was the most useful to acquire technical vocabulary. However, the number was almost reduced by a half when the auditory modality was applied (Table 5).

Table 5 Modality vs students' perception of the efficiency of the matching exercises

Modality	No. of the students
Visual	176/270 (65%)
Auditory	73/214 (34%)

Third, in terms of the acquisition of productive and receptive vocabulary, both visual and auditory modalities are more advantageous for the acquisition of receptive vocabulary even though the difference of the acquisition of the two types of vocabulary is more accentuated in the auditory modality condition. In general terms, the visual modality yields significantly better results for the acquisition of both receptive and productive vocabulary. In addition, in comparison with receptive vocabulary, productive vocabulary seems to benefit even more from the visual modality (Table 6).

Table 6 Modality vs productive/ receptive technical vocabulary

Modality	Topic	Receptive	Productive
Visual	Age & agnosia	90/138 (65%)	44/138 (32%)
	Memory	106/126 (84%)	105/126 (83%)
	Overall	196/264 (74%)	149/264 (56%)
Auditory	Age & agnosia	57/116 (49%)	14/116 (12%)
	Memory	55/98 (56%)	28/98 (29%)
	Overall	112/214 (52%)	42/214 (20%)

Finally, in what concerns student motivation, in the visual modality condition, 20% of the students said they preferred the matching exercise to the other activities of the module whereas only 11% of the students expressed their preference towards the matching exercises when the auditory modality was used (Table 7).

Table 7 Modality vs student motivation

Modality	No. of the students
Visual	20%
Auditory	11%

5. DISCUSSION

Even though matching exercises seem to be relatively useful for the study of technical vocabulary, a few elements in particular are worth further discussion.

First, while choosing the modality for matching exercises, it is important to keep in mind that the visual modality produces much better results at all levels: the efficiency of such exercises, students' perception of their efficiency, and student motivation. This could be explained by the cognitive overload related to the working memory. Indeed, we previously mentioned (section 3.4) that the auditory modality associated with note-taking could make the accomplishment of a task more difficult.

Second, students' perception of the efficiency of matching exercises appears to correlate with their ability to provide correct answers, which could mean either that the students' perception reflects the real knowledge acquisition, or that the inability to provide correct answers impacts students' attitudes towards the exercise.

Third, while students believe that matching exercises are useful for vocabulary acquisition, they are not particularly motivated to do them. Although the analysis of all the data collected for our PhD revealed that incidental and implicit vocabulary learning is more efficient than matching exercises, the students felt that the matching exercises and explicit vocabulary learning were more beneficial to them. We could only hypothesise that the confirmation bias (Groome et al., 2014) was at work: the students were accustomed to such learning and they had most likely done matching exercises before, so it was only natural for them to confirm their beliefs concerning the usefulness of matching exercises.

6. LIMITATIONS

Our study is not devoid of limitations. The most salient one is the number of the questionnaire items used to measure the acquisition of technical vocabulary: per teaching module, there were two such items, one allowing to examine the acquisition of receptive vocabulary, and the second one – of productive vocabulary. Although the results show certain tendencies in terms of the usefulness of matching exercises, the numbers are not statistically significant to allow for more generalisable conclusions. The second limitation concerns the topics chosen: it would have been more preferable to select the topics similarly (un)familiar to students in order to have objectively comparable results.

7. CONCLUSION

Far from being an advocate of matching exercises, we included them as control items in our course of English for psychology, designed within the framework of our PhD research. To our surprise, matching exercises seem to be helpful in the study of technical vocabulary, and what is more – they are perceived as such by students. They can be used as a warm-up activity to start a class: when students enter the classroom, they are more often than not agitated and have difficulty getting to work, so doing a traditional activity individually could help teachers bring their students to the reality of their class. Matching exercises are proven beneficial mostly for the study of receptive vocabulary, and they lead to more satisfying results when the visual modality is employed. Even though students do not appreciate doing them, they still find such exercises useful. Finally, matching exercises are easy to design, and they do not require much classroom time to be accomplished. So, if you are hesitant to use matching exercises in your classes, do not precipitate to eliminate them completely.

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Appendix A

Activity 1: Types of Agnosia

Instructions: The exercise describes different types of agnosia. Try to match the descriptions with the type names.

associative agnosia – sensory agnosia – prosopagnosia – visual object agnosia – colour agnosia – integrative agnosia – auditory sound agnosia – simultanagnosia – pure word deafness – apperceptive agnosia – optic aphasia – amorphognosia– ahylognosia

1. A person cannot recognize the meaning of visually presented objects, but sometimes, recognition is better for real objects than for pictures or line drawings. _____
2. A residual category of patients who have difficulty appreciating the nature or name of colour they see. _____
3. The patient experiences an inability to comprehend spoken language, but can read, write, and speak in a relatively normal manner. _____
4. A person is unable to appreciate various characteristics of heard music though the perception of pitch, harmony, timbre, intensity and rhythm may be affected to different degrees or in various combinations. _____
5. A form of visual agnosia in which a person cannot reliably name, match, or discriminate visually presented objects, despite adequate elementary visual function (visual fields, acuity, and colour vision). _____
6. _____ refers to impaired recognition of the size and shape of objects.
7. _____ refers to impaired recognition of the distinctive qualities of objects such as weight, density, texture, and thermal properties.
8. _____ is an inability to comprehend meaning of common environmental sounds, with relative sparing of speech comprehension.
9. A form of visual agnosia in which one retains the ability to recognize elements of objects but is unable to integrate these elements together into comprehensible percept. _____
10. _____ is characterized by an inability to appreciate the overall meaning of a complex picture or stimulus, with preserved perception of isolated elements or details within the stimulus.
11. A form of visual agnosia in which a person cannot use the derived perceptual representation to access stored knowledge of the object's functions and associations but is able to copy and match the drawing even though unable to identify it. _____
12. A condition in which a person cannot name a visually presented object, despite being able to indicate the identity of the object through gesture and sort the visual stimuli into categories. _____
13. A form of visual agnosia in which a person cannot recognize familiar faces, despite adequate elementary visual function (visual fields, acuity, and color vision). _____

Appendix B

Activity 2: Types of Agnosia

Instructions:

The exercise describes different types of agnosia. Try to match the descriptions you will hear with the type names.

associative agnosia – sensory agnosia – prosopagnosia – visual object agnosia – colour agnosia – integrative agnosia – auditory sound agnosia – simultanagnosia – pure word deafness – apperceptive agnosia – optic aphasia – amorphognosia– ahylognosia

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____

Appendix C

Activity 1: Types of Memory and Memories¹⁰

Instructions:

Match the types of memory with their definitions.

flashbulb *short-term* *implicit* *prospective* *false* *reconstructive*
declarative *semantic* *echoic* *retrospective* *iconic* *autobiographical*
long-term *explicit* *episodic* *procedural* *working* *non-declarative*

	a form of long-term memory that involves knowing that something is the case and generally involves conscious recollection; it includes memory for facts and memory for events
	memory that involves conscious recollection of information
	forms of long-term memory that influence behaviour but do not involve conscious recollection; e.g. priming and procedural memory
	memory that does not depend on conscious recollection
	a form of long-term memory concerned with personal experiences or episodes that occurred in a given place at a specific time
	a form of long-term memory consisting of general knowledge about the world, concepts, language, and so on
	skill learning refers to the gradual improvement of performance with practice that generalises to a range of stimuli within a domain of processing (motor skills are important in everyday life: for example, they are needed in word processing, writing, and playing a musical instrument)
	memory for the events of one's own life
	vivid and detailed memories of dramatic events
	memory for events, words, people, and so on encountered or experienced in the past
	remembering to carry out intended actions
	a form of recollection in which some parts of the information recalled are accurate and some parts of the information are inserted from other sources where recollection is missing the data. This seems to occur in most long, term memories for events
	a hypothesized information store in the brain which lasts indefinitely and has no limit on its capacity
	a hypothesized information storage system of a limited capacity

¹⁰ Eysenck, M. W., & Keane, M. T. (2010). *Cognitive psychology: A student's handbook*. Hove: Psychology Press.
 Matsumoto, D. (Ed.). (2009). *The Cambridge dictionary of psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

	which allows material to be used in tasks requiring several seconds and to be repeated for maintenance, as in repeating a telephone number until it is dialed
	recollections of events that have not actually occurred
	a hypothesised very-short-term memory store for visual information which allows the integration of visual information to complete a Gestalt of a scene
	a hypothesised very-short-term memory for sound which allows storage of auditory information long enough for the auditory system to make sense out of it
	hypothesised information storage system containing the information necessary for working on a particular task at a particular time

Appendix D

Activity 2: Types of Memory and Memories¹¹

Instructions:

Match the types of memory with their definitions.

flashbulb *short-term* *implicit* *prospective* *false* *reconstructive*
working *semantic* *echoic* *retrospective* *iconic* *autobiographical*
long-term *explicit* *episodic* *procedural*

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____
14. _____
15. _____
16. _____


¹¹ See the footnote in Appendix 3.

EFFECTIVENESS OF QUIZLET ON WRITING LEVEL OF GFP STUDENTS IN OMAN

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Abstract. *The purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of using the Quizlet tool in enhancing vocabulary acquisition and writing skills development among general foundation program students in Oman. A quasi-experimental, non-equivalent, controlled group design was employed, with a sample of 64 students randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups. The experimental group received vocabulary instruction using the Quizlet tool, while the control group received vocabulary instruction using traditional methods. Pre- and post-tests were administered to measure vocabulary knowledge and writing skills. The results of the t-tests indicated that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group in both vocabulary acquisition and writing skills development. These findings suggest that the use of the Quizlet tool is an effective strategy for supporting vocabulary acquisition and writing skills development among general foundation program students in Oman. Limitations of the study and implications for future research are discussed.*

Key words: *Quizlet, vocabulary acquisition, writing skills development, first language use, second language learning*

1. INTRODUCTION

The acquisition of vocabulary and language skills are two important aspects of learning a language. For language learners, research has repeatedly shown how important vocabulary is, especially in terms of reading comprehension and writing skills (Hu & Nation, 2000). Vocabulary is particularly crucial for pre-intermediate English language learners because it can significantly affect their writing level. By incorporating technology into the learning process, pre-intermediate English language learners can improve their vocabulary retention. A variety of tools and resources can be made available through technology to help students learn and remember new words (Chapelle, 2001). In order to facilitate asynchronous learning, which is defined as learning that takes place without regard to time or location and frequently makes use of technology, mobile applications might be a useful tool (Darabi, Eftekhar Ardabili, & Kaviani, 2015). Mobile applications can offer students a variety of tools and resources that can help with vocabulary development and retention, which will ultimately improve language learning.

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One study discovered that mobile vocabulary learning applications were successful in enhancing English language learners' vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension (Huang & Huang, 2018). The study's findings show that students who used the app significantly increased their vocabulary knowledge, which in turn led to better reading comprehension ratings. Another study discovered that vocabulary learning apps for mobile devices helped English language learners build their vocabulary (Zarei & Mohammadi, 2018). The use of the software, according to the researchers, greatly expanded the learners' vocabulary knowledge, as seen by their improved test-taking results.

In conclusion, vocabulary is extremely important for pre-intermediate learners as they build their English language skills, especially their writing skills. Technology, especially mobile apps, and integration into the classroom, can promote vocabulary learning and the development of language abilities. These strategies provide a variety of interactive tools and resources that can aid students in learning and remembering new words, thereby improving their language ability.

1.1. Problem statement

A key skill for students in Oman's general foundation curriculum is the capacity to express oneself clearly in writing. However, a lot of students have trouble writing, especially during exams when dictionaries are prohibited. Lack of vocabulary is one thing that may make this harder. With a focus on vocabulary learning and retention, the goal of this study is to ascertain how well the Quizlet tool may improve the writing abilities of students in Oman's general foundation curriculum. This study intends to find viable ways for assisting the development of writing abilities in this demographic by looking at the effect of Quizlet on writing performance.

1.2. Significance of the study

Being able to express oneself clearly in writing is an essential skill for students in the general foundation program because it is required for success in postsecondary education and beyond. Nonetheless, a large number of the students in this population have trouble writing well. Lack of vocabulary is one thing that might make writing difficult. With a focus on vocabulary learning and retention, the goal of this study is to ascertain how well the Quizlet tool may improve the writing skills of students in Oman's general foundation curriculum. This study has the potential to shed important light on the efficacy of technology-based techniques for improving vocabulary learning and retention, which will ultimately lead to the development of better writing skills by investigating the effects of Quizlet on writing performance.

The findings of this study will be especially interesting and relevant in terms of discovering viable strategies for increasing language acquisition in pupils. English language instructors and lecturers can utilize Quizlet as a helpful resource to support the development of writing skills in their students by studying how it affects writing abilities. By offering a clearer knowledge of the function of vocabulary in writing skill and the possibilities of technology-based approaches for helping vocabulary acquisition, this research has the potential to contribute to the larger area of language learning. The results of this study may also guide the development of future materials and methods for language instruction, with the ultimate objective of assisting English language learners in the development of their writing abilities.

In conclusion, this study's insights into the effectiveness of technology-based strategies, in particular the Quizlet application, could potentially aid the development of writing skills among English language learners enrolled in the general foundation program in Oman. By comprehending how Quizlet affects writing abilities, English language lecturers may be able to use this tool to support the growth of writing skills in their pupils. The findings of this study may potentially serve as a blueprint for the development of future language learning tools and techniques that aid in the development of English language learners' writing skills.

1.3. Research questions

1. How effective is the Quizlet tool in Oman for helping students in the general foundation program increase their vocabulary and writing skills when compared to other vocabulary learning techniques?

2. How does the first-language approach affect second-language learners' vocabulary learning and retention in English-language classrooms?

These research questions will aid in directing the investigation and give it a specific direction. By responding to these inquiries, the study will be able to look at how the Quizlet tool affects vocabulary learning and writing abilities and pinpoint probable elements that might affect its efficiency.

1.4. Hypothesis

According to vocabulary tests and writing evaluations, the Quizlet tool supports vocabulary acquisition and the development of writing skills in general foundation program pupils in Oman more effectively than other vocabulary learning methods. Also, several studies and theories have shown that teaching English to students in their first language considerably improves their vocabulary learning and retention in the general foundation program in Oman. This is especially important for pupils whose first language is their strongest because they could find it simpler to pick up new terminology in their mother tongue before translating it to the second.

For second language learners, especially those who are more proficient in their first language, employing the first language in English classes may have a good effect on vocabulary enrichment. This is because learning new terminology in the native language can take place in a cozier and more familiar environment, which might aid in acquisition and retention (Cummins, 1979). The relationship between learning a first language and a second language is complex and multifaceted, and there may be additional factors that have an impact on vocabulary learning and retention. The effects of using the first language in English language classes in a particular environment, such as the wider public, must thus be researched.

1.5. Research objectives

1. To assess the Quizlet tool's effectiveness in assisting vocabulary learning and the development of writing abilities among Omani students enrolled in the general foundation program. With the goal of enhancing language competence, this objective looks to determine the most efficient method for assisting vocabulary learning and the development of writing abilities in this population.

2. To examine the effects of employing the students' native tongue in English language instruction on vocabulary learning and retention among students in Oman's general foundation program. To discover any potential advantages or difficulties connected with this strategy, this purpose intends to investigate the relationship between the use of the first language and vocabulary acquisition and retention in a second language environment.

3. To determine the elements that might affect the way the Quizlet tool and the use of the student's native tongue in English language classes affect vocabulary learning and the development of writing abilities in Oman students enrolled in general foundation programs. To determine the effectiveness of various vocabulary learning strategies and the use of the native tongue in English language classrooms, it is important to understand the role the various variables, including language proficiency, age, learning style, and motivation, play in these processes. Understanding these elements may make it possible to create more specialized and efficient strategies for assisting this population's growth of their vocabulary and writing abilities.

1.6. Definition of terms

- *Vocabulary acquisition*: The process of learning and acquiring new words and their meanings.
- *Vocabulary retention*: The ability to retain newly acquired vocabulary over time.
- *Writing skills*: The ability to effectively communicate through written language, including the ability to construct well-written sentences and paragraphs, use appropriate grammar and vocabulary, and organize ideas logically.
- *Language proficiency*: The ability to use a language effectively and accurately for communication.
- *First language*: The language that a person learned first and speaks most fluently. In this research, it is the Arabic language.
- *Second language*: A language learned after the first language, often with the goal of improving communication skills in that language. In this research, it is the English language.
- *General Foundation Programme*: A program designed to provide foundational knowledge and skills in various academic subjects for new students preparing to enter higher education.
- *Quizlet tool*: An online learning platform that allows users to create and use digital flashcards and games to study and learn new vocabulary autonomously.

1.7. Study Limitations

The study has several limitations, with the first being related to sampling. The size of the study's sample may be too small, potentially limiting the broader applicability of its findings. Additionally, the sample might not accurately represent Oman's general foundation program students, making it challenging to draw generalizations about them.

Another limitation pertains to data collection methods. The study relies on self-report measures to assess vocabulary development and writing abilities, which may introduce bias or subjectivity. Furthermore, the study solely relies on writing assessments as its data source, which might not capture the full complexity of language learning.

Lastly, the study faces time constraints. It may cover only a short period, potentially overlooking the longer-term impacts of the Quizlet tool or the use of students' native tongues in English language classes on vocabulary development and writing abilities.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. The Role of Vocabulary in Language Development

A key component of learning a language is developing a vocabulary, and studies have repeatedly demonstrated that vocabulary size and knowledge are directly related to total language ability (Schmitt, Schmitt, & Clapham, 2001). The lexical approach views vocabulary as the language's building blocks, and it holds that establishing a strong vocabulary is crucial to communicating effectively in a second language (Lewis, 1993).

To describe the process of language acquisition and retention, various hypotheses have been put forth. According to Krashen's (1982) input hypothesis, learners pick up vocabulary by being exposed to intelligible input—language that is just a little bit beyond their current level of comprehension. Learners will gain more knowledge the more exposure they receive to this kind of information (Krashen, 1982). According to Swain's (1985) output theory, vocabulary is also acquired by learners through production, or the active use of language. This theory says that in order to remember new vocabulary and integrate their knowledge, learners must actively make language (Swain, 1985).

It has also been demonstrated that explicit vocabulary education, such as the direct teaching of word definitions and usage, is helpful for enhancing vocabulary knowledge (Nagy, Herman, & Anderson, 1985). Vocabulary acquisition can also benefit from repetition and repeated exposure to new vocabulary through reading and listening exercises (Nation, 2001). Also, the use of context and other lexical cues can aid students in deducing the meaning of unfamiliar words and enhancing their vocabulary skills (Nation, 2001).

In conclusion, there are many different aspects that might affect vocabulary learning and retention, making the topic of vocabulary's involvement in the evolution of the English language complex and diverse. The use of technology-based learning aids, exposure to intelligible information, production, explicit instruction, and other essential tactics and approaches have all been found to support vocabulary learning in research. By taking into account these and other elements, language teachers and students can pinpoint efficient vocabulary-acquisition techniques and encourage the growth of a wide-ranging vocabulary in English.

2.2. The Role of Asynchronous and Autonomous Learning in Language Acquisition

Particularly in the context of online and remote learning, asynchronous and autonomous learning are two methods of language acquisition that have recently attracted more and more attention. Asynchronous learning is when learning takes place at many times and places without the need for immediate interaction with teachers or other students. Learners engage with the learning materials and activities on their own (Kear, 2020). On the other hand, autonomous learning refers to the capacity of learners to take charge of their own learning, making decisions about what and how they study, and setting their own learning objectives (Benson & Voller, 1997). take charge of their own learning, making decisions about what and how they learn and setting their own learning goals (Benson & Voller, 1997).

Asynchronous and autonomous learning have been shown to provide a number of potential advantages for language acquisition. For instance, asynchronous learning can provide students the freedom to study at their own pace and on their own schedule, which can be very useful for individuals who have other responsibilities or are located in other time zones (Kear, 2020). On the other hand, autonomous learning can enable students to take charge of their own education and participate in self-directed activities that are catered to their unique learning requirements and objectives (Benson & Voller, 1997). This can encourage a sense of ownership and responsibility for learning, which can boost motivation and engagement (Benson & Voller, 1997).

Asynchronous and autonomous learning, notably when it comes to language acquisition, can give students more access to authentic language resources and chances to use their language abilities in real-world situations (Kear, 2020). This could aid in enhancing one's ability to communicate and using more natural language (Kear, 2020). Asynchronous and autonomous learning can also provide students more control over the course material and pace, which can be especially advantageous for those who may have varied learning preferences or preferred forms of instruction (Benson & Voller, 1997).

To be effective, asynchronous, and independent learning may not be appropriate for all students and may call for additional help and scaffolding (Kear, 2020). Also, in order for students to participate in the lessons and activities effectively, these strategies can necessitate that they possess a certain level of digital literacy and self-regulation abilities (Benson & Voller, 1997).

In conclusion, asynchronous and autonomous language learning are two methods that can give students more freedom, control, and access to real-world language resources. These methods can encourage a sense of ownership and responsibility for learning while supporting the development of communicative competence and the acquisition of more natural language use. Asynchronous and autonomous learning may not be appropriate for all students, and they may need additional assistance and scaffolding to be successful. Also, for students to participate fully in the lessons and activities, these techniques might call for them to possess a certain level of digital literacy and self-regulation skills in order to effectively engage with the learning materials and activities.

Overall, asynchronous, and autonomous learning have many advantages for language acquisition, but it's crucial to carefully assess each learner's needs and give the support and scaffolding required to achieve success.

2.3. The Pros and Cons of Using the First Language in Second Language Acquisition

For many years, scholars and educators have debated the use of the first language (L1) in the acquisition of second languages (L2), presenting both supportive and opposing viewpoints. On the one hand, those who support the usage of the L1 contend that it can offer a comforting and familiar environment for learning, especially for those students who are more skilled in their L1 (Cummins, 1979). The transmission of knowledge and abilities between languages, such as vocabulary, grammar, and cultural understanding, can also be facilitated by using the L1 (Cummins, 1979). Moreover, using the L1 can help learners maintain their L1 skills and give them a sense of pride and identity (Garca & Sylvan, 2011).

However, critics of L1 use contend that it might cause disruption and confusion, especially if students rely too heavily on their L1 to comprehend and generate L2 (Cook, 2003). The L1 can be used to build a sense of dependency, which can impede the

development of L2 competency (Cook, 2003). Moreover, the L1 may cause a linguistic and cultural gap among learners who speak the same L1, which may reduce opportunities for genuine conversation and cross-cultural exchange (Garca & Sylvan, 2011).

Briefly stated, the use of the L1 in L2 acquisition is a complex and multifaceted issue, and the impact of L1 use on L2 learning may depend on a variety of factors, such as the learner's proficiency in both languages, the context of L2 learning, and the objectives of L2 instruction (Garca & Sylvan, 2011). As a result, it is crucial for educators to carefully weigh the advantages and disadvantages of L1 use in L2 learning and come to wise decisions about when and how to incorporate the L1 into L2 instruction.

2.4. Previous Studies

Using Quizlet to Enhance Language Learning

An increasing corpus of studies has looked into how well Quizlet, a digital flashcard and study tool, works to improve language acquisition. Many studies have shown that Quizlet can be an effective and entertaining tool for memorizing vocabulary, especially when combined with other language learning exercises (Bouhnik & Manor, 2018; Hsu & Chen, 2019; Kaya & Kaya, 2018; Lee, 2018).

In their study, Bouhnik and Manor (2018) found that Quizlet was effective at improving vocabulary acquisition and retention for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, as measured by vocabulary tests and self-reported learning strategies. The study also found that learners who used Quizlet reported higher levels of motivation and engagement compared to those who did not use the tool. These findings suggest that Quizlet may be a useful and engaging tool for vocabulary learning and retention among EFL learners.

Similar findings were made by Hsu and Chen (2019), who discovered that Quizlet helped Taiwanese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners improve their vocabulary knowledge and memory as measured by vocabulary tests and a retention exam given one week after the initial learning. The survey also discovered that students who utilized Quizlet had greater levels of satisfaction with their educational experience than those who did not. These findings suggest that Quizlet may be a helpful and effective tool for vocabulary learning and retention among ESL learners, and that it may be particularly beneficial for increasing motivation and engagement in learning. results imply that Quizlet might be a helpful and successful tool for vocabulary learning and retention among EFL learners, and that it might be especially advantageous for enhancing happiness with the learning process.

Furthermore, Quizlet was beneficial in improving vocabulary understanding and retention for Turkish English as a Second Language (ESL) students, as evidenced by vocabulary exams given before and after the learning intervention, according to Kaya and Kaya's research. Comparatively to students who did not use the service, Quizlet users also reported better levels of engagement and passion. These results imply that Quizlet may be a valuable and successful tool for ESL learners to learn and retain vocabulary, and that it may be especially helpful for boosting motivation and engagement in learning.

Al-Hinai and Al-(2020) Rasbi's study on the efficacy of Quizlet for vocabulary learning and retention among Omani English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners is another study that might be included in this review. Al-Hinai and Al-Rasbi (2020) discovered via their study that Quizlet was successful in increasing vocabulary retention

and knowledge as shown by vocabulary tests given both before and after the learning intervention. In addition, the study discovered that Quizlet users reported better levels of motivation and engagement than Quizlet non-users. According to these findings, Quizlet may be a helpful and efficient tool for vocabulary learning and retention among EFL learners in Oman, and it may be especially helpful for boosting motivation and engagement in learning.

Overall, there are some limitations, conclusions, and recommendations that are shared by the investigations by Bouhnik and Manor (2018), Hsu and Chen (2019), Kaya and Kaya (2018), Lee (2018), and Al-Hinai and Al-Rasbi (2020).

The small sample sizes in these studies are a typical flaw that may restrict the generalizability of the results. Another prevalent drawback is that some of the research lacked control groups, which makes it challenging to separate the effects of Quizlet from other variables that might have affected the outcomes. Some of the studies also lacked long-term follow-up tests to determine how long Quizlet's impacts on vocabulary learning and retention will last.

In terms of findings, all of these research articles discovered that Quizlet helped English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners increase their vocabulary understanding and retention. In some of the studies, Quizlet was also linked to higher levels of engagement and motivation, as well as higher degrees of satisfaction with the educational process.

According to all the research, Quizlet may be a helpful and efficient tool for EFL learners to learn and retain vocabulary. When using Quizlet, it is crucial to keep in mind the specific language learning context and the instructional goals because these are the two things that may determine how effective the tool is. More study is required to assess Quizlet's effects on vocabulary learning and retention over the long term, as well as to examine Quizlet's application in other language learning situations and with different learner demographics.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

The usefulness of Quizlet for vocabulary learning and retention among students in Oman's general foundation program might be investigated using a quasi-experimental design. The study subjects would be split into two groups according to this design: an experimental group that utilizes Quizlet to acquire vocabulary, and a control group that does not. Pre- and post-tests would be administered to both groups to gauge their vocabulary retention and knowledge, and the results would be compared to ascertain the efficiency of Quizlet.

The ability to compare the two groups, which can assist in establishing a causal link between Quizlet use and vocabulary learning and retention, is one benefit of adopting a quasi-experimental methodology. Use of a non-equivalent, controlled group design is required by the researcher. It is crucial to understand that this design is less rigorous than a randomized controlled trial since participants are not randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups. It could be more challenging to account for any confounds and biases as well as to guarantee that the groups are comparable before the investigation begins.

3.1. Population and Sample

Students in Oman's general foundation program learning English as a foreign language would make up the study's population (EFL). The general foundation program students in Oman offer a distinct and pertinent environment for this study, which intends to investigate the efficacy of Quizlet for vocabulary learning and retention among EFL learners.

The study's sample is chosen using a convenient sampling technique. The study was conducted using a non-equivalent, controlled group design. The sample size $n=64$. 30 of them are females and 34 are males.

3.2. Instruments

A variety of tools were utilized in this study to gather information and assess how well the Quizlet tool could help Omani students enrolled in general foundation programs improve their writing abilities. Writing tests were the main tools used to assess changes in writing abilities. They have given both before and after the intervention. The tests were created to measure the study's objectives. In addition to the writing tests, a survey was given to participants to learn more about their opinions about and experiences with the Quizlet product.

3.3. Procedure

There are several steps that were followed to conduct this study using a quasi experimental design. First, identify the study sample. The first step would be to identify the study sample and recruit participants for the study. This involved reaching out to convenient sampling to administer the tests. Secondly, identify the control and experiment groups and administer pre-tests: Both the experimental and control groups were given pre-tests to measure their current vocabulary knowledge and writing skills. This would provide a baseline against which the post-test results can be compared. Third, implement the intervention: The experimental group would then begin using Quizlet for vocabulary learning, while the control group would not use Quizlet. The intervention involved assigning a set number of Quizlet flashcards to be completed each week, and allowing the participants to use Quizlet at their own pace. After two weeks, the post-test was administered. Both the experimental and control groups were given post-tests to measure vocabulary knowledge and writing skills. The results of the post-tests were compared to the pre-test results to determine the effectiveness of Quizlet for vocabulary learning and retention. Finally, the data was analyzed. The collected data was then analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques to determine the effectiveness of Quizlet for vocabulary learning and retention. This could involve comparing the pre- and posttest results for the experimental and control groups, and examining any differences between the groups. The final step was to write a report summarizing the findings of the study and discussing the implications for vocabulary learning and retention among general foundation program students in Oman.

3.4. Study Variables

There are several variables that could be considered for this study:

3.4.1. Independent variable: In this study, the use of Quizlet for vocabulary learning serves as the independent variable. The experimental group would use Quizlet, whereas the control group wouldn't, and the researcher would adjust this variable.

3.4.2. *Dependent variables*: Writing proficiency and vocabulary knowledge. The efficiency of Quizlet for vocabulary learning and retention would be assessed using these characteristics, which would be examined using the written assessments.

3.4.3. *Control variables*: To guarantee that the results are accurate and reliable, it is crucial to control the other variables that can affect the study's findings. Age, gender, language ability, past English exposure, and learner motivation are a few examples of potential control variables. By stratifying the sample or by employing statistical methods to account for potential confounds, these variables could be managed.

3.5. Research Validity

A pretest-posttest control group design was used in this study to guarantee internal validity. One set of participants used the Quizlet program to learn vocabulary and hone their writing skills, while the control group does not. The study can account for additional variables that can affect writing skills, including prior knowledge or motivation, by comparing the outcomes of the two groups, and it can pinpoint any variations in the findings to the use of the Quizlet application. This makes it possible to confidently attribute the study's findings to the independent variable under investigation rather than to other variables.

The use of a representative sample of Oman students enrolled in general foundation programs ensures the external validity of this study, enhancing the applicability of the findings to this community. In order to assess if the findings are generalizable, other researchers can replicate the study in various settings or with various populations because the research design and methodology are clear and replicable. This makes it easier to confidently extrapolate the study's findings to populations or settings other than the study's particular sample and context. This study is able to produce solid and trustworthy results that may be applied to various contexts and populations outside of the particular sample and environment by boosting both internal and external validity.

3.6. Research Reliability

A customized writing test was created and used to assess writing abilities in order to assure the validity of this study. This exam was specifically created to evaluate the study's learning objectives and will be adjusted to each participant's level to make sure it is both rigorous and pertinent to their language proficiency. In order to ensure that the assessments are graded consistently and fairly, the writing samples will also be evaluated using a pre-designed and reviewed marking rubric. These metrics will aid in ensuring the validity of the writing exam and the overall validity of the research findings. The study can limit measurement error by carefully crafting and administering the writing test and by utilizing a fair and consistent scoring system.

4. DISCUSSION

The table below demonstrates that the two groups; control and experimental, are equal in terms of the mean and standard deviation. This ensures that the first test has drawn a baseline for the study. It established an understanding that both groups were distributed equally.

Table 1 Group Statistics

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Test 1	Control Group	32	13.9063	3.60	.5404
	Experimental Group	32	13.5781	3.20	.5662

The focus of the second level of analysis was on identifying variations among the control and experimental group. The results of the study showed that Quizlet has a positive and significant effect on improving students' writing abilities. The students who utilized Quizlet in the experimental group had a much higher mean score on the writing test than the control group, according to the results of the t-test for equality of means, which showed a significant difference between the experimental and control groups (p-value .001). Furthermore, it was discovered that there were 16 students in the experimental group who demonstrated some improvement in the second test, whereas there were only 6 in the control group who achieved high test 2 scores. Additionally, there were 6 students from the control group who had low scores, whereas there was only 1 student from the experimental group who received a low score. This outcome is in line with that of earlier research that found Quizlet to be a helpful resource for improving students' vocabulary and recall. Quizlet could assist students master new vocabulary words while also sharpening their writing abilities, which are essential for success in both school and the profession.

The study's potential to advance language learning by emphasizing the effectiveness of technology-based approaches to improving vocabulary learning and retention makes it significant. Quizlet's effect on writing abilities can be understood by English language teachers, who can then make use of this instrument to help their pupils improve their writing abilities. Important to note is that although the t-test findings show a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups, the effect size also has a major impact. The findings' relevance to real-world applications and the extent to which the intervention affected students' writing abilities could be better understood with further research of the effect size.

The findings of this study addressing the efficiency of Quizlet in boosting vocabulary learning and the potential advantages of using the first language in language learning are further supported by the survey results. The survey consisted of 5 Likertscale items questioning students' perceptions about the use of the Quizlet. It was found that Quizlet was well-received and thought of by the participants as a helpful tool in their language learning process, based on the high number of students who strongly agreed that Quizlet is a good way for vocabulary development (92%). This is in line with earlier study that discovered technology-based tools can improve language learning outcomes.

A further indication of the possible advantages of including the first language in language acquisition is the high percentage of students (90%) who agreed or strongly agreed that using the first language when learning new terms in the second language is extremely useful. This result is in line with research suggesting that speaking one's native language can help beginner language learners acquire new words and enhance their understanding. To help students understand new vocabulary and eventually improve their language learning results, instructors and language educators should think about including the first language in language learning resources and practice.

Overall, the poll findings emphasize the potential advantages of including the first language in language learning and offer more proof of the efficiency of Quizlet in increasing vocabulary learning. The results of this study, along with those from the survey, offer important insights for language teachers and imply that using technology based tools like Quizlet in conjunction with speaking the target language can be successful strategies for promoting language learning and enhancing writing abilities.

The study's findings, taken together, imply that Quizlet is a useful tool for enhancing students' writing abilities, notably in vocabulary learning and retention. The findings could influence the creation of new materials and methods for language instruction, ultimately assisting in the improvement of writing abilities among English language learners.

5. CONCLUSION

The goal of this study, which focused on vocabulary learning and retention, was to ascertain the efficiency of Quizlet in increasing students' writing abilities in Oman's general foundation curriculum. The study's findings offer important information on how technology-based strategies might increase vocabulary learning and retention, which ultimately strengthens students' writing skills.

The experimental design of the study provided compelling proof of Quizlet's effectiveness in enhancing students' writing abilities. The data analysis showed a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups, proving that Quizlet users greatly outperformed the control group in terms of mean writing test scores.

The study's conclusions are important for researchers, students, and English language teachers alike. Quizlet is a useful tool that English language lecturers can use to help their students strengthen their writing abilities. Students can utilize Quizlet to increase their vocabulary learning and retention, which will result in enhanced writing abilities required for success in school and in the workplace.

According to research, it can be advantageous for language learners to use their native tongue when learning a second language, especially in the beginning. Teachers and resources can build a bridge to help students comprehend the meanings of new vocabulary in the second language by utilizing the learner's first language. Quizlet was utilized in the current study to help students learn English vocabulary, but it was also successful in improving the students' writing abilities because the definitions were given in the students' native Arabic. Using the native language in this way helps lessen cognitive load and make learning and remembering new terminology easier, which eventually improves writing skills. As a result, including the first language in language learning resources and training may be a valid strategy for enhancing language learning and proficiency.

The study's overall findings show the potential of technology-based methods for assisting English language learners in the development of their vocabulary and writing abilities. The study's findings advance the field of language learning by deepening our understanding of the relationship between vocabulary and writing skills as well as the possibilities of technology-based vocabulary learning strategies. With the ultimate goal of helping the development of writing skills in English language learners, the results may assist shape the creation of future language learning tools and methodologies.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that teachers implement Quizlet into their lesson plans in Oman's general foundation curriculum to improve students' vocabulary learning and writing skills in light of the study's findings. Students who struggle with language and writing abilities may find this technology-based approach to be especially helpful. To help students learn and retain new vocabulary, teachers can also teach new terms in the second language using the students' native tongue.

Also, more research should be done to examine how well Quizlet works to improve writing skills for various student groups and situations. Future research can also look at the effects of combining traditional teaching techniques with technology-based solutions to improve language learning outcomes.

It is recommended that instructors consider students' opinions and attitudes toward using technology-based resources and their first language when teaching a second language considering the study results. By taking into account and incorporating students' preferences into their instructional approaches, educators can improve their teaching processes. Lastly, educators and language learning institutions may work together to create cutting-edge, technology-based language learning tools that cater to the needs of English language learners in Oman's general foundation curriculum.

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THE IMPACT OF MOBILE ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING (MALL) IN DEVELOPING THE SPEAKING SKILL: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

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Abstract. *Mobile technology and its applications are among the technologies in education developing the fastest. They present an alluring chance to access numerous information sources at any time and location. In the study context, students who enrol on the Foundation program at Dubai Men's College in the United Arab Emirates (the UAE) suffer from a cumulative lack of language proficiency in general and speaking proficiency in particular. The study's primary purpose was to examine the impact of Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) on students' English language speaking skills. The study also examined how teachers perceived MALL's effect on students' speaking skills. The research question was: To what extent did students' speaking skills in the experimental group develop through MALL compared to those in the control group? This subject was addressed using a mixed-method approach, including qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. A quasi-experiment of 66 students formed an experimental and a control group, and 20 teachers were involved. The results showed that the experimental group had statistically significant differences from the control group. The study emphasised the advantages of adopting MALL to develop students' speaking skills, particularly those unmotivated.*

Key words: *MALL, EFL Learners, Speaking Skills, EFL Teachers' Perspectives 1*

1. INTRODUCTION

Integrating Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) in education has garnered significant attention recently, reflecting a paradigm shift towards more adaptive and personalised pedagogical approaches. This evolution in educational technology, particularly in language learning, is driven by rapid technological advancements and the changing educational landscape that demands accessible and individualised learning experiences (Hwang & Lai, 2020). MALL, which involves using mobile devices like smartphones and tablets for educational purposes, is increasingly recognised for its potential in enhancing language proficiency, especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. This is particularly relevant when language skills are crucial for academic and professional success.

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In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), proficiency in the English language is a pivotal requirement for academic advancement, especially in higher education institutions like the Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT). HCT, a premier educational institution in the UAE, mandates a minimum English language proficiency for admission, typically evaluated through standardised tests like the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), with a benchmark score 5.0. This policy underscores the critical role of English in the UAE's academic and professional sectors and highlights the need for effective language teaching methodologies.

The challenge of enhancing English speaking skills among students at HCT is exceptionally pressing. This demographic exhibits challenges in language proficiency, characterised by low motivation, learner autonomy, and retention issues (Alzieni, 2020). Here, MALL offers a promising solution. According to Cochrane et al. (2022), MALL facilitates real-world interaction and immersive learning experiences, potentially improving language skills and performance. The rationale for using MALL in this context is its ability to provide a more engaging, flexible, and contextually relevant learning environment compared to traditional methods, which can be particularly effective in addressing the specific challenges faced by the students at HCT.

This study evaluates MALL's impact on students' speaking skills in the Foundation Program at HCT. It seeks to compare the development of speaking skills between students engaged in MALL (experimental group) and those in traditional learning settings (control group). Additionally, the study explores teachers' perspectives on the efficacy of MALL in enhancing English speaking skills, providing insights into the practical application of this technology in an educational setting.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform decision-makers at HCT and similar institutions about the effectiveness of MALL in language education. By assessing the benefits and barriers of MALL, this study contributes to the broader discourse on integrating technology in language education and its implications for future pedagogical strategies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

MALL represents a dynamic shift in educational paradigms, leveraging the ubiquity and technological capabilities of mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets to facilitate language learning. The core advantage of MALL lies in its ability to provide learners with the flexibility to access educational content anytime and anywhere, which is instrumental in creating a learner-centric environment (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008). This flexibility is not just about spatial and temporal convenience but also encompasses the adaptability of learning experiences to individual learner needs, preferences, and learning styles. Studies have shown that MALL can significantly enhance learner engagement and motivation, critical factors in language acquisition (Burston, 2015). The interactive nature of mobile technologies, including multimedia capabilities and gamified learning elements, contributes to this heightened engagement.

Furthermore, the cost-effectiveness of MALL is a notable consideration, especially in contexts where access to traditional educational resources is limited or expensive. Peters (2011) highlights that MALL reduces the reliance on physical infrastructure and traditional instructional materials, presenting a more economical alternative to conventional language education settings. However, the implementation of MALL is not without challenges. Technical issues, such as device compatibility and internet connectivity, alongside concerns regarding content quality and pedagogical effectiveness, require ongoing attention (Hockly, 2013). Despite these challenges, the potential of MALL to revolutionise language education is immense. It facilitates a more personalised, interactive, and contextually relevant learning experience, significant for language learners who require frequent and meaningful interaction with the target language (Rosell-Aguilar, 2018). As such, MALL is increasingly recognised not just as a tool for language learning but as a transformative approach that reshapes how languages are taught and learned.

By reviewing educational and psychological schools of thought, significant connections can be drawn between these theories and Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL). For instance, behaviourism is a psychological theory pioneered by figures like B.F. Skinner focuses on observable behaviours, positing that all behaviours are learned through environmental interaction (Skinner, 1957). This theory is particularly relevant to MALL, as mobile learning environments are designed to provide stimuli and immediate feedback, which are critical components in behaviourist learning.

In MALL, learning activities often involve repetitive practice, immediate reinforcement, and interactive tasks that align with behaviourist principles. For example, language learning apps frequently use drill-and-practice exercises, which mirror the behaviourist approach of reinforcing correct responses through repetition and positive feedback (Stockwell, 2007). This method is effective in helping learners acquire new language structures and vocabulary, akin to how behaviourist techniques shape desired behaviours.

Furthermore, the behaviourist theory's emphasis on observable and measurable outcomes aligns with the data-driven nature of MALL. Many mobile learning applications are equipped with tracking and analytics features, allowing for the measurement of learner progress and engagement, an aspect that resonates with behaviourist approaches to education (Lefrançois, 2019). Therefore, understanding behaviourism provides valuable insights into how and why certain aspects of MALL are practical in language learning, illustrating the intersection between psychological theories and educational technology. "In mobile learning, Behaviourism can be applied by using technology to track and reinforce desired behaviours in learners. For example, a mobile learning app might use rewards or incentives to encourage students to engage with educational content on their mobile devices. Studies have shown that behaviourist principles can effectively improve learning outcomes in mobile learning environments. For example, using rewards and feedback in a mobile learning game enhanced students' motivation and performance (Xiao et al., 2014).

Examining some well-known theories on second language acquisition makes it possible to see a connection between them and MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning). Krashen (1998) proposes two ways to develop language skills: acquisition and learning. The acquisition involves unconsciously internalising knowledge through communication, similar to how a person learns their first language. On the other hand, learning is the conscious acquisition of knowledge about a language (e.g. grammar or form), often resulting from formal language instruction. According to Krashen's theory, natural communication is the most effective way to learn a language. MALL supports and

encourages authentic, real-world language use, which can help learners "acquire" the language rather than "learn" it. Additionally, Krashen's Comprehensible Input Hypothesis suggests that learners must understand the input they receive to produce comprehensible output. MALL is easily understandable and engaging, making it relevant to the learner.

Furthermore, MALL has the potential to improve speaking skills by providing learners with opportunities to practice speaking and receive feedback on their performance. Studies have shown that MALL can be effective in enhancing speaking skills. For example, a study has shown that mobile devices to support speaking practice improved students' pronunciation and fluency in English as a second language (ESL) (Lin et al., 2014). Another study found that mobile technology in a blended learning environment improved students' speaking skills and language proficiency (Kukulska-Hulme et al., 2009).

In another English Language Acquisition setting, Palfreyman (2012) conducted a study at Zayed University in the UAE on how available mobile technology (students' camera phones) can be used to enhance learners' input into the curriculum, to promote intercultural learning among teachers and students, and to improve students' productive skills; speaking and writing. Students also used their phone cameras to give insight into their culture. They made videos using mobile apps such as iMovie. They also used some other apps to reflect on these photos and videos. These pictures and movies encouraged dialogue between students and their teachers. This study showed that MALL creates a relaxing atmosphere of intercultural learning and promotes discussion. Palfreyman (2012) asserts that using MALL provides a simple, sustainable way for students to generate meaningful content that contributes to the learning goals. He also points out that the results show some improvement in students' productive skills.

In conclusion, most of the research that studied the effect of MALL on English language skills in general and on speaking skills, in particular, showed a positive impact as these devices open the doors to the learner for more practice and exposure to the language.

3. METHODOLOGY

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected to achieve the purpose of this study. Data were collected from multiple sources, including quasi-experimental and descriptive research methods, to triangulate data collection. The IELTS (International et al.) speaking test was used as a pretest and post-test for the experimental and control groups. IELTS seems to be a reliable measure of language proficiency. IELTS has a high relevance in structure, criteria and content. The researcher had permission to access some of her IELTS resources and exams used at DMC.

The experimental group was two third-year classes (33 students) from Dubai Men's College. The researcher was tasked with teaching them. Another two sections were used in the control group. The researcher ensured that the main characteristics of the two groups were as similar as possible. Table (2) shows the essential features of the experimental and control group. The following table shows the baseline characteristics of the experimental and control groups.

Table 1 Baseline Characteristics of the Experimental Group and the Control Group

Area	Experimental Group	Control Group
Age Factor	17-21	17-20
Sex	Males	Males & Females
Language Level	L3 Foundations Program	L3 Foundations program
CEPA Score	(164-170)	(164-170)
CEFR Level	B1	B1
(Common European Framework of Reference)		
IELTS Score	3.5-4.0	3.5-4.0
Curriculum Used	IELTS Skills Preparation_B1 (CEFR)	IELTS Skills Preparation_B1(CEFR)
Nationalities	UAE	UAE + Arabs
Number of students	33 (3 excluded as they did not sit for the post-test)	33
Age Factor	17-21	17-20
Sex	Males	Males & Females
Language Level	L3 Foundations Program	L3 Foundations program
CEPA Score	(164–170)	(164–170)

The pretest was done in the first week of the study, and the post-test was in the last week for both the control and experimental groups. The pretest's objectives were to prove that the experimental and control groups had no significant difference in these tests' results. In contrast, the post-tests examined the effect of MALL on the students' speaking skills.

The researchers in this study used purposeful sampling to select five teachers, two males and three females, with more than three years of experience in teaching using MALL—this qualitative method aimed to determine knowledgeable and experienced participants in the topic of the study. The researchers then interviewed these teachers, asking them questions about the impact of MALL on students' speaking skills. These interviews provided the researchers with valuable information about the topic of the study. These are the major interview questions:

- Do you think that MALL has developed students' language skills? How?
- Do you believe that MALL has developed students' speaking skills? How?
- What is essential for implementing a successful MALL in an institution? i.e. IT Support,
- What issues are barriers to implementing a booming MALL in an institution?
- Please Feel Free to Add Any Additional Comments

4. FINDINGS

The study's findings answered the main two research questions. The results of the speaking pretest showed that there was no significant difference in the Speaking scores between the Experimental Group ($M=55.00$, $SD=6.5$ and the Control Group ($M=65.82$, $SD=6.5$) conditions; $t(64) = -1.139$, $p = 0.13$. The following table represents the Speaking Scores of the pretest.

Table 2 The Speaking Scores of the Pretest:

The Speaking Scores/Group Statistics

	Group Name	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Speaking	Experimental Group	33	55.0000	6.49519	1.13067
	Control Group	33	56.8182	6.47328	1.12685

The Speaking Scores/Independent Samples Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means								
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Speaking	Equal variances assumed	.584	.448	-1.139	64	.259	-1.81818	1.59631	-5.00718	1.37082
	Equal variances are not assumed			-1.139	63.999	.259	-1.81818	1.59631	-5.00718	1.37082

For the post-test, the results show a highly significant difference in mean scores of the Speaking post-test in favour of the Experimental Group. [Experimental Group (M=75.17, SD=7.13) and Control Group (M=58.79, SD=5.16) conditions; $t(61) = 10.515$, $p = 0.000$ which is ≤ 0.05 .]

The research results show that the MALL model succeeded in developing the speaking skills of the experimental group (M=75.1). The options that this model provides for speaking-based projects are noticeable. The collaboration opportunities are motivating, and they could inspire students. Many educational apps that promote speaking and communication skills are provided to the experimental group. For example, TED Talks, Keynote, Zaption, Haiku Deck, and interactive digital books have offered fruitful ground for these students to practice speaking. However, the control group did not provide these options (M=58.8). Consequently, the fourth hypothesis is accepted. The following table shows the statistical results of the speaking post-test.

Table 3 The t-test results of differences between the experimental group and the control group about the Speaking post-test

Group Statistics

	Group Name	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Speaking	Experimental Group	30	75.1667	7.12975	1.30171
	Control Group	33	58.7879	5.15847	.89797

Independent Samples Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means								
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Speaking	Equal variances assumed	1.224	.273	10.515	61	.000	16.37879	1.55762	13.26412	19.49345
	Equal variances are not assumed			10.357	52.412	.000	16.37879	1.58139	13.20608	19.55149

The results of the qualitative analysis of the interviews showed a range of opinions on the topic of the study. Most teachers favoured MALL and believed it positively impacted students' speaking skills. Some teachers favoured MALL under certain conditions, while others did not like the MALL strategy. For example, a female teacher said in an interview, "MALL gives [students] various ways to practice speaking through effective apps and websites: Keynotes, iMovie, e-texts, and Spark Video."

In conclusion, this significant improvement in speaking skills is attributed to using MALL. The impact of these ubiquitous devices is noticeable. These devices are easily portable, facilitate social collaboration, and enhance authenticity and connectivity. Stimulating learning in a real-world context motivates students to learn and practice the skills they need once they enter the job market. However, the traditional method is not a complete failure as the post-test results also show improved student language skills. Still, it could not be compared with the impact that MALL has on the language skills and the autonomy of the learners, which was significant.

5. DISCUSSION

Results correspond with what is available in the literature. For example, the quantitative data from the study indicated a significant difference in the mean speaking scores in favour of the experimental group. This result agrees with the related studies of Cochrane et al. (2022), who concluded that "Mobile language learning led to increased reading and speaking proficiency." (p. 3). In addition, the study agrees with what Kadhim et al. (2022) found. They studied the impact of mobile learning on Iraqi learners' oral performance and motivation. They ensured that MALL significantly affects speaking ability and has primarily improved the students' oral performance.

Significantly, MALL enables learners to engage in various activities, such as using language learning apps, participating in online language exchange programs, and listening to language learning podcasts. MALL can be a valuable tool for improving speaking skills, as it allows learners to practice their speaking skills in various contexts and receive feedback from native speakers. According to Kadhim et al. (2022), "using mobile learning as a strategy to enhance EFL learners' speaking skills has a significant effect on enhancing the learners' speaking competence." (p. 39).

In discussing the enhancement of speaking skills through technological means, the importance of mobile applications and online platforms cannot be overstated. Tools like Duolingo, Babbel, and Rosetta Stone offer an array of activities and exercises specifically designed to aid in the improvement of pronunciation and fluency in a new language. These applications are tailored to meet the needs of learners at various proficiency levels, providing an accessible platform for a broad audience. The interactive nature of these tasks, coupled with the benefit of regular practice, contributes significantly to reinforcing and developing language patterns essential for spoken proficiency.

Furthermore, in the context of practical language application, online language exchange platforms such as Tandem and HelloTalk play a crucial role. These platforms facilitate direct interaction with native speakers, providing learners with a genuine language immersion experience. This form of engagement is invaluable for practising conversational skills and receiving immediate feedback on aspects like pronunciation and grammatical accuracy. Echoing this sentiment, Alzieni (2021) underscores the effectiveness of mobile learning in

offering personalized learning experiences. He argues that engaging in learning activities from any location at any time allows for contextualisation (p. 86). This adaptability and contextual relevance of mobile learning are pivotal in enhancing language learning, particularly in developing and using mobile apps and online platforms. Many other strategies can help improve your speaking skills. For example, practising speaking with a language partner or tutor can be a valuable way to get personalized feedback and support. You can also try listening to recordings of native speakers and repeating what you hear to improve your pronunciation. Finally, participating in conversation groups or joining a language club can provide opportunities to practice speaking in a social setting and build confidence.

Furthermore, Mobile Assisted Language learning or MALL effectively improves speaking skills. A study by Chen et al. (2021) found that learners who used mobile devices for language learning significantly improved their speaking abilities. The study found that learners who used mobile devices for language learning were more likely to participate in speaking activities, receive corrective feedback on their speaking, and engage in collaborative learning with other learners. These factors all contributed to their improved speaking skills. In addition, Lisana, L. (2022) found that MALL interventions resulted in higher levels of student engagement and motivation, which are essential factors in language learning and speaking skill development. The research suggests that MALL can be a valuable tool for improving speaking skills.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, MALL is effective in improving speaking skills. Research has demonstrated that learners who use mobile devices for language learning are more likely to participate in speaking activities and receive feedback on their speaking, which can help improve their proficiency. MALL can also increase student engagement and motivation and is essential for language learning and speaking skill development. Overall, mobile devices can be a valuable tool for improving speaking skills in language learning.

Furthermore, the flexibility and accessibility of mobile learning make it an attractive option for language learners. With mobile devices, learners can practice their speaking skills anytime, anywhere, and at their own pace. This can be particularly useful for learners who may not have access to traditional language learning resources or have busy schedules. As such, the use of mobile devices in language learning has the potential to expand access to language learning opportunities and improve speaking skills for a wide range of learners.

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INCORPORATING CHATGPT IN THE ACADEMIC RESEARCH PROCESS: AVOIDING STUDENT STIGMATIZATION

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Abstract. *ChatGPT, a potent and readily accessible technological tool, has recently raised concerns regarding its potential for fostering plagiarism within educational contexts. With its emergence, academic institutions have begun disseminating cautionary advisories to educators, urging them to incorporate notifications in their syllabi to apprise students that the utilization of this application could impinge upon their academic integrity, potentially resulting in a failing grade for their submitted work. While these apprehensions possess a certain degree of validity, university professors had anticipated that their institutions would furnish them with comprehensive training sessions on the utilization of ChatGPT and its pertinent functionalities for pedagogical purposes. The primary objective of this research is to introduce ChatGPT and elucidate how it can be harnessed to encourage tertiary-level students in the composition and refinement of their academic research papers, thereby aiding them in attaining the prescribed learning outcomes delineated in their respective syllabi and the guidelines governing academic writing courses. Furthermore, rather than resorting to punitive measures and undue stress imposition, educational institutions should endeavor to evince genuine concern for their students' well-being. The author posits that the extent of plagiarism facilitated by ChatGPT is contingent upon the nature of the course in which it is employed. Consequently, course instructors should consider implementing tailored instructional and assessment strategies, which will be expounded upon in this study. The research culminates by offering recommendations for the preservation of students' well-being and the mitigation of distrust.*

Key words: *ChatGPT, student wellbeing, academic institutions, pedagogical applications, mistrusting students, plagiarism and ChatGPT*

1. INTRODUCTION

Academic writing and publishing pose formidable challenges for university professors, necessitating substantial time and effort to produce works of exceptional quality. This challenge is even more exacting for university students, who are tasked with generating research as a testament to their educational journey. Consequently, there arises the question of how academic writing can be rendered more accessible, efficient, and engaging for these students. One prospective solution lies in the utilization of ChatGPT, an artificial intelligence (AI) tool designed to enhance the quality of manuscripts and documents produced by students.

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ChatGPT is a derivative of the Generative Pre-trained Transformer 3 (GPT-3), an AI language model developed by OpenAI, renowned for its widespread adoption in natural language processing tasks, encompassing translation, summarization, question answering, and text generation, among others. In this context, Kalla and Smith (2023, p. 827) have expounded:

The working of ChatGPT can be broken down into several steps. First, the user inputs a prompt or question into the system. The model processes this prompt, which uses its knowledge of language patterns and relationships to generate a response. The response is then returned to the user, who can continue the conversation or ask another question.

ChatGPT has garnered substantial attention and generated considerable controversy owing to its capacity to generate authentic and coherent textual content (Zohery, 2023), thereby engendering concerns regarding its potential implications and applications within the domain of language processing (Debby et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2021; Scanlon, Nikkel & Geradts, 2023; Thorp, 2023). ChatGPT is capable of writing entire scholarly essays by breaking a main topic into subtopics and having ChatGPT write each section, it is possible to create an entire article using the tool (Lund & Wang, 2023). It could write an entire paper in a matter of seconds with minimal input from a researcher (Lund and Wang, 2023).

In light of the pervasive issue of online plagiarism confronting academia (Khalil & Er, 2023), a significant contingent of scholars (Bertram, 2019; Chechitelli, 2023; Crawford, Cowling & Allen, 2023; Liebrez, 2023; Lund et al., 2023; Stokel-Walker, 2022; Wilcox, 2023) within the academic community harbor apprehensions concerning the potential proliferation of plagiarism and the erosion of ethical standards associated with the use of ChatGPT. Although, as illustrated by the aforementioned experts in academic institutions, concerns are mounting regarding the rapid dissemination of ChatGPT-3 and the recent iteration, GPT-4, in light of their extensive accessibility and ability to provide responses akin to those generated by humans, several researchers (e.g., Govindarajan & Christuraj, 2023 & Shoufan, 2023) have extolled the positive contributions of ChatGPT in the realm of scientific research and academic endeavors, as elucidated below.

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH

While ChatGPT presents several challenges and concerns, particularly concerning academic integrity and plagiarism, universities must carefully assess the potential risks and benefits associated with the utilization of these tools and take measures to ensure their ethical and responsible deployment. These measures may entail the development of comprehensive policies and procedures governing their use, the provision of training and support for both students and faculty, and the adoption of a diverse range of pedagogical strategies to deter academic dishonesty. By addressing these challenges, universities can harness the opportunities presented by ChatGPT while concurrently upholding the integrity of their assessments and the overall quality of their educational programs. Consequently, the objective of this paper is to dispel apprehensions and reservations surrounding ChatGPT and plagiarism, offering assurances regarding its advantages when applied throughout various stages of academic research paper composition.

2.1. Background information

However, before proceeding any further, the present writer reviewed the outcomes for teaching academic writing courses at the American University of Sharjah (AUS) and found out the following:

Academic writing courses develop critical thinking and academic writing competencies and help students produce a research paper in which the students' arguments demonstrate analytical and critical thinking skills.

Furthermore, examining the guidelines for writing a research paper, it is found that they focus on the production of a well-structured and argued research paper through stages, with clear section headings. Moreover, they highlight using an academic writing style with opinions supported with citations from the literature in the field of study.

3. BRIEF REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The proliferation of AI technology and its influence on education has emerged as a subject of escalating concern in recent years, as evidenced by a growing body of scholarly literature (Brown et al., 2020; Dowling & Lucey, 2023; Okonkwo & Ade-Ibijola, 2021; Roscoe, 2017; Shoufan, 2023). Specifically, the adoption of ChatGPT for the generation of academic content within educational institutions has ignited apprehensions among academics and researchers (Khalil & Er, 2023). These concerns, shared by several scholars, revolve around ChatGPT's ability to generate instant, highly original content with minimal student input. Consequently, these concerns motivated a study aimed at investigating the prevalence of plagiarism in texts generated by ChatGPT and comparing the results with those produced by established plagiarism detection tools. Academic institutions worldwide, including esteemed scholarly journals and educators, are actively engaged in discussions regarding the potential ramifications of AI language models, such as ChatGPT, on the autonomy and creativity of researchers and students (Khalil & Er, 2023). Notably, some educational institutions, including schools in Queensland, Tasmania, New York City, and Seattle, have taken the proactive step of prohibiting the use of ChatGPT on student devices (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019; Stokel-Walker, 2022; Wilcox, 2023; Zohery, 2023; Tlili et al., 2023). This demonstrates a growing concern for the welfare of students within the academic community and underscores the apprehensions surrounding the potential influence of AI technology, particularly ChatGPT.

In this context, researchers delve into the potential advantages of ChatGPT and its constructive applications within the realm of education (Barrot, 2023; Alexander et al., 2023). For instance, Li and Xing (2021) emphasize that ChatGPT serves as a platform for asynchronous communication, enhancing student engagement and collaborative interaction by enabling students to pose questions and engage in discussions without the constraint of real-time presence. Furthermore, ChatGPT utility extends to facilitating remote learning, particularly benefiting students who face physical or mental health challenges that hinder their attendance in traditional classroom settings (Barber et al., 2021). Another significant merit of ChatGPT in education pertains to the creation of customized assessments. It has the potential to generate tailored exams or quizzes tailored to each student's unique needs and capabilities (Barber et al., 2021; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). This feature holds particular promise in courses emphasizing language proficiency or critical thinking, as ChatGPT can

craft questions aligned with individual students' skill levels, challenging them to exhibit their knowledge and abilities (Bommasani et al., 2021).

Moreover, ChatGPT offers the advantage of furnishing students with instantaneous feedback and personalized responses to their inquiries (Perez et al., 2017). Along the same lines, Gao (2021), Roscoe et al. (2017), and Zawacki-Richter et al. (2019) advocate for ChatGPT potential role in grading students' assignments and providing real-time feedback. For instance, ChatGPT can be employed to assess student work, thereby freeing instructors to concentrate on higher-level responsibilities such as offering guidance and support to students.

4. RESEARCH DESIGN STEPS TO SAFEGUARDING THE INSTITUTION'S INTEGRITY

ChatGPT application was used for two consecutive semesters since 2023 with 46 third year university students at a private university in the MENA area for a research writing process within a communication based course. When? In this section, the researcher assessed the capability of ChatGPT in academic research by providing several commands to write different sections of the demo research topic. The prompts given to ChatGPT revolved around the following:

- Generating research ideas
- Writing up the introduction (including problem statement and research gaps)
- Preparing a literature review with citations and references
- Writing up the methodology section
- Writing up the results, discussions and conclusion sections

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In an academic context, students, under the direct supervision of their professors, have the opportunity to employ ChatGPT applications in various stages of their research process, including brainstorming research topics and composing research articles encompassing elements such as the research proposal, research working draft, and final research paper. An illustrative instance of this approach is demonstrated through the work of a student at AUS, who selected a research topic entitled "Fundamentals of starting a new business." This choice not only serves to exemplify the utility of ChatGPT but also aims to elucidate the critical challenges associated with its application in academic research.

ChatGPT, as a tool, exhibits its capacity to assist researchers in generating novel research ideas through the provision of suggestions grounded in user inputs, as observed in the study by Lund and Wang (2023). For instance, when students input a specific topic into ChatGPT, the application promptly generates a list of prospective research ideas that are pertinent to the chosen subject matter. This particular feature assumes paramount significance in the research process, as it aids scholars in their pursuit of innovative research avenues. To illustrate this point, an example generated by ChatGPT is provided below:

Prompt

Give ideas for an academic research on: Fundamentals of starting new businesses

ChatGPT Generated Response

Certainly! Research on the fundamentals of starting new businesses is a valuable area of study that can contribute to our understanding of entrepreneurship and business development. Here are some research ideas in this domain:

1. **The Role of Entrepreneurial Education in Business Success:** Investigate the impact of formal and informal entrepreneurial education on the success and sustainability of new businesses. Analyze the effectiveness of different types of training programs and their long-term outcomes.
2. **Entrepreneurial Mindset and Decision-Making:** Examine how the mindset of entrepreneurs influences their decision-making during the early stages of business development. Explore factors like risk tolerance, resilience, and adaptability.
3. **Access to Capital for New Businesses:** Research the challenges and opportunities entrepreneurs face when seeking financial resources to start and grow their businesses. Explore traditional and innovative funding sources, such as venture capital, crowdfunding, and microloans.
4. **Entrepreneurial Ecosystems and Regional Development:** Investigate the role of entrepreneurial ecosystems in fostering the growth of new businesses in specific regions or cities. Analyze the key components of successful ecosystems and their impact on local economies.
5. **Technology and Innovation in New Ventures:** Explore the ways in which technology and innovation drive the formation of new businesses. Focus on emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, blockchain, and biotechnology and their applications in entrepreneurship.
6. **Social Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Business Models:** Study the rise of social entrepreneurship and its impact on addressing societal and environmental challenges. Analyze sustainable business models and their role in new venture creation.
7. **Failure and Learning in Entrepreneurship:** Investigate the role of failure in the entrepreneurial process. Examine how entrepreneurs perceive and learn from failure, and how these experiences shape future business endeavors.
8. **Gender and Diversity in Entrepreneurship:** Analyze the challenges and opportunities faced by underrepresented groups, such as women and minorities, in starting and growing businesses. Explore the impact of diversity on innovation and business success.
9. **Regulatory Environment and Entrepreneurship:** Examine the regulatory barriers and incentives that influence entrepreneurship. Investigate the impact of government policies, tax incentives, and intellectual property protection on new venture creation.
10. **Market Entry Strategies for New Businesses:** Research the strategies and approaches that new businesses use to enter and compete in established markets. Compare the success of disruptive innovation versus incremental innovation in market entry.
11. **Networking and Social Capital in Entrepreneurship:** Explore the role of networking and social capital in the early stages of business development. Analyze how entrepreneurs build and leverage networks for resources, mentorship, and partnerships.
12. **Internationalization of New Ventures:** Investigate the challenges and strategies involved in taking new businesses global. Explore the factors that influence international expansion decisions and the impact on business performance.

These research ideas cover a wide range of topics within the fundamentals of starting new businesses, and you can tailor them to your specific interests and expertise. Conducting in-depth research in any of these areas can contribute valuable insights to the field of entrepreneurship and provide practical guidance for aspiring entrepreneurs and policymakers.

It has been observed that the software has supplied student researchers with diverse ideas that possess potential for further elaboration. However, these suggestions lack the incorporation of academic citations and references, thereby rendering the resultant content non-academic in nature. Consequently, students are required to invest additional effort in refining the suggestions, as the output generated by ChatGPT does not constitute a final product suitable for submission within a research context. An additional advantage offered by ChatGPT lies in its capacity to assist researchers in the identification of pertinent scholarly literature through the analysis of user input, subsequently generating a curated list of associated articles. Below is a reproduction of the content provided by ChatGPT:

Prompt

Give references/sources for an academic research on: Fundamentals of starting new businesses

ChatGPT Generated Response

Certainly, here are some academic references and sources that you can use for research on the fundamentals of starting new businesses. These sources cover a wide range of topics related to entrepreneurship, business planning, and startup management:

1. Books:

- a. **"The Lean Startup: How Today's Entrepreneurs Use Continuous Innovation to Create Radically Successful Businesses"** by Eric Ries.
- b. **"Business Model Generation: A Handbook for Visionaries, Game Changers, and Challengers"** by Alexander Osterwalder and Yves Pigneur.
- c. **"The Innovator's Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great Firms to Fail"** by Clayton Christensen.
- d. **"Zero to One: Notes on Startups, or How to Build the Future"** by Peter Thiel and Blake Masters.
- e. **"Foundations of Entrepreneurship and Economic Development"** by David A. Harper and Robert M. Solow.

2. Academic Journals:

- a. **Journal of Business Venturing:** This journal covers a wide range of topics related to entrepreneurship, including startup strategies, innovation, and entrepreneurial finance.
- b. **Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice:** This journal publishes research articles on various aspects of entrepreneurship, from the creation of new ventures to the management of established small businesses.
- c. **Strategic Management Journal:** While not exclusively focused on startups, this journal often features articles on entrepreneurial strategies and business creation.
- d. **Small Business Economics:** A journal that explores the economic aspects of small businesses and startups, including topics like financing, growth, and innovation.
- e. **Academy of Management Journal:** This journal covers management topics, including entrepreneurship, and can provide valuable insights into the management aspects of startups.

3. Online Resources:

- a. **Kauffman Foundation:** The Kauffman Foundation is a leading organization in entrepreneurship research. Their website offers a wealth of reports, articles, and data on various aspects of starting and running businesses.
- b. **Harvard Business Review:** The HBR website contains numerous articles and case studies related to entrepreneurship and startup management.

4. Government and Industry Reports:

- a. **U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA):** The SBA provides a wealth of resources and reports on small business and entrepreneurship in the United States.
- b. **Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM):** GEM publishes an annual report on entrepreneurship and offers valuable insights into global startup trends.

5. Dissertations and Theses:

- a. Consider searching academic databases like ProQuest, JSTOR, and Google Scholar for relevant dissertations and theses on the fundamentals of starting new businesses.

When conducting your research, remember to evaluate the credibility and relevance of your sources, and cite them properly following the citation style required for your academic work (e.g., APA, MLA, Chicago). Additionally, you may want to look for more recent sources or updates to these references, as the field of entrepreneurship is constantly evolving.

While this feature undeniably offers a notable advantage by saving researchers a substantial amount of time in comparison to the manual search for sources relevant to the research topic, it is essential to acknowledge that ChatGPT provides suggestions for books and journal titles that researchers should consult. Additionally, even when the software provides specific citations, these must be meticulously validated due to the possibility that the sources indicated may be spurious or nonexistent, as evidenced by recent studies (Cotton et al., 2023; Qasem, 2023), despite the presence of purported author names online in unrelated contexts. Consequently, professors can ascertain the use of ChatGPT in generating the article by conducting online searches for the provided sources and references, leading to the identification of the automated content generation. Subsequently, students can be summoned for a candid discussion session to address the matter, followed by guidance to seek authentic online sources for their research.

Research design constitutes a crucial facet of any research endeavor, necessitating a methodical and systematic approach. ChatGPT consistently presents input in an academic format, and it further aids authors in selecting optimal research methodologies and identifying the most suitable research methods in alignment with their research inquiries and the available dataset. An illustrative example is provided below:

ChatGPT Generated Example:

To conduct research on this topic, a combination of methods could be used, including surveys, interviews, focus groups, observation of classroom behaviors, and analysis of academic integrity policies and practices in UAE schools. It's no short forms important to ensure ethical considerations are taken into account while researching sensitive topics like cheating among students

ChatGPT can also assist in preparing the required research questions.

Prompt**Give research questions on :Fundamentals of starting new businesses**

Certainly, here are several research questions related to the fundamentals of starting new businesses:

1. **What are the key factors that influence the decision to start a new business, and how have these factors evolved over time?
2. **How do different types of entrepreneurs, such as necessity-driven entrepreneurs and opportunity-driven entrepreneurs, approach the process of starting a new business?
3. **What is the role of entrepreneurial education and training in improving the success rate of new businesses, and how effective are different educational programs in this regard?
4. **What are the most common challenges and barriers that entrepreneurs face when starting new businesses, and how do they navigate and overcome these obstacles?
5. **How does access to financial resources, including venture capital, angel investors, and crowdfunding, impact the growth and sustainability of new businesses?
6. **What is the relationship between business planning and the success of new ventures, and how do different types of business plans (e.g., traditional vs. lean startup) affect outcomes?
7. **What strategies and tactics do entrepreneurs employ to identify and evaluate market opportunities for their new businesses, and how do these strategies vary across industries and regions?
8. **What role does innovation play in the development and growth of new businesses, and how do entrepreneurs foster a culture of innovation within their startups?
9. **How do social and cultural factors influence the choice of business ideas and models among aspiring entrepreneurs, and what are the implications for diversity and inclusion in entrepreneurship?
10. **What are the long-term impacts of new businesses on local economies, including job creation, economic growth, and community development?
11. **How can public policy and government initiatives better support and promote the creation of new businesses, particularly in underserved communities?
12. **What are the ethical considerations that entrepreneurs should take into account when starting and running new businesses, and how do these considerations impact decision-making?
13. **How do global trends, such as digital transformation and environmental sustainability, shape the strategies and goals of new businesses in different industries?
14. **What are the critical success factors for achieving sustainability and resilience in new businesses, especially in the face of economic downturns or unexpected challenges?
15. **How does the use of technology, including artificial intelligence and blockchain, influence the operations and competitiveness of new businesses in various sectors?

These research questions cover a broad spectrum of topics related to the fundamentals of starting new businesses. Depending on your specific research interests and objectives, you can narrow down or adapt these questions to suit your study's focus.

Based on the foregoing analysis, it is apparent that the proliferation of research inquiries poses a formidable challenge for students, impeding their ability to comprehensively address them. Consequently, this predicament underscores the imperative for academic instructors to intervene collaboratively with their students, with the aim of culling the myriad of questions and identifying those of utmost relevance. In accordance with the aforementioned directives for scholarly writing, there exists a pronounced emphasis on organizing the research manuscript into well-defined sections. In this regard, ChatGPT can serve as a valuable resource for the production of these textual components, ensuring precision, brevity, and adherence to the established conventions of scientific discourse. It can be employed to generate content for various segments of the article, encompassing the introduction, literature review, methodology, results, discussion, and conclusion. A representative exemplar generated by ChatGPT is provided below:

Prompt

Write a research paper on: Fundamentals of starting new businesses

ChatGPT Generated Response

Writing a complete research paper on the fundamentals of starting new businesses is beyond the scope of a single response. However, I can provide you with an outline for a research paper on this topic. You can use this outline as a guide to structure your research paper and expand on each section with detailed content.

Title: Fundamentals of Starting New Businesses

Abstract: Provide a concise summary of the research paper, including the main objectives, methods used, and key findings.

1. Introduction:

- Provide an overview of the significance of entrepreneurship and new businesses in the global economy.
- State the research objectives and the research questions addressed in the paper.
- Explain the structure of the paper.

2. Literature Review:

- Define entrepreneurship and its role in economic development.
- Discuss the historical evolution of entrepreneurship theories and concepts.
- Review key theories related to starting new businesses (e.g., opportunity recognition, resource-based view, effectuation).
- Explore the factors influencing entrepreneurial intentions and the decision to start a new business.

3. Methodology:

- Describe the research methods used (e.g., literature review, surveys, case studies, interviews).
- Explain the criteria for selecting the research sample or sources.
- Discuss any data collection and analysis techniques employed.

4. Key Factors in Starting New Businesses:

- Identify and analyze the critical factors that influence the decision to start a new business.
- Discuss the role of innovation, market research, and feasibility analysis in business idea development.
- Examine the importance of a well-defined business model and business plan.

5. Challenges and Barriers:

- Investigate the common challenges and barriers faced by entrepreneurs when starting new businesses.
- Discuss financial challenges, regulatory hurdles, and market entry challenges.
- Explore strategies for overcoming these challenges.

6. Resources and Financing:

- Analyze the various sources of funding available to entrepreneurs (e.g., bootstrapping, angel investors, venture capital).
- Discuss the role of financial planning and management in the early stages of a new business.
- Examine government support programs and incentives for startups.

7. Business Growth and Sustainability:

- Explore strategies for scaling up a new business and achieving sustainable growth.
- Discuss the importance of building a strong organizational culture.
- Examine the challenges of maintaining innovation and competitiveness over time.

8. Case Studies:

- Include real-world case studies of successful and unsuccessful startups to illustrate key concepts and challenges.
- Analyze the strategies and decisions made by entrepreneurs in these cases.

9. Conclusion:

- Summarize the key findings from the research paper.
- Highlight the implications of the research for entrepreneurs, policymakers, and researchers.
- Discuss potential areas for future research in entrepreneurship.

10. References:

- List all the sources, books, articles, and studies cited in the paper, following the citation style guidelines.

Remember to use proper formatting, citations, and a consistent style throughout your research paper. Additionally, ensure that your paper presents a cohesive argument and supports your findings with relevant evidence from the literature and any empirical research conducted.

It is noticed from the above that the tool has provided the user with a good format of the research manuscript that they still need to work on.

Here is another example generated from ChatGPT:**Prompt**

Write me an academic research paper with citations and references on Fundamentals of Starting New Businesses

ChatGPT Generated Example

FUNDAMENTALS OF STARTING NEW BUSINESSES**Abstract**

This research manuscript explores the fundamental concepts and principles associated with starting new businesses. Entrepreneurs play a crucial role in driving economic growth and innovation, making it imperative to understand the key factors that contribute to successful business initiation. This manuscript reviews the essential components of entrepreneurship, including identifying opportunities, business planning, financing, and legal considerations. Additionally, it examines the role of innovation, risk management, and entrepreneurial mindset in the process of launching and sustaining new businesses. Through an in-depth analysis of relevant literature and case studies, this manuscript provides a comprehensive overview of the fundamentals necessary for aspiring entrepreneurs to embark on their entrepreneurial journey.

Introduction

Entrepreneurship is the engine of economic development and innovation, creating jobs, fostering competition, and driving technological advancements. Starting a new business is an exciting and challenging endeavor that requires a solid foundation in various aspects of entrepreneurship. This manuscript aims to explore the fundamentals of starting new businesses, shedding light on key concepts, strategies, and considerations that aspiring entrepreneurs must understand and embrace.

Identifying Opportunities

The first step in starting a new business is identifying opportunities. Entrepreneurs often spot gaps in the market or recognize unmet consumer needs. A comprehensive understanding of market trends, consumer behavior, and industry dynamics is essential for recognizing viable opportunities (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). Furthermore, conducting market research, competitive analysis, and feasibility studies can help refine the business idea and validate its potential for success (Hisrich, Peters, & Shepherd, 2017).

Business Planning

Effective business planning is critical to the success of any new venture. A well-structured business plan serves as a roadmap, outlining the company's mission, vision, goals, and strategies for achieving them (Kuratko, Hornsby, & Goldsby, 2017). It also includes financial projections, marketing strategies, and an analysis of potential risks and challenges. Entrepreneurs must continuously revise and update their business plans to adapt to changing market conditions (Baron, Shane, & Gregoire, 2019).

Financing

Securing adequate financing is often a significant challenge for new businesses. Entrepreneurs can explore various sources of funding, including personal savings, loans, venture capital,

angel investors, and crowdfunding (Mason & Stark, 2004). The choice of funding depends on the nature of the business, its growth potential, and the entrepreneur's risk tolerance. Proper financial management is crucial to ensure the sustainability and growth of the new venture (Brinckmann, Grichnik, & Kapsa, 2010).

Legal Considerations

Navigating the legal landscape is another essential aspect of starting a new business. Entrepreneurs must choose the appropriate legal structure for their venture, such as sole proprietorship, partnership, corporation, or LLC, considering factors like liability, taxation, and management (Bagley & Dauchy, 2019). Additionally, compliance with local, state, and federal regulations, intellectual property protection, and contracts with suppliers, customers, and employees must be carefully managed to avoid legal pitfalls.

Innovation and Competitive Advantage

Innovation plays a pivotal role in gaining a competitive edge in the market. Entrepreneurs should continuously seek ways to innovate their products, services, processes, and business models (Tidd & Bessant, 2018). Staying ahead of the competition often requires a culture of innovation within the organization and a willingness to embrace change. Case studies of successful startups, such as Apple and Tesla, demonstrate how innovation can drive rapid growth and market leadership (Malerba, 2006).

Risk Management

Entrepreneurship inherently involves risk. Managing and mitigating these risks is crucial for the sustainability of new businesses. Risk assessment should be an integral part of the business planning process, identifying potential threats and developing strategies to address them (Kaplan & Warren, 2016). Adequate insurance coverage, contingency plans, and financial reserves can provide a safety net during challenging times.

Entrepreneurial Mindset

The entrepreneurial mindset is a key factor that distinguishes successful entrepreneurs from others. It encompasses traits such as resilience, creativity, adaptability, and a willingness to learn from failures (Rauch & Hulsink, 2015). Developing an entrepreneurial mindset is an ongoing process that involves continuous self-improvement and a commitment to personal and professional growth.

Conclusion

Starting a new business is a complex and multifaceted process that requires a deep understanding of the fundamentals of entrepreneurship. Identifying opportunities, effective business planning, securing financing, managing legal considerations, fostering innovation, mitigating risks, and developing an entrepreneurial mindset are all critical components of the entrepreneurial journey. By embracing these fundamentals and continually learning and adapting, aspiring entrepreneurs can increase their chances of not only launching a successful business but also contributing to economic growth and innovation.

6. CONCLUSION, SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND PEDAGOGICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

In recent times, scholars and professionals across the globe have exhibited a profound interest in ChatGPT, as evidenced by the works of Rahaman et al. (2023) and Shoufan (2023). This growing fascination stems from the compelling potential of ChatGPT as a tool for enhancing the efficiency of research manuscript development. The core aim of the present study was to underscore the application of ChatGPT in the context of academic research among students, offering a practical illustration along with pertinent recommendations. This investigation revolves around a demonstration research topic, delving into both the capabilities and constraints of ChatGPT in the creation and composition of academic research papers. The findings of the study shed light on the manifold advantages that ChatGPT affords researchers, including its utility in idea generation, research topic structuring, and even the crafting of abstracts through the utilization of prompts. Nonetheless, it is imperative to acknowledge that ChatGPT occasionally leads astray when formulating research problems, questions, and identifying gaps, often generating hypothetical problem statements and fictitious references (Walters & Wilder, 2023).

The study's outcomes underscore the substantial potential of ChatGPT when harnessed judiciously and ethically within academic settings. Furthermore, it is recommended that educators instructing academic writing persist in the practice of soliciting draft submissions from students for review prior to final submission. This approach compels students to amend and refine their submissions based on the feedback provided by their professors, thereby discouraging the use of ChatGPT to generate entirely new versions of their research. Professors should also maintain a mechanism for comparing the previous submissions with the revised ones to ensure consistency. Additionally, it is advisable to decline submissions that incorporate writing elements not yet covered in the course, such as proposals or working drafts that include abstracts.

Moreover, the inclusion of oral progress reports and question-answer sessions within writing courses serves the purpose of identifying the true authorship of research. A distinctive feature of ChatGPT-generated texts lies in their formulaic and machine-like quality upon reading, enabling the verification of references as either authentic or counterfeit (Haman & Školník, 2023; Tlili et al., 2023). It is imperative to impress upon students that technology should be leveraged as a tool for enhancing their skills and learning, rather than as a substitute for original thought and expression (Khalil & Er, 2023). This imperative arises in response to the continuous emergence of software packages that may tempt students into plagiarism, exemplified by the website mentioned below:

"The UNDETECTABLE AI Writing Tool That Bypasses AI Detectors"

Hence, there exists an urgent necessity to formulate academic tasks that demand heightened critical thinking to align with the learning objectives of the course and to uphold academic integrity. As Alexander et al. (2023) have asserted, educators require digital training concerning the utilization of AI tools in the ESL classroom, as well as proficiency in advanced detection tools. Furthermore, a revisitation of assessment policies and procedures is warranted, along with the development of suitable rubrics and assessment criteria (Alexander et al., 2023, p. 41).

In conclusion, instructing faculty members should undertake the following measures:

- Design intricate cloze test questions that correspond with the course content.
- Endeavor to avoid yes-no questions, paraphrasing, and summarization statements in assessments.
- Recognize that the nature of the course dictates the susceptibility to plagiarism; content-based courses may be more vulnerable than task-based ones.
- Minimize the use of online tests, even with the deployment of lockdown browser mechanisms.
- Ensure that students attain the intended skills so that they can competently assess responses generated by ChatGPT. It is evident that students lacking requisite writing skills may struggle to gauge the appropriateness of ChatGPT generated responses (Shoufan, 2023).

The quote below underscores this point:

To utilize ChatGPT effectively, students must have an adequate background in the relevant field of study so that they can generate appropriate prompts and critically evaluate the responses provided by the system (Shoufan, 2023, p. 38814). In other words, educators ought to foster students' exploration of the potential benefits and drawbacks associated with ChatGPT, thereby equipping them with the ability to conduct a thorough and impartial assessment of the outcomes of their actions. This approach aids students in responding thoughtfully to their investigative encounters (El-Sakran, 2023). In summary, while ChatGPT may appear to simplify students' lives, it has concurrently engendered additional responsibilities for instructors, a phenomenon that warrants further exploration.

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THE ROLE OF L2 TRANSLATION ACTIVITIES IN TRANSLATION-ORIENTED FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING: A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract. *Translation as a language teaching tool, especially into a foreign language (L2 translation), has long been surrounded by controversy in teaching English for general and translation purposes. The article considers the problem of using L2 translation activities in teaching foreign languages to translation students. The aim of this study was to determine the attitude of 65 3rd and 4th-year translation students of the Linguistics University of Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, towards the use of L2 translation activities in foreign language training in terms of their benefits for L2 acquisition and the students' professional development. The two stages of the study included: (a) the use of L2 translation activities in 'English as a major foreign language' classes and (b) the collection of student feedback about the above-mentioned activities by means of a questionnaire. The results indicate that L2 translation activities were positively viewed by the participants and considered beneficial for both: (a) L2 acquisition and practice and (b) developing professionally significant skills and abilities through using their L2 in a quasi-translation context. The implication of this study is that L2 translation activities, if designed and implemented with the translation profession in mind, can make a valuable contribution to the teaching of foreign languages to trainee translators.*

Key words: *translation, translation activities, L2 translation, translation-oriented foreign language teaching*

1. INTRODUCTION

The translator uses foreign languages in contexts which are highly demanding and require a high level of proficiency as well as special skills, cognitive mechanisms and abilities. Therefore, the teaching of foreign languages to trainee translators should be professionally oriented, i.e., aim to facilitate the acquisition of skills and development of cognitive mechanisms and psychological characteristics which ensure the adequate use of a foreign language in translation contexts. One way to do this could be through the use of translation activities in foreign language instruction.

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Translation as a language teaching tool has long been surrounded by considerable controversy, with L2 translation viewed with ‘downright animosity’ (Carreres, 2006). Despite once being the leading teaching tool within the Grammar Translation Method (GTM), it later became ‘the pariah of English language teaching’ (Cook, 2010) and was heavily criticised and ignored by the proponents of language teaching methodologies which succeeded the GTM. Today, the trend seems to be changing with more teachers speaking openly about its benefits, and publications appearing in scientific journals and proving its effectiveness as a language teaching tool (Cook, 2010; Djelloul & Neddar, 2017; Drobot, 2018).

Similarly, there is a controversy about and a lack of research into the usefulness of L2 translation activities in teaching foreign languages to translation students. L2 translation has been claimed to be a demotivating, hopeless, unnecessary (Carreres, 2006; Fernández-Guerra, 2014; Mogahed, 2011; Popovic, 2001) and professionally counterproductive task (Gile, 1995; Menck, 1991; Schäffner, 1998; Snell-Hornby, 1992; Stewart, 2008). However, there has been no detailed investigation of this issue.

Contrary to the established opinion, many studies have demonstrated that learners seem to highly enjoy L2 translation activities in a general English classroom (Carreres, 2006; Dagilienė, 2012). This prompted us to investigate students’ attitudes to such activities in a translator training context. The aim of this study was to determine the attitude of 3rd and 4th-year translation students of the Linguistics University of Nizhny Novgorod, Russia towards the use of L2 translation activities in foreign language training in terms of their benefits for L2 acquisition and practice and the students’ professional development. It is expected that this study will provide some valuable insights into the potential benefits and downsides of the use of L2 translation activities in teaching a foreign language to trainee translators.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Terminology

The term ‘translation’ is widely used in different contexts. Therefore, a distinction should be made between translation as:

- (1) a professional activity which is an end in itself;
- (2) a classroom activity which is a pedagogical tool used for improving and assessing students’ translation skills in translation classes and teaching a foreign language and testing students’ language knowledge in foreign language classes;
- (3) a classroom strategy used for ‘management’ purposes (L1/native language translation).

In this paper, the term ‘translation’ will be used to refer to translation as a foreign language teaching technique.

2.2. The attitude to the use of translation in foreign language teaching

2.2.1. *Negative attitude*

The opponents of the use of translation in an EFL classroom claim that it undermines the process of second language acquisition in that it is a skill independent of the traditional four skills whose practice, therefore, does not contribute to their development (Carreres, 2006; Vermes, 2010). More specifically, they claim that translation is not helpful in the acquisition of new vocabulary or grammatical structures as: (a) exact translation is not always possible

due to differences between languages; (b) giving a translation equivalent to explain the meaning of new language may reduce students' use of L2; (c) translation cannot be used in multilingual classes.

In addition, translation is not seen as encouraging communicative language use and promoting language practice in real-life conditions. It is claimed that translation focuses more on the language itself and its formal properties rather than on developing an ability to use it (Druce, 2012; Vermes, 2010). As regards its nature, it is considered to be:

(a) an uncommunicative, non-interactive activity which is performed by students individually (Carreres, 2006);

(b) an unnatural activity as it has no application in the real world and is not necessary for non-translators (Druce, 2012; Malmkjaer, 1998; Vermes, 2010).

More generally, translation is said to prevent learners from developing a second language identity by inhibiting thinking in L2 making them view L2 through L1, thereby strengthening their dependence on L1 (Carreres, 2006; Pan & Pan, 2012).

2.2.2. *Positive attitude*

On the other side of the debate, translation as a classroom activity is viewed as efficient and important (Čarapić, 2022) and is considered to be an 'enrichment' activity (Leonardi, 2010) which enhances the process of L2 acquisition.

It has been argued that translation is 'a sum of the four skills' (Leonardi, 2010) and brings into play all of them (Gomes Ferreira, 1999; Malmkjaer, 1998), thereby supporting, further strengthening, consolidating (Mažcikienė, 2018) and developing them concurrently (Leonardi, 2010), as well as being a means of testing students' ability to apply these skills (Gomes Ferreira, 1999).

Moreover, translation is seen as an effective tool and a useful cognitive strategy in developing vocabulary (Djelloul & Neddar, 2017; Fernández-Guerra, 2014; Laufer & Girsai, 2008; Leonardi, 2010) and teaching grammar (Duff, 1989; Petrocchi, 2006).

Many scholars believe that translation encourages and facilitates meaningful real-life language use as it emphasises the 'link between language and usage' (Štulajterova, 1998) and encourages students to discuss L1 and L2 'in use', forces students to fine-tune their language to specific contexts and meanings, helps to develop precision and accuracy of expression and contributes to a deeper understanding of L1 and L2 (Takimoto & Hashimoto, 2010).

In addition, many authors agree that translation is a natural real-life activity which 'happens everywhere, all the time' (Duff, 1989, p. 6) and is considered an indispensable social skill in the modern globalized world (Drobot, 2018).

It has also been noted that translation can reduce negative interference and lead to 'positive interference' (Leonardi, 2010) through what some scholars call three 'C's – comparison, consciousness and control (Whyatt, 2009).

Finally, translation is viewed by many researchers and scholars as a highly communicative classroom activity as it lends itself well to interaction among students and the teacher, thereby promoting collaborative learning (Druce, 2012; Leonardi, 2010; Mahmoud, 2006), and is even regarded by some scholars as a possible component of a communicative approach (Popovic, 2001).

If properly implemented, translation can be learner-centered (Mahmoud, 2006), contribute to learner autonomy (Mahmoud, 2006), encourage students' active involvement (Takimoto & Hashimoto, 2010), make learning more meaningful (Weller, 2008) and promote the development of communicative and problem-solving abilities (Koppe & Kremer, 2007).

To conclude, the analysis of the arguments in favour of translation demonstrates that they seem to be the exact opposites of those against it which suggests that the problem is not translation activities per se but the way they are viewed and, more importantly, designed and implemented.

2.3. The attitude to the use of translation in teaching foreign languages to translation students

The general opinion seems to be that translation is counterproductive in teaching foreign languages to translation students as the negative effects outweigh the possible benefits. Scholastic translation (i.e., translation exercises in language teaching) has been referred to as 'translationese' and is seen as inappropriate and inadequate for training professional translators (H.P. Krings) (as cited in Menck, 1991, p. 151).

First, it is claimed that scholastic translation has little in common with professional translation and therefore comes into conflict with it. In the two contexts: (a) the concept of translation is defined differently (Schäffner, 1998; Vermes, 2010); (b) the use of translation is qualitatively different (Gile, 1995); (c) translation activities have different objectives and require a different mode of thinking (Menck, 1991). As a result, there is a shift in priorities and those aspects which are essential for translator training receive much less attention (Stewart, 2008).

Second, scholastic translation is said to reinforce false beliefs about translation which have to be later dealt with by teachers of translation (Sdobnikov, 2007; Snell-Hornby, 1992). These negative effects may include the following. On the one hand, translation may be seen as a process of finding one-to-one correspondences in the target language. This can reinforce the belief that the knowledge of translation equivalents in two languages is enough to produce an adequate translation. Besides, such beliefs can account for an unprofessional approach to the assessment of a translated text based on the number of active vocabulary items used. Other negative effects may include over-reliance on thematic glossaries and bilingual dictionaries and lack of strategies for establishing correspondences in a particular context through heavy reliance on the topic vocabulary studied in class.

Critics also argue that scholastic translation encourages students to make word-for-word translations (Gomes Ferreira, 1999; Malmkjaer, 1998; Pan & Pan, 2012; Weller, 2008) and overgeneralizations thinking that a corresponding foreign word can be used in exactly the same contexts and situations as the word from their native language.

Yet another argument (which accounts, to a certain extent, for the above-mentioned problems) is that foreign language teachers are, for the most part, not professional translators and therefore cannot ensure an adequate approach to designing and implementing translation activities through lack of translation knowledge and experience (Sdobnikov, 2007).

It cannot be denied that the arguments presented above are not unreasonable. However, it should also be borne in mind that translation activities are a type of pushed-output tasks (Laufer & Girsai, 2008) which require students to speak or write on various themes through need or motivation beyond their normal comfort level, set predetermined conditions and force students to make use of specific linguistic resources. Viewed in this light, translation activities can develop students' psychological readiness to use a foreign language under conditions similar to translation contexts and make students' language knowledge more mobile and concrete.

2.4. L2 translation: pros and cons

When it comes to L2 translation (i.e., translation into a foreign language, also referred to as inverse translation), criticism against it is even more severe, bordering on ‘downright animosity’ (Carreres, 2006). It is claimed to be:

(a) more difficult and demanding than L1 translation (Fernández-Guerra, 2014; Popovic, 2001);

(b) unnatural, purposeless and unnecessary because it has no application in the real world even for professional translators who normally translate into their mother tongue (Mogahed, 2011);

(c) counterproductive as it leads to interference and students’ dependence on L1;

(d) unrealistic, frustrating and de-motivating because students’ knowledge of L2 will always be inferior to that of L1.

As to the positive effects of L2 translation, it is noteworthy that all the above-mentioned benefits of translation activities equally apply to L2 translation. In addition, it has been pointed out that it helps to ‘systematise and rationalise’ a learning mechanism which takes place naturally in the human brain (Carreres, 2006). Many authors stress that translation is highly appreciated and enjoyed by students (Carreres, 2006; Dagilienė, 2012) and is seen as a valuable teaching tool by teachers as it can ‘prompt’ students to use specific vocabulary or grammar (Byram, 2000).

We believe that in the context of translator language training, L2 translation could also prove beneficial. Despite existing opinions that it is an absurd, hopeless and unnecessary task as translators normally operate into their L1, there is a growing body of evidence that translation into L2 is a ‘normal and widespread’ activity (Pokorn, 2016), especially with ‘minor’ languages and in multilingual communities in both institutional and non-institutional settings.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants

The participants were 3rd and 4th-year full-time translation students of the Higher School of Translation and Interpreting (Linguistics University of Nizhny Novgorod, Russia) enrolled on a 5-year translation training programme with English as their L2 language and Russian as their native/L1 language. Overall, the study involved 65 students (58 female, 7 male) who ranged in age from 19 to 21. The number of participants, as well as the gender distribution, were determined by the student population in each year of study and were not manipulated by us in any way.

In the 3rd year, students begin to study specialisation courses which include ‘Translation Studies’, ‘A Practical Course in Translation from L2’, ‘Theory of Specialised Translation’. At this stage, they mostly have no (or little) formal translation experience and only have a general understanding of their future profession and the competencies required to be good at it.

4th-year students, however, have more advanced knowledge of translation as a field of study and a profession and more translation experience in the academic and possibly real-world contexts. They have a better understanding of the challenges of the translation profession and skills and abilities the translator needs. However, ‘A Practical Course in Translation into L2’ is not part of the fourth-year curriculum and is studied in the fifth year.

Both groups have a good command of the English language, with 4th-year students being obviously slightly superior to 3rd-year ones. However, none of them had any previous experience of long-term exposure to English in an English-speaking country.

3.2. Research design

The study consisted of two stages. During the first stage, L2 translation activities were used in 'English as a major foreign language' classes over a 5-month period (1 term). They were given to students at the end of each vocabulary unit (3 units) and section of a unit (3 sections per unit) as consolidation activities. The activities were: (1) Render an article into English; (2) Act as interpreter.

Taking into account the opinions of many critics that L2 translation is counterproductive in teaching languages to translators, we identified the following criteria for our translation activities: (a) real-life (and if possible (quasi-)professional) context; (b) communicative purpose; (c) interesting content; (d) negotiation of meaning; (e) use of active vocabulary. From an organizational point of view, they had to involve pair/group work, discussion of alternatives, L1/L2 differences and similarities as well as L1/L2 correspondences.

The first task required students to render into English a short article (350 words) on an issue related to the topic of the unit and present it in class (orally, in groups/pairs or individually). The articles were provided to the students by the teacher. In the second task, each student was supposed to act as interpreter in a conversation between two Russian-speaking individuals. The texts for these 'conversations' were made up by the students in pairs as homework; however, the dialogue for each 'translator' was chosen randomly, so the students could not prepare in advance. Both tasks were followed by the group's comments on the rendition from the point of view of its intelligibility, clarity and appropriateness of the language used, and possible translation alternatives.

During the second stage, a questionnaire was given to students to find out their attitude to the use of the translation activities described above. This will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

3.3. Data collection and analysis

The study used a mixed methods approach. The data were collected through a questionnaire that consisted of closed-ended (CEQ) (7) and open-ended (OEQ) (9) questions. An obvious benefit of such a questionnaire is that it combines precise and relevant responses and the ease of comparison provided by closed-ended questions (quantitative data) with more detailed answers to open-ended questions containing students' personal opinions, attitudes and ideas (qualitative data).

The questionnaire aimed to find out the students' attitudes to and opinions about three aspects relating to the use of L2 translation activities and were grouped into three sections: (1) usefulness for L2 learning and practice; (2) usefulness for professional development; (3) degree of psychological comfort. A 5-point Likert scale was used for each question, ranging from 1) Strongly agree to 5) Strongly disagree.

Table 1 Questionnaire

<i>Usefulness for L2 acquisition and practice</i>
1. Do you agree that L2 translation activities are useful for developing L2 speaking skills? (CEQ)
2. Do you agree that L2 translation activities are useful for expanding and practising L2 vocabulary and grammar? (CEQ)
3. Do you agree that L2 translation activities can help you to identify and gain a better understanding of L1/L2 differences? (CEQ)
4. Did L2 translation activities change your personal assessment of your L2 proficiency? How? (OEQ)
5. Did L2 translation activities change your ideas about the character of translator's L2 knowledge? How? (OEQ)
6. Did L2 translation activities change your approach to learning L2? How? (OEQ)
<i>Usefulness for professional development</i>
7. Do you agree that the knowledge of bilingual word correspondences is key to good translation? (CEQ)
8. Did you find L2 translation activities useful for developing professionally important skills? In what way? (OEQ)
9. Did L2 translation activities have any effect on your self-image as a future interpreter? How? (OEQ)
10. Do you agree that the use of L2 translation activities in foreign language classes contributes to professional translator training? (CEQ)
11. Which translation activity did you find especially useful for developing professionally important skills? Explain your choice. (OEQ)
<i>Degree of psychological comfort</i>
12. Do you agree that L2 translation activities are performed outside one's comfort zone? (CEQ)
13. Do you agree that this challenge is beneficial for your development as an L2 user and translator? (CEQ)
14. Which activity did you find more stressful? Why? (OEQ)
15. Which activity did you find more enjoyable? Why? (OEQ)
16. What difficulties did you face when doing L2 translation activities? (OEQ)

We used a paper questionnaire, and the students were expected to answer the questions in writing. The questionnaire was anonymous as full identification was not essential to the purposes of the study. Individual students will be referred to as S1, S2, etc. The questions were in the students' L1 to ensure complete understanding of what was being asked. The students answered open-ended questions in their L1 which allowed them to express their ideas more clearly and precisely. The answers were then translated into English. Sixty-five completed questionnaires were collected, i.e., all the participants gave their responses.

The qualitative data collected from open-ended questions were analysed using thematic analysis which allows the researcher to identify and analyse patterns of meaning across a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The themes identified provided insight into some common attitudes and opinions shared by translation students about different aspects of using L2 translation activities in a foreign language classroom.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Usefulness for L2 acquisition and practice

Table 2 Usefulness of L2 translation activities for L2 acquisition and practice

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. Do you agree that L2 translation activities are useful for developing L2 speaking skills?				
38,5%	49,2%	7,7%	4,6%	0%
2. Do you agree that L2 translation activities are useful for expanding and practising L2 vocabulary and grammar?				
57%	33,8%	9,2%	0%	0%
3. Do you agree that L2 translation activities can help you to identify and gain a better understanding of L1/L2 differences?				
46,2%	38,4%	15,4%	0%	0%

The quantitative data demonstrate that the students seem to be in agreement about the benefits of L2 translation activities for the specified aspects of L2 acquisition and practice. Interestingly, students felt that they benefit more from vocabulary and grammar activities (Strongly agree – 57%) than from speaking activities (Strongly agree – 38,5%). This finding could be explained by the fact that the students' attention was mainly focused on finding the right vocabulary as well as grammatical and sentence structures in L2. This explanation can also account for the fact that the majority of the students (Strongly agree – 46,2%) agreed that L2 translation activities are beneficial in terms of identification of differences between L1 and L2. Switching between the two languages, comparing linguistic means in L1 and L2 when selecting a translation equivalent can be helpful in raising awareness and consolidation of knowledge of the cross-linguistic differences and similarities between the two languages.

Answers to Questions 4, 5, 6 (qualitative data) revealed the following common themes. First, many students admitted that they they were sure that learning topic vocabulary and practising it through learning activities was enough to produce a good translation. This opinion was particularly predominant among 3rd year students.

Many were surprised that their L2 knowledge did not function as efficiently as they had expected. Some students observed that they had “struggled to recall the right L2 word or phrase in response to an L1 equivalent of an active vocabulary item” (Ss 5, 7, 13, 19, 22, 45, 51), though they had done vocabulary exercises which required them to provide L1 or L2 equivalents for the active vocabulary items.

In addition, it emerged from the students' answers that first-hand experience of L2 translation gave them new insight into the importance of having an extensive vocabulary and being able to find the right language to communicate an idea clearly and precisely. They admitted that “knowing as many words as possible” (S7) was a priority for a translator. Participants also stressed the importance of “being able to find a synonym or a synonymous phrase when you don't know or have forgotten the right word” (S17) or “when the right word does not come to mind at the right moment” (S18), “knowing different ways of saying the same thing” (S2).

Finally, students admitted a certain shift in their attitude to the process of learning L2. They stated that they “better understood the purpose of classroom activities and practice exercises” (S14), “understood the importance of paying attention to every new word, phrase and grammatical structure” (S1), “came to appreciate the knowledge of a large number of set phrases and clichés” (S57, 45), “understood what their priorities should be in learning a foreign language” (S64). Some pointed out that this experience gave them motivation to expand their vocabulary and “find different ways of saying the same thing” (S28). This indicates that students begin to see their L2 as a professional tool, relate their knowledge of the language to the professional context of its use and adopt a more conscious and professionally-oriented attitude to what is going on in the foreign language classroom.

4.2. Usefulness for professional development

Table 3 Usefulness of L2 translation activities for professional development

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
7. Do you agree that the knowledge of bilingual word correspondences is key to good translation?	13,8%	27,7%	6,2%	52,3%	0%
10. Do you agree that the use of L2 translation activities in foreign language classes contributes to professional translator training?	20%	61,5%	12,4%	4,6%	1,5%

Answers to Question 7 produced somewhat mixed results. On the one hand, a large proportion of the students (Strongly agree – 13,8%, Agree – 27,7%) believe that the knowledge of bilingual correspondences is essential to producing a good translation. This could in part be accounted for by the reliance on topic vocabulary which led to the assumption that without knowledge of these words and phrases students would have experienced difficulties during L2 translation activities. This assumption, though not entirely false, is still undesirable for a future translator. Consequently, more thought should be given to the design of L2 translation activities to ensure that they do not contribute to the formation of wrong beliefs.

However, the fact that a slightly larger proportion of the participants (Disagree – 52,3%) disagree with the question, seems reassuring. It suggests that these participants understand that to produce an adequate translation one cannot rely on bilingual correspondences only. This seems to, at least in part, refute the concerns expressed by the opponents of translation in a foreign language classroom that L2 translation activities instil a false belief about the existence of perfect one-to-one correspondences between languages.

Answers to Question 10 revealed a generally positive attitude of the participants to the contribution of L2 translation activities to their professional development as translators. Only a small minority of the students (Disagree – 4,6%, Strongly disagree – 1,5%) felt that these activities were unnecessary rather than useful in this respect. Still, more students seem to “Agree” (61,5%) that “Strongly agree” (20%) with the question which suggests that L2 translation activities are not seen as key to their professional training. This is in line with the role given to these activities within translation-oriented foreign language training – they

were not intended to provide training in L2 translation but to ensure students' exposure to their future profession and development of awareness of its challenges.

The analysis of the qualitative data (questions 8, 9, 11) revealed that both 3rd and 4th-year students agreed that the L2 translation activities were useful in terms of providing insight into and first-hand experience in their future profession. However, their reasons for thinking so were slightly different. While 3rd year-students seemed to enjoy and appreciate the novelty and professional character of the activities, the opportunity "to try their hand at translation" (S34), "to feel like a professional translator" (S41) and "were excited about acting as real translators" (S53), 4th-year students stressed the importance of these activities in terms of providing more opportunity "to practise translation skills" (S12), "to use active vocabulary in a professional context, to see how well they have mastered it" (S45).

Some students felt intimidated by these activities at first because they "felt that they didn't know how to translate the passage" (S19), "were at a loss as to how to find the right words" (S59), "felt that their language knowledge was letting them down" (S62). Nevertheless, they admitted the importance of such activities in terms of providing exposure to their future profession – "if I want to be a good translator, I shouldn't shy away from such activities" (S2).

There was a small proportion of participants who felt that translation activities should be used in translation classes, while language classes should focus on practising foreign language only – "in a foreign language class, we should learn new words, make up dialogues, retell texts" (S63).

The "Act as interpreter" activity was quite predictably rated as an especially useful activity as it "creates conditions similar to those in which professional translators work" (S61), "gives us a taste of what translator's work is like" (S12), allows us to "experience first-hand the difficulties that translators face in their work" (S11).

4.3. Degree of psychological comfort

Table 4 Degree of psychological comfort during L2 translation activities

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
12. Do you agree that L2 translation activities are performed outside one's comfort zone?				
38,5%	40%	13,8%	7,7%	0%
13. Do you agree that this challenge is beneficial for your development as a translator?				
29,2%	41,5%	18,5%	10,8%	0%

The data received for Question 12 demonstrate that a large majority of the students (Strongly agree – 38,5%, Agree – 40%) find L2 translation activities challenging and uncomfortable. However, the answers to Question 13 suggest that the participants understand the importance of dealing with this discomfort and are getting used to such stressful conditions. Two observations immediately strike the eye. The first one is that while 38,5% of the students strongly agreed that L2 translation activities were performed outside one's comfort zone, only 29,2% strongly agreed that this challenge was beneficial for them. The second observation is that there is a slight increase in the number of participants who "Neither agree or disagree" and "Disagree", 18,5% and 10,8% respectively. This may in part correlate

with the negative opinions expressed by some students about the advisability of including L2 translation activities in translator language training.

Predictably, the participants were unanimous in identifying the “Act as interpreter” activity as more stressful. As to the more enjoyable activity, opinion was divided and no apparent correlation with the year of study was observed. The difference of opinion could be accounted for by the students’ different preferred types of activity, with some enjoying a more comfortable and collaborative learning environment and others thriving on more stressful and challenging tasks. This inference is partly supported by the data. The students commented that the “Act as interpreter” activity “allowed them to test their L2 knowledge” (S43), “to see how they could use L2 under pressure” (S31), “to see what they were capable of” (S53), while the “Render the article into English” activity was described as “inviting collaboration and discussion” (S23), “group work and interaction with other students” (S58), “giving some flexibility in terms of language” (S11), “giving opportunity to discuss alternatives and defend your choice” (S60), “challenging but motivating” (S57).

With regard to the problems encountered by students, the following difficulties have been identified as common to a large proportion of students:

(a) dependence on the original text and lack of flexibility when choosing the right language to render the ideas into L2;

(b) lack of strategies for and experience in quickly and efficiently dealing with difficulties in finding the right translation equivalents and attempts to produce a word-for-word translation which proved clumsy and inadequate;

(c) slow recall and retrieval of linguistic resources in L2, including those which are “well-known” to students;

(d) slower speech in L2;

(e) time constraints (“Act as interpreter”);

(f) psychological discomfort and lack of psychological readiness for translation activities.

Once again, these data indicate the students’ unpreparedness for using their L2 in quasi-professional contexts which results in word-finding and retrieval problems, slower speech rate and overall discomfort when doing L2 translation activities.

5. CONCLUSION

The study focused on the use of L2 translation activities in teaching foreign languages to trainee translators and aimed to find out 3rd and 4th-year translation students’ attitude to these tasks. Overall, the evidence from this study suggests that L2 translation activities were viewed by the participants as useful both in terms of benefits for L2 acquisition and practice as well as giving the students an opportunity to relate their L2 knowledge and the process of its acquisition to a quasi-translation context and to draw adequate conclusions, some encouraging and some disappointing and offering much food for thought.

In particular, the students highlighted that these activities were beneficial in terms of L2 vocabulary, grammar and speech practice as well as raising awareness of cross-linguistic differences between L2 and L1. L2 translation activities gave them valuable insights into how language is used in translation and the extra demands placed on the translator’s L2 competence and changed their idea of what the translator’s knowledge of L2 should be like.

The students also agreed that this learning experience caused a shift in their attitude to the process of learning L2 towards a better understanding of and a more meaningful approach to L2 activities. It also contributed to their professional development in terms of giving them some L2 translation practice and allowing them to identify with the profession and strengthen their self-image as future translators. Finally, the participants noted that this experience made them aware of some important problems with their L2 knowledge and use such as a weak L1 – L2 link, word-finding and retrieval problems, slower speech, lack of strategies for dealing with difficult situations and lack of psychological readiness to perform under such stressful conditions.

However, the study revealed some areas which require attention. These include the opinion expressed by some participants that L2 translation activities do not belong in the foreign language classroom and divergence of opinion among the students about the role of bilingual correspondences in translation. The former may simply reflect some students' personal opinions but it may also imply a certain lack of understanding of the aims and potential benefits of classroom activities. The latter is an important issue in translation, and it is essential that the students have a professional attitude to the use of bilingual correspondences.

The study has several some implications for translator language training:

1. L2 translation activities should have a place in the teaching of foreign languages to trainee translators.

2. When planning, designing and implementing L2 translation activities, it is crucial to prevent possible negative effects and ensure that these activities do not become counterproductive.

3. Foreign language teachers who work on translation training programmes should have a good understanding of the essence and challenges of the translation profession.

A potential limitation of the study could have been the method of collecting qualitative data. It is possible that an in-person interview could have provided more detailed information than written answers to open-ended questions. On the other hand, it may well be that the students could have been more reluctant to share their opinions in person. Besides, the “in-person interview” option was discarded due to a large number of participants.

Future research could focus on the different aspects of designing and implementing L2 translation activities used as part of foreign language training for trainee translators so as to ensure their effectiveness for L2 acquisition, their value for the professional development of students and prevention of the formation of false beliefs about or unprofessional approaches to translation.

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WHY ARE WE FLIPPING? AN EXPLORATION OF THE REASONS FOR IMPLEMENTING FLIPPED LEARNING AND ITS PERCEIVED IMPLICATIONS IN AN ONLINE ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES PRESESSIONAL COURSE

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Abstract. *Preessional courses are designed to help learners develop the necessary language and academic skills to succeed in their higher education journey. Despite this common overarching goal, these courses vary in the degree of disciplinary specificity, duration and pedagogical underpinnings. One pedagogical underpinning used to varying degrees is flipped learning (FL). FL is a relatively novel pedagogical approach which has informed the development of the preessional object of study. This small-scale study aims to gain a better understanding of why course designers, course developers and course coordinators, decide to implement FL, along with its pedagogical implications. Through the use of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, it is shown how although FL was first adopted as a response to practical constraints, the pedagogical benefits, such as fostering students' autonomy and maximising classroom time, translated into its formal adoption in further iterations of the course. Results also show the practical implications of adopting FL following a top-down approach. This article also shows how FL can be combined with other approaches such as TBL or TEL. Based on the data generated, this article argues for FL to be part of the eclectic pedagogical repertoire that nurtures EAP.*

Key words: *Flipped Learning, EAP Pedagogies, Pre-sessional course, Technology Enhanced Learning, Course Design*

1. INTRODUCTION

Multiple approaches to knowledge have interacted in the development of EAP as a discipline, from the now-consolidated genre-based approach to teaching writing in the disciplines to embracing recent approaches such as Legitimation Code Theory (Bruce, 2012). Interestingly, it is in the classroom space where this eclecticism comes to life (Kirk, 2018). The extra layer of complexity when exploring EAP pedagogies (Kirk, 2023) is the multiple realities of EAP teaching not only in different institutions within the UK but also in terms of the global context (MacDiarmid & MacDonald, 2021). EAP does not exist in a vacuum but rather as a part of broader pedagogical conversations and within

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local contexts. It is primarily a student-centred approach nurtured by advances in pedagogical research and locally enacted to respond to the multiple realities in which is implemented. One of those advances is the case of Flipped Learning, Although FL had been implemented and researched before Covid-19 (Wittmann & Wulf, 2023), it has been gaining popularity due to its seamless integration in the online environment. This is relevant for the current context within HE as following the move online, known as emergency remote teaching (ERT) (Hodges et al. 2020), institutions, practitioners and learners are navigating the return to physical spaces. As a result, new blended and hybrid mediums of delivery are being explored. Crucially, there is a strong desire to harvest the lessons learned from the pandemic (see, for instance, JAAP's (2021) special issue 'Transitions to Remote and Blended Learning'). Similarly, McElveny (2023) explicitly signals FL as one of those positive approaches to teaching and learning while urging the EAP community not to lose the advances made in terms of delivery mode and pedagogical designs (McElveny, 2023). However, despite FL being widely discussed in EAP forums such as BALEAP (2019; 2021; 2023) and IAETFLL (2019; 2021; 2023), published research exploring FL in the EAP context is still emerging.

Novel pedagogical approaches and delivery models have also affected EAP preessional courses. As Pearson (2020) explains these courses aim to help learners develop their linguistic and academic skills while regulating admission into HE programmes in the UK. Pearson (2020) also highlights the lack of systematic documentation of preessional programmes in terms of how the intensity, length and frequency of courses relates to minimum English requirements in HE programmes.

This article aims to shed light on how FL, a relatively novel pedagogical approach, informs the development of a preessional course while providing a better understanding of how key figures in pre-sessional design evaluate the pedagogical implications of this approach. Thus it provides a better understanding of the impact of FL in preessional courses while showing how pedagogical principles are embraced following a top-down approach in the course object of study. Specifically, it aims to address the following research questions.

1. What reasons might pre-sessional course designers have for adopting FL?
2. What are the perceived pedagogical implications of embracing FL for course design?

To achieve this goal, a critical review of the literature is presented to contextualise FL in relation to EAP pre-sessionals while exploring the nature of these courses. The methodology section introduces the context of the research and examines the methodological principles and methods adopted in this mixed-methods study. Results are presented and discussed, followed by a critical reflection on the data generated and their implications for the use of FL in EAP preessional courses.

2. CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This section aims to critically engage with key literature to contextualise this study. Thus, this section explores the nature of FL followed by a brief exploration of the nature of preessionals.

2.1. Conceptualising Flipped Learning

In 2012, two high-school Chemistry teachers, Bergamand and Sams (2012), relocated their traditional lectures outside of the classroom space, to allow the sessions to be a

collaborative space where complex aspects were explored. This transformative initiative resulted in them being credited as the founders of FL as it is currently conceptualised. However, the origins of FL can be traced to the seminal work of Mazur (1997) and, more recently, the Inverted Classroom (IC) (Lage, Platt and Treglia, 2000). IC is defined by the authors as “events that have traditionally taken place inside the classroom now take place outside the classroom and vice versa” (Lage et al., 2000, p. 32). A superficial engagement with IC and FL may suggest that they are cemented in similar concepts. In fact, Bergmann and Sams (Noonoo, 2012) themselves attribute the lack of interest aroused by the IC in institutions and practitioners alike, compared to FL, to the lack of technological readiness. Nevertheless, a deeper analysis of the pedagogical principles of both IC and FL reveals that IC advocates providing a wide range of options for different learning styles, FL advocates an inversion of Bloom’s taxonomy (Brinks-Lockwood, 2014). That is to say, while IC is rooted in the widely discredited theory of learning styles (An & Carr, 2017; Kirschner, 2017), FL is rooted in social constructivism (Correa, 2015). By moving the higher-order thinking skills tasks into the classroom space, learners are able to explore these more challenging tasks with the support of their peers and the guidance of the tutor. This, in turn, results in learning becoming a collective experience (Vygotsky, 1978). This conceptualisation of FL, (Brinks-Lockwood, 2014; Correa, 2015; Villegas, 2022) allows for a deeper understanding of the pedagogical principles informing FL. This is not to say that FL cannot benefit from TEL and multimodal artefacts but rather by demonstrating how FL is underpinned by constructivism, also present in other EAP pedagogies such as Task-Based Learning (TBL), I argue for FL to be a valuable approach within the eclectic EAP pedagogical repertoire.

Having addressed FL in relation to TEL, the importance of space will now be explored. Back in 2016, Fisher’s then-provocative article questioned the need for classrooms altogether argued that FL and active learning spaces are simply a response to the new economic demands. Fisher (2016) predicted the transformation of working spaces due to technological advancements to be mimicked in HE spaces. Fisher’s (2016) rationale is based on a utilitarian conception of education as a preparation for contributing to the world’s economy that he proposes (2016, p. 11). However, with the 2020 Covid-19 outbreak, activity was moved online. In the case of education, Johnston et al. (2022) talk about the importance of the third space as a form of conceptualising schools’ emergency remote teaching (ERT). Crucially, they conclude their article with a call to consider the implications of the lessons learned during the pandemic and the role of digital third spaces in different aspects of education. Similarly, in the context of EAP in HE, McElveny (2023) urges practitioners not to lose sight of the positive aspects of teaching online. He reports successfully implementing FL as part of a TEL project, following Abeysekera and Dawson’s (2014) framework. This is an interesting example of combining FL and TEL where strong pedagogical principles are intertwined with TEL. This is not the only example of a growing body of research (see JPAAP Special issue) reflecting on the teaching and learning that took place during the ERT period. Creative and relatively novel approaches, like McElveny’s (2023), along with the awareness of different spaces and their impact on teaching and learning (Johnston et al., 2022) open the possibility of re-distributing tasks and renegotiating the space. This is then implemented as deliberate action considering pedagogical implications and practices, as opposed to impositions from the labour market as Fisher (2016) proposed. Therefore, FL can contribute to the redistribution of spaces by informing the distribution of the tasks in either the online or physical space. redistribution can thus be informed by strong pedagogical principles and market demands.

Flexibility in space is not the only advantage that FL can bring to the EAP classroom. Studies on FL report a more effective use of classroom time (Davies et al., 2015). Similarly, Wanner and Palmer (2015) attribute FL to an increase in learners' interaction while Yilmaz (2013) reports high students' engagement and satisfaction. Studies exploring FL in the language classroom report better performance (Teng, 2017) along with students' ability to produce higher-quality work (Brinks-Lockwood, 2014). However, studies also report potential pitfalls of FL. Firstly, student lack of? preparation of the flipped tasks (Abeysekara & Dawson, 2014) is a common concern. Secondly, in the context of HE, Anderson et al., (2017) report how although initially students who attend a FL course score higher than those on a non-flipped course, these differences disappear after 6 months.

Research specifically exploring FL in EAP is emerging, for instance, McElveny's (2023) project using FL alongside TEL, a trend predicted to continue. Knežević et al., (2020) adopted FL to foster EAP students' vocabulary acquisition; their positive results provide strong grounds to conceptualise FL as a useful practice to enhance vocabulary acquisition in the EAP classroom. Thus, this study aims to contribute to this growing area of research by amplifying the voices of course designers, course developers and course leaders to shed light on their design process and experience of using FL in a preessional course.

2.2. Conceptualising Preessional Programmes

EAP is related to EFL but presents its own unique characteristics as a field. Watson-Todd, (2003) explains how the key principle behind EAP is to develop students' academic literacies. Crucially, EAP tends not to be included under any specific method due to their prescriptive nature clashing with EAP's intrinsic eclecticism (Watson-Todd, 2003). Therefore, EAP draws from a wide range of approaches that allow for enacting its four controlling principles, as identified by Philips (1981, cited in Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001, p. 183). These principles are

- Reality control, relating to the difficulty of the task.
- Non-triviality, stating how the task needs to be relevant for the students.
- Authenticity, requiring the language to be 'authentic for its specific purpose' (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001, p. 183).
- Tolerance of error, allowing errors that do not compromise communication.

The eclectic and fluid nature of EAP makes it a truly student-centred discipline, where a wide range of approaches are used to allow students to join their disciplinary discourse and actively engage with the construction of knowledge. As highlighted in the introductory section, to achieve this goal, traditional approaches such as Swales' (1998) conception of textography as a genre inform materials and courses which allow students to acquire the unique disciplinary patterns of their field. Similarly, Hyland explains how to be heard in a discipline, it is necessary to 'display a competence as disciplinary insiders' (Hyland, 2005, p. 175). Thus, by using authentic materials, students will be more aware of their discipline's discourse, thus addressing Hyland's point and fostering not only students' own awareness of disciplinary discourse but also their ability to communicate successfully within their communities of practice. An example of specificity in preessional courses is discussed by Hulme (2021) who argues for the need for discipline-specific professionals while offering a set of guidance principles.

However, the ability to engage in these pedagogical discussions informing the course direction is not necessarily available to practitioners in the course. Fletcher (2023) urges

course designers to allow space to preessional tutors to bring their own expertise, thus addressing differentiation and genuinely place the learners at the centre of the sessions. As highlighted, a learner centred approach is key in teaching EAP. Similarly, Alexander (2020) explains the need for EAP tutors to quickly adapt to teaching a course “it is designed, rather than as they imagine it should be designed”. This quote puts the focus on the understanding of pedagogical principles enacted by course designers while highlighting a top-down implementation of these principles. This, in turn, requires practitioners who have the skills to unpack those pedagogies and bring them to live in the classroom.

However, as Fletcher (2023) highlights a purely to-down implementation may overlook differentiation. Crucially, EAP practitioners need to be highly skilled to decode and implement pedagogical underpinnings yet may be unable to provide key input based on their experience and high skills. Ganchev (2020) proposes a middle-ground approach to designing academic writing preessionals where a top down-approach is complemented by student-generated data based on questionnaires, diagnostic texts and classroom observations. While this approach includes students’ voices, it still fails to acknowledge how preessionals following a top-down design rely on qualified practitioners unpicking said principles and qualified practitioners effectively using them to underpin their courses.

In the case of FL, this requires course designers who have an intimate understanding of FL and the specific contexts in which the course will be implemented. In turn, it requires practitioners who can understand how this pedagogical approach is conceptualised and implemented. Crucially, the Competency Framework for EAP teachers (BALEAP, 2008) does not include FL as one of the key pedagogical approaches in the EAP practitioner toolkit. Thus, creating the space to explore the rationale underpinning course designers’ selections and implementations of pedagogical approaches to inform their courses.

3. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

3.1. Research Context

This small-scale study aims to gain a better understanding of why course designers, course developers and course coordinators, referred to under the umbrella term ‘management team’ decide to implement FL while shedding light on their perceptions of the impact of this approach in the course. The course object of study took place at a Russell-group University in the UK offering a 10-week and a 6-week preessional Flipped EAP course was selected. This course relies on TEL to present the flipped content, students access this content through the VLE and complete it before attending the live synchronous session. Crucially, this data was collected in the summer of 2020, therefore this flipped pre-sessional was moved online, making it an example of ERT (Hodges et al., 2020). As FL had been implemented in 2018, this choice of pre-sessional course seems reasonable as they are clear examples of early adopters (Huser et al. 2021). However, it is worth highlighting the unique circumstances in which the data collection took place. This, in turn, needs to be taken into consideration when engaging with the results and analysis in this paper.

3.1.1. Participants

This is a small data set with five self-selected participants. Four of the participants identified as male and one as ‘prefer not to say’. Although participants have been labelled under the umbrella term ‘course management team’, Table 1 shows how they hold a wide range of roles related to course design, development and implementation.

Table 1 Roles held by questionnaire participants under the umbrella term ‘course management team’.

Role in the course object of study	Respondents
Course Designers/ Academic Directors They oversee the preessionals design and have line management responsibilities. They meet weekly with the Course Leaders while the course takes place and Course Leaders report directly to them.	2
Course Developers They have a strong understanding of OL and Online tools; they report to the Technology Enhance Learning Director	1
Course Leader They are the point of contact between the teaching-team and the Course Designers/ Academic Directors and Course Developers. They oversee the teachers implementing the course but have no line management responsibilities	2

Although all respondents agreed to be contacted to participate in a semi-structured interview, only four of them responded to the follow-up email to set up the interview. Interviews included two course leaders, William, and Dennis, one member of the course development James, and one of the academic directors out of the potential two, Lester. Key demographic information about these participants is provided in Table 2. As discussed, interviews revealed complementary information that allowed for a better understanding of the quantitative data collected.

Table 2 Key demographic information of semi-structured interview participants

Pseudonym	Demographic information
Lester	Lester is one of the two managers who took part in the questionnaire. He was behind the push for adopting FL in 2018 and maintaining it for the summer school pre-sessionnal course due to its positive results
James	James has relevant EL experience and has played a variety of roles in pre-sessionnal summer school courses, including teacher, team leader and TEL support.
William	Summer 2020 was William’s first time as a team leader. However, he has experience of teaching in this pre-sessionnal course.
Dennis	Summer 2020 was Dennis’s first time as a team leader. However, he has experience of teaching in this pre-sessionnal course.

3.2. Methodology and Methods

As highlighted, this study aims to address the following RQs:

1. What reasons might a pre-sessionnal course management team have for adopting FL?
2. What are the perceived implications of embracing FL?

To achieve this aim, a mixed methods research approach was adopted. From a philosophical perspective, this research aligns with the practical paradigm, which emphasizes practical application (Denscombe, 2008). This paradigm is appropriate for this study as it aims to investigate how and why FL is implemented in a pre-sessional course from the perspective of course designers, course developers and course leaders. In this study, an abductive approach to data processing is employed, as suggested by Reichertz (2004), because abductive reasoning allows the researcher to actively engage in both theory generation and data creation (Kaushick & Walsh, 2019). This approach is well-suited for the study's mixed-methods nature and the data generation and analysis process. Crucially, MMR allows for triangulation, which involves comparing the outcomes obtained through different methods (Ivankova & Greer, 2015). It also allows for complementarity, thus enabling seeking clarification on findings obtained from different methods (Ivankova & Greer, 2015). In this study, semi-structured interviews allow for further clarification on ideas and themes generated at the questionnaire stage.

Case study was adopted as the research strategy. This is because the project focuses on a specific course in a British HE institution and closely explores their reality of embracing FL in an EAP course. However, it is important to address the limitation of generalizability often associated with case studies, as discussed in the literature (Cohen et al., 2011; Pearson Casanave, 2018; Wellington, 2015). Case studies do not lead to generalizations, but the results can be transferable to similar contexts. Crucially, this cross-sectional study was carried out in the third year of the programme embracing FL, however, the data was collected in 2020. This means that although FL had been implemented in 2018 and refined in 2019, in 2020, FL run alongside ERT. The uniqueness of summer 2020 contributes to the fact that to ethically engage with these results, findings should be considered within their context. Thus, allowing for potential transferability but not for generalisability.

Quantitative data was generated through questionnaires adapting perceptions from the literature and previously used questionnaires in similar studies. Those studies are Noels et al. (2000), Sergis et al. (2018), Sørenbø et al. (2009) and Wanner and Palmer (2015). Adapting questionnaires offered the significant benefit of using items that had undergone testing to ensure validity and reliability for their intended research purposes. This was reassuring to me being a researcher with limited experience, this approach gave me a sense of reassurance and develop my own understanding of the process involved in developing a questionnaire. This questionnaire was also informed by insights from the course object of studies obtained through a pilot exploratory research conducted in 2019. One of the key decisions made in terms of this instrument was using Likert scales with numbers, to avoid potential discrepancies when interpreting words (Cohen et al., 2017). Specifically, in this study, due to the limited sample, the use of percentages was discarded in favour of respondents' numbers. This approach was taken so that results do not misrepresent the data set.

In terms of analytical lenses, descriptive statistics were used due to the self-selected and non-representative nature of the sample. Descriptive statistics allow for categorising and gaining insights into the sample, but they do not support making presumptive conclusions (Allen, 2017). Therefore, descriptive statistics are used to provide context for the qualitative data set and to provide a description, rather than drawing inferences. Two reasons underpin this methodological choice, firstly, it helps assess data quality and identify anomalies (Loeb et al., 2017). Secondly, it enhances the understanding of quantitative description (Trochim, 2020). The software SPSS was used to carry out this analysis due to its user-friendly interface. This study presents the mode to identify the most common answers in the questionnaire.

Qualitative data were generated through semi-structured interviews with the management team and analysed through thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). To generate themes from the semi-structured interviews or conversations with a purpose (Webb & Webb, 1932; as cited in Wellington 2015), I followed the six key decisions proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thus, in this analysis, themes were generated based on trends in the literature, participants own comments and the proposed RQS. In that line, although the analysis was constrained by the RQs, it is closer to a rich description of the data set as opposed to a detailed account of a particular aspect. After all, this exploratory study aims to shed light on the perceptions of practitioners in course management positions in relation to FL.

The proposed RQs have played a key role in the analysis of the data generated, therefore, this is closer to a theoretical TA, as opposed to a more inductive approach. This TA aligns with a more Semantic, or explicit level, as it moves from the description to the interpretation of the data. Its goal is to theorize the broader meaning and implication of the data while relating it to the literature previously explored. It has already been explained the rationale behind embracing a pragmatic paradigm, to align with this epistemological choice, this analysis takes a more essentialist. Lastly, Braun and Clarke (2006 p. 85) highlight ‘the many questions of Qualitative research’ including the project RQs, the interview questions and the questions informing the coding and analysis of data. In this project, the RQs were at the heart of the process but they also evolved and became more refined, as my own understanding of the field grew, and the research evolved. Similarly, the interview questions were mostly informed by the RQs but, due to the dialogic nature of semi-structured interviews, some questions and ideas explored are unique to each participant. Once again, the original RQs were instrumental in coding and analysing the data, in line with a more theoretical approach to TA.

My approach to generating themes also aligns with Braun and Clarke (2006 p.84) approach by embracing their six steps to carry out TA as can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3 Braun and Clarke 2006 p.84, the questions of Qualitative Research.

How to develop a robust approach to TA Braun and Clarke (2006 p.84)?	How did I ensure this?
Familiarise yourself with your data	As highlighted, transcripts were extracted using Otter.ai and check by the researcher for accuracy and omissions. These transcripts were printed out and manually highlighted key ideas that related to the RQs.
Generate initial codes	I re-read this roughly highlighted transcripts and roughly coded them a first time, then I moved the analysis to MAXQDA to refine this initial coding.
Searching for themes	I looked at the coded extract to generate relevant and meaningful themes to address the RQs.
Reviewing the themes	I moved from a microanalysis approach to a more holistic one to ensure consistency and congruency in the generated themes in relation to RQs and the literature analysed.
Defining and naming themes	At this stage, themes were revised and refined ensuring consistency in grouping the extract under the relevant themes.
Producing the report	This article is the report of this analysis

On a more practical note, recordings were transcribed using Otter.ai, and MaxQDA was used to facilitate the coding process. Table 4 summarises the themes generated to address the proposed RQs.

Table 4 Codes generated to address the proposed RQs.

Themes generated to address the proposed RQs	
What reasons might pre-sessional course managers have for adopting FL?	What are the perceived implications of embracing FL?
Practical constraints	FL in combination with other pedagogical approaches.
Pedagogical benefits	FL and TEL

3.3. Ethical considerations

Before concluding this section, I would like to address the ethical considerations from a data generation and a researcher’s positionality perspectives. Firstly, in terms of data generation, it has been reinforced how results may be transferable but not generalisable due to the intrinsic nature of the research. To protect participants’ identities, respondents were given the option to choose their own pseudonyms, those who declined were assigned one. Secondly, in terms of positionality, this is an example of an insider researcher, which is intrinsically sensitive, as participants can be influenced by pre-existing relationships. Although, at the time of conducting this research, I was a member of the department object of study, I was involved in in-sessional programmes and not preessionals thus potentially lessening some of the issues. Similarly, the voluntary nature of participating in the research was highlighted in the letter to participants and ethical consent was obtained from the institution and the department. Ethical approval was obtained to carry out this research.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To facilitate the presentation of the results obtained, they have been classified under their respective RQs.

RQ1 What reasons might a pre-sessional course management team have for adopting FL?

The first RQ was solely addressed through the use of qualitative instruments. Rich contributions were made by all participants in this area. Participants reported a response to practical and external factors to explore the use of FL. Specifically, they wanted to maximise the classroom space, responding to a higher number of students in 2017.

Although adopting FL was a response to a desire to embrace students-centred sessions while maximising the physical space, as has been seen from the literature critically evaluated in this article (Bergman and Sands, 2012; Brinks-Lockwood, 2014) in these areas in which FL can have a positive impact. Crucially, this lengthy quote shows how FL may have been a response to external circumstances but has quickly become a positive approach. The powerful car/ bicycle metaphor explains how allowing FL to become part of the summer school pedagogical repertoire translated into fostering

students' autonomy and aligning classroom dynamics to EAP principles (King and Kirk, 2022).

“I’ve used this metaphor elsewhere, is us adopting FL has been a positive thing. And imagine that you drive to work, and then your car breaks down. So, you start walking to work instead. And you find that actually walking to work is good exercise. It’s cheaper, it’s better for the environment, and you enjoy it more. So then when your car in when your car gets fixed, you decide that walking to work is better in any case, and that’s what we kind of found with FL. Initially, it was a necessity but then we realized this is a better approach, I think, particularly for helping develop autonomy, and not having so much teacher-led lessons with a teacher at the front explaining how to do this and explaining how to do that.” (Lester)

Therefore the pedagogical advantages of embracing FL, such as developing autonomy and fostering a classroom practice with the tutor adopting the role of ‘meddler in the middle’ (Kirk and King, 2022).

Lester’s insightful take on the benefits of FL is an interesting contrast to Dennis pragmatic approach to the advantages of FL

“I, really, you can give a label to whatever theory or methodology you are using but basically, I see it as I go and do some stuff, they do some stuff. And it works, hopefully.” (Dennis)

Dennis further elaborates on this point by stating that:

“Realistically, there’s a lot of homework, and they need to do the homework for the next class I realise no one’s going to be by giving a paper at IATEFL on the students’ need to do a lot of homework. But it’s just the balance between what you’re doing in class and what you are doing outside of class.” (Dennis)

Crucially, Dennis is highlighting the need for a balance between the in-class HOTS tasks and the before-class LOTS tasks. As has been discussed (Bergman and Sands, 2012; Brinks-Lockwood, 2014, Villegas, 2022). However, both Lester and Dennis refer to learners' autonomy and how it, hopefully, works. The key difference is that Lester seems to conceptualise FL as a conduit for fostering autonomy and students’ engagement whereas Dennis aligns with the conceptualisation of FL as a direct manifestation of active learning. Crucially, Lester’s sophisticated understanding of FL allows him to establish pedagogical links with other key theories in EAP, as the quotes included in this section demonstrate.

It could be argued that Lester’s ability to establish links among the theories used underpinning the course is a result of his heavier involvement in the design. As Basturkmen (2010) argues, beliefs are developed during the process of designing the course. Thus, a direct lack of involvement in this stage may hinder the understanding of pedagogical principles and their impact. This is further supported by William’s perception of FL as a tool to maximise profit.

“I sort of understand the point. Because initially, when it came in, I thought it was just a way for the university to have more money and make more money (...) So you can get two classes in one classroom, so you can make more money, have the early lessons and the late lessons but then I did the course (...) and then it was clearer about how it should be, then it makes sense.” (William)

Considering that FL is difficult to define (Abeysekera and Dawson, 2014), the discussions around spaces in HE (Fisher, 2016) and the neoliberalism influence in HE, it is reasonable to understand how William and Dennis perceived FL to be a strategy to maximize profits. After all, as Lester explains, FL was first considered an option as a response to physical constraints. However, it is clear how all participants are able to identify and articulate the benefits of FL due to their shared understanding of FL, despite the fact that there are different degrees of understanding. The data analysed shows how if FL had not been perceived to foster students’ development and contributed to students’ centred sessions, it would not have been maintained in further iterations of the course.

This section has highlighted how even though the original drivers underpinning the use of FL were a response to practical constraints, the perceived benefits of FL ensured its continuity in further iterations of the preessional course. Crucially, a thorough understanding of FL is essential to be able to identify these benefits. As evidenced by William’s quote, as his understanding of FL develops, he can see ‘the point’ of FL.

RQ2 - What are the perceived implications of embracing FL?

This question aims to explore the perceived implications of embracing FL in an EAP preessional course. To address this RQ, a combination of closed (Table 5, Table 7) and open (Table 6), along with semi-structured interviews were used. The first topic addressed is FL in relation to other pedagogical approaches, followed by FL in relation to TEL.

FL in relation to other pedagogical approaches

Table 5 Questionnaire responses on perceived pedagogical implications of implementing FL

Item	Completely disagree	Disagree	Agree	Completely agree
I understand the pedagogical principles underpinning FL			4	1
I am comfortable answering teachers’ questions about the methods and approaches underpinning this course			4	1
The preessional course is more communicative as a result of embracing FL		2	1	2

It is interesting to see how although the majority of respondents believe FL allows for a more communitive course two respondents feel that is not necessarily the case. When addressing this in interviews, the abundance of materials that needed covering in class combined with the challenges of completing a course delivered through ERT were highlighted as deterrents for fostering communication.

“And if they work in isolation as well. Yeah, I mean, that’s something I’m still getting used to. So that’s going to make things much harder, isn’t it? Yes. Yeah.” (William)

The majority of the interviews reveal FL to be perceived as an excellent vehicle to foster communication, as James’ quote below exemplifies. This perception echoes common findings in the literature (Wanner & Palmer, 2015; Ryan & Reid, 2915).

“Students can spend time on their own and focus on the very basic ideas, understand very simple concepts, concepts. Look at language at the very good sort of like basic level, before they come to the classroom and do something a bit more advanced, or the interactivity happens in a way that, you know, they prepare something in advance, and then they come and they practice it in the lesson, they communicate their ideas and their notes”. (James).

In line with the responses generated in RQ1, the first two items reinforce participants' confidence in their own understanding of FL, along with the pedagogical principles informing the course. Lester's interview offers further evidence of the strong pedagogical principles underpinning the course as a direct result of engaging with the body of knowledge

“Well, to be honest, I kind of pride myself on the work that I have done. So back in 2018, when we first started adopting, flipped learning, I remember saying to my colleague, we don't know what we're doing. And so I went and found out and I went and read books about flip learning, task-based learning, andragogy. And I took what I discovered, and I applied it to the development work we were doing on the course.” (Lester)

This perceived interaction of FL with other pedagogical approaches in the course was explored in the open-ended question (Table 6).

Table 6 Course management team identification of other pedagogical principles informing the course

Participant	Principles Identified
Management	Essentially, we applied principles of flipped learning and task-based learning. The former kind of necessitates the latter because things that can be done didactically, passively or independently such as reading a text, understanding a grammar point or preparing a discussion can be flipped out of the classroom, and class time should be spent on quality interactive activities and TBL already has a wealth of literature on good ways to approach this.
Management	The communicative approach
Course Leader	TBL
Course Leader	Promoting student autonomy and independence
TEL Team	Discourse analysis/text processing, lexical approach, digital literacy, learner autonomy, critical thinking, task-based learning, CLT.

As can be seen, FL is perceived to be implemented alongside TBL. Responses show how different members of the team conceptualise the course and its pedagogical underpinnings and approaches. It is also worth noting how some perceived positive impacts of embracing FL, promoting students' autonomy and independence, are reported as pedagogical underpinnings.

Taken together, these responses show how FL is perceived to interact with other pedagogical approaches in EAP. Crucially, an understanding of these pedagogies has been presented as essential to developing a robust course. These findings highlight how different pedagogies are carefully implemented in an eclectic manner to foster teaching and learning in EAP.

It is also possible to see how this top-down approach to course design may clash with the reality of the classroom. The vast quantity of materials prepared may be a detriment to meaningful participation. It has been argued how EAP instructors are required to possess a wide range of skills that in this top-down approach may be underutilised if they are forced to forefront completing the syllabus to responding to the learners’ needs and peace by teaching how course ‘how it was designed’ (Alexander, 2023).

FL and TEL

The second theme generated to better understand the implications of embracing FL is TEL. As has been explained, despite voices arguing for a conceptualisation of FL based on strong pedagogical principles (Brinks-Lockwood, 2016; Villegas, 2022); FL is largely presented in relation to the use of TEL (Abeysekera and Dawson, 2014; Bergamnd and Sands, 2012). As highlighted, as this data was collected in 2020, the role of TEL is visible in the development of the flipped content and in the delivery of the sessions. With all teaching having been moved online as a result of ERT, the classes were delivered synchronously. Responses to the questionnaire (Table 7) show how students were perceived to be able to access the tasks and ask questions, this is an identified potential pitfalls when implementing flipped learning (Wanner and Palmer, 2015).

Table 7 FL and TEL questionnaire responses

Item	Completely disagree	Disagree	Agree	Completely agree
The flipped content is easy to access			4	1
Students know what to do when they struggle to understand the interactive task			3	2
Organising a FL course is logistically more challenging than organising a traditional one			2	3

The theme of technology appeared frequently in the interviews. The exchange below shows the extent to which TEL is perceived to play a major role in the course. Firstly, TEL is perceived as a positive element that enhances students’ motivation and engagement with the course while allowing them to develop their skills while providing agency regarding the channels used.

They really like the interactive lessons. This sounds like a cliché, but the...these are young people they love using like computers or, or phones or devices. And so to actually, in a traditional classroom, we’re always having to tell your students put your phone away. (...) And it’s an advantage for engaging with texts. Because students can go at their own pace, they can read again, they can watch again. Certainly, it’s a bit more accessible in terms of allowing students the freedom to decide how they engage with something (Lester).

Most of the language lessons are interactive in the way students are clicking to identify something or clicking to complete a multiple choice task or drag and drop, you know, drag the words into the text or identify something and the students like that sort of interactivity. Because it’s, it has this sort of you gamifying language learning, and it

does help with, you know, motivation and understanding the content a bit more in checking (James).

Secondly, TEL appears a source of anxiety when issues are reported.

“I mean, obviously, occasionally, you have a technical issue, (...) Sometimes, you know, if they, if their score is not showing, and they did, they completed the activity, but it wasn't recorded. So you'll get you know, we'll get emails from students worrying about 'oh I completed that, but it doesn't show' or these page is blank, and what do I do, and I want my teacher to know that I finished it.” (James)

In the specific context of ERT, FL is perceived to be essential to ensure the smooth delivery of the course, making it both meaningful and feasible as Lester's quote shows. This quote is particularly compelling as it highlights once again the importance of understanding FL to implement it in courses.

“So that kind of moving to an online context, really. Even if it's not flipped learning, there needs to be variety. (...). So you got that flexibility. And I think that's essential. (...) Certainly for, like some kind of full-time or intensive course such as preessional teaching online requires flipped learning really requires some way of having asynchronous content and flipped learning is, is a viable and, and proven and good way of making that work. So I think that if we hadn't adopted flipped learning back in 2018, we would have had to have done this year, if we'd had the time to get our heads around it.” (Lester)

As can be seen, in the course object of research, the role of TEL was essential to implement FL. It is worth reinforcing how the decisions underpinning the design of the interactive flipped materials were informed by strong pedagogical principles. Examples show how the flipped content aimed to allow students to acquire the basic elements of the tasks to then further explore more complex issues in the sessions. This, in turn, facilitated the delivery of the online synchronous sessions thus showing an effective and reciprocal interaction between FL and TEL.

Before concluding this section, it is worth addressing the perceived challenges of organising a FL course in relation to a traditional one. On the one hand, the quotes presented so far evidence a learning curve in terms of embracing a relatively novel approach. Arguably, this is not a challenge intrinsically related to FL, but rather a direct result of embracing new pedagogies. The development of the materials was identified as a challenge in implementing FL using TEL.

“The main challenge is that the time it takes to think about what you want to present, how to present it, what, like, what sort of interactivity a certain task needs. And obviously, that time to make it you know, because for this to be interactive, you need to be inputting a text, you know, it's not just the click of a button, you have to 'oh, make that button green.' If the student clicks on that, make the button red if the student clicks on that. So creating templates and using these templates, and obviously, the interactive content is something we've developed over a few years now. And you know, it wasn't just created in just a week and kind of like given to students. So it does take time and you know, you need to train people to do this. You need to have people writing the materials and understanding what kind of things we can or we cannot do.” (James)

This section has reinforced the need to thoroughly understand pedagogical principles to develop effective materials. Similarly, it is essential to understand digital literacy and an understanding of how to translate practices into the OL environment effectively. Similarly, developing materials in the OL environment requires a considerable investment in terms of resources, however, this would still be the case if the course was not flipped. In fact, by embracing FL course developers have a theoretical framework they can refer to when distributing the tasks as the low-order thinking skills task will be done independently and the higher-order thinking skills task will be done in the session.

5. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This article has aimed to show why an EAP presessional management team implemented FL and the implications it had in relation to other key pedagogical principles in EAP and TEL. data, has shown how FL benefits from interacting with other approaches in EAP, thus enhancing the pedagogical repertoire available in the discipline. It has also shed light on how FL can be used alongside TEL and the benefits this can provide in terms of students' motivation, and engagement while acknowledging the challenges in terms of resource investments, this article has aimed to engage with the current discussion around pedagogies in EAP and advocates for the inclusion of FL as one of the approaches in the EAP toolkit.

The data generated aligns with the argument that beliefs are generated during the course design stage (Hulme, 2021). Therefore, it is suggested that discussions around pedagogical underpinning and developments of beliefs are routinely embedded in presessional management team discussions.

This article has shown how EAP practitioners need to display a wide range of competencies, as stated by the Teaching EAP Framework (BALEAP, 2009). Based on the results and discussions presented in this article, a continuous engagement with research and EAP pedagogies is essential to bring to life top-down directives. However, it suggested that EAP practitioners' expertise is recognised and space is provided to respond to learners' need and differentiation in line with EAP being student-centred.

Although the ERT period forced universities and practitioners alike to move their teaching online, a thorough understanding of OL and instructional design principles is essential to effectively implement FL as a blended approach. Technology can facilitate the design and implementation of LOTS tasks, making them attractive for students, but this is an area that requires specific expertise. Opportunities for CPD with specific emphasis on online instructional design are essential for course developers aiming to effectively include TEL to foster pedagogical approaches such as FL.

To conclude, while this small-scale study has focused on course designers', course developers' and course coordinators' perceptions, it would be beneficial to carry out further studies investigating to what extent these perceptions correspond to students' and teachers. Similarly, comparative case studies of flipped and non-flipped courses may help gain a better understanding of the impact of FL in EAP presessionals courses.

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MEASURING ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN A GRAMMAR-LED GENERAL ENGLISH COURSE AT A TERTIARY EDUCATION INSTITUTION

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Abstract. *With the need for instant communication and the boom of the digital era, quality content concerning grammatical output by language learners has become a hot issue among teachers, particularly university professors who aim at accuracy when dealing with their students' production. The purpose of this study was to measure the effectiveness of a remedial grammar course created "ad hoc" for university leavers (n = 987) in Lima, Peru between March 2018 and September 2019. The dataset deployed in the study came from two instruments: Pre-Test and Post-Test, applied to participants at the start and end of every term. When processing the data, the difference of the paired samples did not follow a normal distribution, therefore, the t-student test could not be applied. Alternatively, the non-parametric Wilcoxon signed-rank test had to be used, but only after verifying the assumption that the differences between post and pre-test samples followed a symmetric distribution. The test result yielded a very significant p-value, thus rejecting the null hypothesis that there were no differences regarding median grades between the pre- and post-tests. Furthermore, the effect size of nearly 70% confirmed the effectiveness of the grammar course and the appropriacy of the application of teaching and assessment methods.*

Key words: *ELT, grammar, Wilcoxon test, CEFR, academic achievement*

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last years, much has been published regarding the re-appearance of grammar in the learning of a foreign language, particularly as a reaction towards the extended use of the communicative approach since the 1970s. Under that umbrella, there are terms that we, teachers, have been extremely familiar with, such as the learning of a second language (contrasted to the acquisition of a native language), inductive (as opposed to deductive) approach to teaching, fluency (versus accuracy), or communicative competence (contrasted to linguistic competence), which have certainly proved to have fit in our evolving, globalized world where English has been, and will probably be – for many years ahead – the lingua franca. However, there is a group of users whose aim is not oral communication in the first place but instead, written reception – reading – and oral production – speaking. I am referring to the world of tertiary education and its actors such as scholars, researchers, or

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college students who may be more inclined to become linguistic competent, be exposed to deductive instruction, or attain accuracy in their productive outputs.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A paper by Kamal, S. M. (2013) reporting results on the study of article accuracy to undergraduate students from various universities in Dhaka, Bangladesh points out that little or no need is shown by students to “polish” their use of this grammatical structure as it has no significant effect on meaning. As long as the message is put across, no mastery of grammar is needed. On empirical terms, over the last decades this fact has become trendy in EFL learning due to the emphasis on communication skills prioritising fluency to accuracy particularly when producing language, be this oral or written.

Ideally, there should be a balance between accuracy and fluency when teaching a foreign language. It is not necessary to sacrifice any of the two to succeed in the teaching-learning process following a form-based or a communication / content-based approach (Krashen, Nilolov, 1997). The authors did an experiment with two groups of children (eighth graders) in Hungary exposing them to the two teaching methods: communication-based and traditional grammar-based, and found out that in the former one, learners were as accurate as the ones who received instruction with the traditional, grammar-based programme. This means that both approaches to teaching EFL can co-exist and be applied to several age groups so that learners can be benefited by making the most of them in their performance. Hence, there is no need to sacrifice accuracy for fluency. According to Krashen and Nilolov (1997), “Ideally, accuracy and fluency should advance at the same pace during the language acquisition process ...”

The above quotation is also associated with the extent to which the teaching style prioritizes learning or acquisition. It is known that for the latter term, exposure to the target language is immersed within everyday contexts where meaningful situations are presented and practised in a communicative way enhancing fluency. This has also been reinforced by Gayane R. Hovhannisyan (2016): “Only through meaningful learning activities do the students create their own mental models of the knowledge acquired and the skills used.” This practice is contrary to what happens when a language point is first presented, analysed and later practised through controlled exercises following a deductive approach. In this case, accuracy should come before fluency and “learning” should consequently take place. However, in any case, the learner may ideally become competent both linguistically and communicatively.

Furthermore, the role of the teacher is key when delivering a method of instruction. It is said (Obeidat, M., 2020) that teacher-centredness is a characteristic of the deductive method of teaching whereas in the inductive method, teachers encourage students to discover the rule after having practised it within real-life like contexts, to finally store it in either their short- or long-term memory (Bilash, 2009). What is more, in their desire to make students understand how rules of the English language work and how these are applied in real-life situations, teachers may deliver instruction using either a bottom-up (specific to generic) or top-down (generic to specific) approach. Incidentally, these ones have been linked respectively to the inductive and deductive currents of teaching. At this point, it is worth mentioning that empirically, the application of a deductive approach can benefit more adult learners than younger ones since it calls for their maturity, motivation,

and raises awareness on the formation of rules and their application, i.e., usage and use, something that may not necessarily be attained by the application of inductive, bottom-up methods.

3. BACKGROUND

The present study was conducted at the Bilingual Department of a private university in Lima, Peru, between March 2018 and September 2019 with 987 participants enrolled in a non-credit, grammar course called English Competency Course (ECC). Passing this course with a mark between 10.5 and 20, would enable participants to replace the grade they had previously obtained: 11, 12, or 13 (over 20) in their last general English course called English VI, and thus comply with the requirement of credits earned for having taking courses in English. Having complied with this requirement would also let them apply to obtain the bachelor's degree.

ECC was designed to be a remedial course whose main purpose was the review of the English grammar studied through English I to VI, i.e., during the students' first three years of studies at the university; it would cover the basic user and independent user reference levels according to CEFR (A1 to B2). ECC would have a duration of seven weeks, being weeks 1 to 6 devoted to instruction, and week 7 to evaluations and feedback. The weekly contents of ECC matched the main grammatical structures that the students had learnt every semester in their English I to VI courses, primarily, tenses. Therefore, in ECC, they would be completing the CEFR reference levels every two weeks: elementary (A1, A2), intermediate (B1) and upper intermediate (B2). In addition, the weekly input of instruction was 11 academic hours, making 77 hours for the whole course. The pre-test was applied during the first hour of the course on day one, and the post-test before taking the final exam in week 7. Regarding the number of participants, there were 47 ECC sections opened between 2018-2019 with a total of 987 students, but the ones considered for data processing in this study were 955 as there were 32 students who, for diverse reasons, did not take either instrument, pre or post-test.

3.1. Data collection and analysis procedure

The data was obtained from, on the one hand, the administration of an entry test whose main purpose was to know about the students' *status quo* at the start of the course. Inhere it is important to mention that most of the students who initially enrolled in the English Competency Course, particularly in 2018, had not received English instruction for an approximate period of three years i.e., since the last time they took English VI – at the end of their third year of studies; note also that according to Peruvian law, undergraduates should complete five years of university studies before applying for bachelor's degree. Therefore, at the launch of ECC in 2018, we received the “oldest” students i.e., the ones who had already completed their fifth year and had already left university – most of them had been working or involved in internship at the time of starting the course.

On the other hand, the application of the post-test enabled us to measure the extent to which the participants had not only activated prior knowledge, i.e., the one learnt during their general English subjects: English I to VI, but also to see if they were able to *use* the structures in their academic or professional settings. To make the data obtained from the instruments more valid, it was determined that the exit test would evaluate the same

structures as the entry test, in the same level and order of difficulty as they had been learnt in English I to VI and eventually presented in ECC. In other words, the entry- and post-tests would contain exactly the same questions.

The data was processed using the R statistical programming language. Out of the original 987 registers, 32 were eliminated to avoid bias. These belonged to students who, for any reasons, had been unable to take either test and thus, were marked with zero in both tests.

The median before the application of instruction was 11 out of 20 points (55%), and after having received instruction 14 over 20 (70%).

As normality of differences between pre and post test scores could not be verified, the t-student test for paired samples was discarded. Instead, the non-parametric Wilcoxon test was considered. However, this test has also its own assumption of symmetry distribution, so it had to be verified through the histogram and the result obtained is shown below.

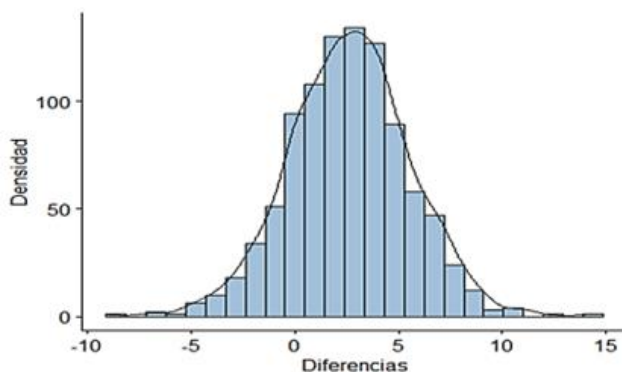


Fig. 1 Differences in pre- and post-test grades

As it can be seen, the graph approximated a symmetric distribution, which meant that it was advisable to apply the Wilcoxon test.

3.2. Hypotheses

Researcher's question:

Are there any statistically significant changes between the grades obtained after the application of the English Competency Course?

Null Hypothesis:

There are no differences in the median grades between the pre-test and post-test.

Alternative Hypothesis:

The median grades of the post-test are greater than those of the pre-test.

4. THE FINDINGS

A Wilcoxon signed-rank test indicated that post-test scores were significantly higher than pre-test scores, $V = 32047$, $p < .001$, $r = .694$.

These results show that after applying instruction, the median grades of the English Competency Course (ECC) were significantly greater than the ones obtained before the instruction. They also show that the effect size was large.

It can be justified firstly by considering that during the six instruction weeks (66 hours), students would review grammar that belonged to the A1, A2, B1 and B2 scale descriptors of language ability as stated by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Secondly, the progress tests applied at the end of each week assessed the participants' mastery of the structures reviewed and practised in class for each of the CEFR levels in terms of both recognition and production. A typical progress test would include two sections, one with multiple choice questions for students to identify the form and use of the grammatical structures studied during the week, as well as open-ended questions for them to produce language using the target structures. This latter section used to have a greater weight because in real class time, every structure used to be practised under communicative contexts and because it involved more mental processing, or cognitive domain than simply recognising, as sustained in Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom, 1956).

The attained effect size of 69.4% can be explained by two main reasons. Firstly, ECC was aimed at being a remedial course, which means that its main purpose was to make students improve aspects of prior learning experiences that had not been well internalized in any of the six English courses taken during their first three years at university and that eventually were reflected in any of the three low scores obtained in their last general English course (English VI): 11, 12 or 13 over 20. Without having certainty of which structures had to be reinforced, it was decided in the design of the course that students should review the main grammatical points, e.g., tenses studied in prior coursebooks. Secondly, a point in favour for the effectiveness of the course was the age in which these students would receive the ECC instruction. According to university records, when students take their general English courses: English I to VI, their age ranges between 18 to 20. A typical student who enrolled in ECC was aged between 23 to 25. This happened particularly in 2018 because there was a group who had already completed their five years of studies at university and had been waiting for an alternative to compensate for one of the low grades obtained in English VI: 11, 12, or 13, something that impeded them to obtain the bachelor's degree; the minimum mark had to be 14. This context led to a further assumption: their level of maturity to assume the demands of ECC was higher. Being older meant a two-fold advantage: 1) that they had a more defined motivation either intrinsic or extrinsic, something that would help them become more focused, engaged and determined to do their best and complete the course successfully; and 2) as time went by, they would recall structures more vividly and as a result, they would feel more self-confident in their use both during class time and in the exams.

5. DISCUSSION

On quantitative grounds, the efficacy of the remedial grammar course: English Competency Course was proved. The design of the course in terms of content, along with the teaching method used contributed to such efficacy. On empirical grounds, some credit

needs to be given to the role of learner autonomy which might have contributed to the results obtained in this research.

As far as course design is concerned, a study on the effect of variables in a remedial grammar course final exam (Zevallos, 2022) revealed that well-constructed instruments can be a reliable source for measuring efficacy. The instruments in question were six tests which reflected students' progress in the grammatical structures reviewed every week within the duration of the course. The study consisted of building a regression model using each of the six progress tests administered in the course as independent variables and correlate them to the results of the final exam, which acted as the dependent variable. The findings revealed a good adjustment of the model (Adjusted R-squared 0.70%), which meant effectiveness of both, construction of the tests – type and quantity of questions – and the teaching method deployed.

In the current study, like in the Zevallos one (2022), the deductive approach to teaching was applied. “Deductive” involves a top-down approach to instruction as stated by Harmer (1989). This “explicit” way – or “lecturing” (Obeidat and Alomari, 2020) – to present grammar points helped learners to retrieve, review and re-practise structures they had seen in previous general English courses at university. The main reason for the success of a so-called old-fashioned method as the deductive one was, as explained above, the age of the participants. A study by Singleton and Lengyel (1995) discusses the relationship between age and the success of foreign language learning. They explore factors such as cognitive development and motivation in language learning to prove high correlations between maturity and learning a non-mother tongue language, which is something that empirically did happen in the current research work. A further study by Obeidat and Alomari (2020) also explores the effect of using inductive and deductive approaches to teaching English grammar to undergraduate students. Although the results claimed significant differences in favour of the experimental group, the one on which the inductive method was applied, it was recommended to conduct further studies on non-native speakers of English in higher education to determine the best approach, inductive or deductive, that can enhance their level of grammar proficiency, something also suggested in the present study.

Lastly, on autonomy in language learning, a study by Kayaoğlu et al (2015) on the role of web-based grammar instruction at the Karadeniz Technical University in Turkey attempted to explore whether computer-assisted grammar instruction could yield better results regarding participants' academic success than the traditional classroom teaching. The findings revealed no significant differences between the two methods; however, some insights into interdependency and independence related to managing their learning process arose. This issue has been empirically tackled in the present study as a link between age and academic achievement: the older the students, the more aware of the need to deepen into the grammatical points by means of out-of-the classroom practice. The Kayaoğlu study also recommends the design of entry and exit tests in order to compare the effects of computer-assisted language learning applications (CALL) just as it has been done in this research work when measuring the effectiveness of ECC through the pre- and post-test instruments.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The intention of this study was to prove whether there were any statistically significant changes between the scores obtained from the pre-test and the post-test in the English Competency Course (ECC), a remedial grammar course administered to undergraduates in a Peruvian university. The median grades of the post-test proved to be greater than those of the pre-test yielding a surprising effect size of nearly 70%, with which the efficacy of the course was demonstrated.

One aspect to rescue from the study is the impact it can make in foreign language teaching and learning, particularly in the field of tertiary education. The findings of this research have given light to a revisit of content selection when it comes to designing a remedial course to university learners. It is important to consider the inclusion of the same structures learnt in previous courses – as well as their sequence and order – so that students can retrieve them and activate them at ease. By doing so, as it happened to the participants in this study, teachers would be fostering self-confidence and a genuine desire to use them in their academic and professional contexts; this could be one mode to enhance meaningful learning (Ausubel, 1963) under a communicative perspective.

A further implication of this research was the role given to the deductive approach to instruction. In this case, the mature age of the students was a condition that helped to prioritise learning over acquisition. However, the deductive concept to teaching was ever combined with modern aspects of the communicative approach such as “induction”, “fluency-based” and “pragmatic use” of the grammatical structures turning students into more autonomous, responsible, and independent users of the English language.

Finally, it is suggested that further studies should focus on measuring the degree of association between the content of each question in the pre-test, and its outcome in the post-test. Within the same scenario of ECC, Zevallos (2022) attempted to analyse the contribution of each of the instruments applied every week – called Progress Tests – in the Final Exam as a way to prove the correct choice of contents, their graduation in level of difficulty and the teaching method.

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TOWARDS COHERENCE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE THEME IN THE WRITING OF ARAB EFL STUDENTS

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Abstract. *This study investigates the challenges that L1 Arabic EAP students experience in creating coherent texts, specifically concerning the use of the systemic functional linguistics (SFL) notion of Theme. Data included twenty-two writing samples of eleven students throughout a year-long academic writing course. The texts were analyzed for marked Themes, Thematic progression (TP), and multiple Themes. Results show that marked Themes increased significantly, not only facilitating the reading of the texts but also pointing towards possible development in reader awareness. Additionally, the use of coherent TP patterns improved slightly, indicating better choices in building on and developing meanings. In contrast, the use of multiple Themes did not increase, demonstrating a lack of sophistication in orienting the reader. It can be concluded that writing instruction to L1 Arab speakers should ensure that all three Thematic features examined in this study are made visible and practiced.*

Key words: *L1 Arabic writers of English, coherence in writing, SFL Theme, SFL Thematic progression*

1. INTRODUCTION

EFL learners find it challenging to write EAP texts that attend to content, organization, purpose, audience, vocabulary, and mechanics (Abu Rass, 2001; Shokprour and Fallahzadeh 2007) while demonstrating ‘critical thinking, logical development, and coherence of ideas’ (Choo 2009, 15). They should also achieve familiarity with writing processes and language features such as “formality, objectivity, and complexity to use the language precisely and accurately” (Tai 2017, 641) besides different ways of connecting ideas (Shriganeshan 2017).

It is also important to have the ability to present their ideas in a logical order and support their opinion (Gudkova 2021).

Regarding Arabic-speaking EFL learners, attaining familiarity with English rhetoric and structures (Al-Khatib 2017) can present a hurdle when learning writing for EAP (Al-Khatib 2017; Alkubaidi 2019; Elachachi 2015; Kaplan 1966), especially concerning the construal of cohesion, the focus of the current research.

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2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Investigation of cohesion in writing among L1 Arabic speakers began with Kaplan's (1966) seminal study, which observed that Arabic rhetorical patterns tend to get transferred into English writing, citing that L1 Arabic students' paragraph development is based on a complex series of parallel constructions, resulting in "circular and non-cumulative" text organization. More recent studies have concurred with Kaplan's (1966) findings. For example, Allen (1970) found that English texts written by L1 Arabic writers might reach the same point two or three times from different angles so that an L1 English reader "has the curious feeling that nothing is happening" (cited in Sa'adeddin 1989, 36). Further, the transfer of some Arabic stylistics has been noted (Koch 1983), such as the extensive use of parallelism and repetition of the most powerful words and phrases. Other research has found that Arab writers often use rather long sentences linked by coordinating conjunctions (Al-Khatib 2001; Oshima & Hougeas cited in Almeahadi 2012), in which they write around the topic and repeat phrases before stating the main points (Dweik as cited in Alsamadani 2010). In addition, Jordanian student writing in English has seemed to be characterized by a lack of organization and unclear linking of ideas (Khuwaileh and Al Shoumali 2000; Lakkis and Abdel Malak 2002).

With regard to cohesive devices, several studies have observed how L1 Arabic students transfer the Arabic features of cohesion into their English essays, resulting both in the misuse of such devices as well as textual deviation (Qaddumi 1995). Ahmed's 2010 study at the Helwan Faculty of Education in Egypt reveals that cohesion and coherence are challenging for students. Similarly, Modhish's 2012 investigation of cohesive devices among 50 Yemini students shows the use of elaborative cohesive devices followed by inferential, contrastive, causative, and topic-relating markers. Further, Fareh's 2014 analysis of five hundred essays by Arab students finds a lack of coherence, cohesion, and logical relations between sentences, as well as ineffective paragraph development. This resonates with Aldera's (2016) Saudi Arabian findings, revealing a lack of logical progression, organization, inter-sentence relations, and cohesive devices in the writing of advanced learners in the Najran University English MA program.

To analyze the construal of cohesion by EFL learners, much research has been conducted within systemic functional linguistics (SFL) (Eggs 1994; Schleppegrell 2004 and 2009). SFL is a social semiotic approach to language, originated by Halliday in the 1960s (Yang, Ramfrez and Harman 2007), emphasizing the role of language as a meaning-making resource. Of interest in the present research on coherence is the SFL notion of Theme. Nam and Park (2015) define Theme as the initial position of a sentence, "where background information is condensed and connected to new arguments in a logical manner, and thus, can serve as a powerful method of [text] development" (99). According to Eggs (1994), the Theme contains given information, which is relatively familiar or which has already been mentioned somewhere else in the text, while the ensuing Rheme contains new information. Such Theme-Rheme patterns contribute to a logical unfolding of the text, helping to "guide...readers effectively through the texts" (Rosa 2007, 97), ultimately leading to its cohesiveness. If writers fail to move from Theme to Rheme effectively, readers may not follow the development of an idea or argument in a text (Wang 2007) or even understand the text (Halliday and Matthiessen

2004). In this study, three aspects of Theme were analyzed: Marked Themes, Thematic progression, and Multiple Themes.

Writers have the choice of using unmarked or marked Themes. In the unmarked case, the Theme functions as the topic of the clause (topical). In contrast, marked Themes do not function as the topic, but textually (Eggins 1994), such as “and” or interpersonally, such as “unfortunately”. When writers use a marked Theme, they “signal that all things are not equal, that something in the text requires an atypical meaning to be made” (Eggins 1994), serving as an acknowledgment of the need to construe cohesiveness between ideas for the reader. In contrast, the choice of using mostly unmarked Themes could indicate that the writer is inexperienced and has a limited repertoire (Zhou 2020), thus placing the burden on the reader to create cohesiveness. For example, in Indonesia, Ebrahimi and Ebrahimi (2012) carried out a study to analyze Theme position, type in terms of marked and unmarked, and frequency in the writing of 180 compositions written by 60 EFL students: 20 sophomores, 20 juniors, and 20 seniors in which they narrated three pictorial stories in three sessions of 45 minutes each. While approximately 91% of sophomores did not use marked Themes, frequency increased steadily each year, demonstrating a correlation between learner use of more marked Themes with increased experience and level.

Next, Thematic Progression (TP), or how Themes unfold throughout a text, has become important in examining EFL student writing (Arunsirot 2013; Herriman 2011; Lu 2013, Pavavijarn 2022; Wang 2007), especially at the tertiary level, where students are expected to introduce and develop concepts/ideas in extended texts. Several researchers have analyzed the Thematic Progression of EFL writers in English. Based on the Theme analysis of different researchers, Kraus (2018) has identified three TP patterns: (1) constant, (2) linear, and (3) split. A constant TP pattern is one in which the Theme of a prior sentence is repeated in the following sentence in different ways such as through repetition, reference, or synonymy. A linear TP occurs when the Rheme of a clause is taken up as the Theme in the next: “I ate the *pizza*. *It* was delicious”. A split Rheme progression is one in which a Rheme consisting of two elements is taken up in two subsequent separate Themes: “I ate *pizza* and fried chicken. The *pizza* was delicious. The *fried chicken* was too salty”. Additionally, derived Themes in subsequent clauses are derived from a Hypertheme of a paragraph or another section of the text (Danes as cited in Jing, 2015). There are also peripheral themes (McCabe 1999), which do not necessarily detract from the coherence of a text but at the same time might not contribute to TP. McCabe (1999) identifies three types of these: grammatical, extralinguistic, and metatextual. The grammatical Themes start with ‘it’, ‘there is/are’, interrogative wh-constructs, and cataphoric references. Extralinguistic Themes refer to the writer through the personal pronoun “I”, or address the reader personally with “you” or “we”. Metatextual Themes refer to the text itself such as in “This essay will...”

Concerning EFL learner choices of TP, some of Wang’s (2007) findings include overuse of constant progression; insertion of material between Rheme and subsequent thematization; use of empty Rhemes i.e. with no conceptual content to develop in the subsequent Theme; overuse of “there is/are” as Theme; using Themes with unclear reference; and overuse of brand new Themes. In another study, Nam & Park (2015) analyzed the use of Theme in the development of Korean students’ argumentative essays, compared to those written by L1 English speakers. Their analysis shows a striking difference between the L1 Korean and L1 English speakers’ essays in all four key

aspects of thematic structure: length, function, plurality, and semantic role. Based on their results, the researchers note that Korean students tend to overuse highly formulaic and repetitive Themes.

Kraus (2018) examined the use and the potential pedagogic value of TP for Thai EFL students in an academic writing course, showing that Thai students demonstrate similar weaknesses in their writing that previous studies had shown. For example, the students used a great deal of constant progression, placed “there is/there are” as clause openings, and employed a high number of new Themes. In the study, Kraus (2018) indicated that the overuse of constant progression could indicate the limitedness of students in using a variety of forms to express opinions.

Finally, writers might use multiple Themes to construe cohesiveness among ideas (Hasselguard 2000) to help the reader not only to follow the flow of information but also to understand how a text is intended to be interpreted. The use of multiple Themes is often found among high achievers (Emilia, Habibi, and Bangsa 2018), while their correct use can be difficult for English language learners. For example, in Zhou’s (2020) comparison between the use of single and multiple Themes in English abstracts of an MA thesis in psycholinguistics with their Chinese translations, results revealed that 14 out of 21 multiple Themes in English were realized by the repetition of common conjunctions and deemed “not appropriate in most cases” (784).

3. THE OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

Though interest in the challenges of construing cohesion among Arabic speakers worldwide is evident in the literature, there seems to be scarce attention paid to the fine-grain data afforded by Theme analysis or the English writing of Arabic-speaking students in Israel (Chaleila & Garra-Alloush, 2019). As such, the present research aimed to track the progress of construing cohesion by Arabic-speaking EFL students studying academic writing at a teacher training college in central Israel, as indicated by the use of unmarked Themes, multiple Themes, and TP between two texts, one written at the beginning of the semester (T1) and the other written at the end (T2).

4. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

4.1. Research questions

Our research set out to answer the following questions.

1. In T1 and T2:
 - a. What kinds of multiple Theme constellations can be found?
 - b. What kinds of marked Theme functions can be found?
 - c. What kinds of Thematic progression patterns can be found?
2. Between T1 and T2, was there a significant increase in:
 - a. the use of multiple Theme constellations, and if so, which ones;
 - b. the use of marked Themes, and if so which ones;
 - c. different patterns of TP, and if so, which ones?

4.2. Research methods

This mixed-methods study included a qualitative element in which 22 samples (T1 and T2) of 11 students (pseudonyms) were examined in terms of marked/unmarked Themes and their functions/constellations, single v. multiple Themes and their functions, and Thematic progressions and their patterns. For the quantitative portion, features were tallied for T1 and T2, followed by a statistical significance test ($p < .05$) to indicate whether the increase/decrease was significant from T1 to T2.

4.3. Context

The four-hour weekly academic writing course was part of the B.Ed curriculum offered to 17 first-year pre-service teachers majoring in EFL at a teacher training college in the central part of Israel. The course was taught by Abu Rass, a former EFL learner and L1 speaker of Arabic, who had been teaching writing to Arabic speakers for 20 years. A process-writing pedagogy was adopted in this course, prioritizing process over product, gradually aiming to enable students to produce well-written paragraphs and short essays to fulfill current and future academic English requirements. Writing, editing, and revising were regularly practiced. Cohesion was addressed with regard to the use of connectors and transition words in general but not specifically introduced or taught through the prism of the SFL features analysed in this study. The writing assignments analyzed in this study were:

- Essay 1 (T1) (paragraph): assigned at the beginning of the first semester, without any prior instruction, explaining the learner's reasons for studying to be an English teacher at this particular college.
- Essay (T2) (essay): assigned at the end of the course, arguing for or against online education.

4.4. Data Analysis

For this study, 22 samples (T1 and T2) of 11 students were analyzed in terms of marked/unmarked Themes, single v. multiple Themes, and Thematic progression. Analysis was carried out by an experienced SFL user (Portman), who had been teaching L1 Arabic writers of English for six years and confirmed by the participants' writing teacher (Abu Rass). Each essay was read aloud by Portman, to ascertain the overall meaning. Then, multiple Themes were identified, as well as their functions. Next, single-marked Themes were identified along with their functions. Finally, TP analysis was carried out, revealing the various TP patterns. For all analyses, features were then tallied for T1 and T2, followed by a statistical significance test ($p < .05$) to indicate whether the increase/decrease was significant from T1 to T2.

5. RESULTS

Below are the findings for the use of multiple Themes, marked Themes, and TP.

5.1. Multiple Themes

Three multiple Theme constellations were identified for both T1 and T2. The table below provides the constellations and examples of each one:

Table 1 Findings of the Multiple Theme Constellations with Examples

For all three constellations, no significant difference was found between T1

Table 1 Findings of the multiple Theme constellations with examples

Multiple Theme Constellation	Example
Interpersonal + Topical	Interpersonal + Topical
Textual + Topical	<i>At the end of the road,</i> + <i>I</i> just wanted to say that I'm glad to study in [college name], because it's one of the most coolest colleges around (Mo, T1)!
Textual + Interpersonal + Topical	<i>[A]nd + for me,</i> + <i>there is</i> a connection between being a leader and a teacher (Ra, T1).

For all three constellations, no significant difference was found between T1 and T2. The table below provides the number of instances of each multiple Theme and the p-value ($p < .05$):

Table 2 Findings of the multiple Theme constellations with examples

Multiple Theme Constellation	T1	T2	p-value ($p < .05$)	Significant
Interpersonal + Topical	11	9	0.78	No
Textual + Topical	38	60	0.19	No
Textual + Interpersonal + Topical	3	5	0.48	No
Total Multiple Themes	52	74		

While no significant differences were found between T1 and T2 in the three multiple Theme constellations, it is worth noting the use of these constellations in construing coherence. In the Interpersonal + Topical constellation, the writer evaluates the topic before introducing the topic, providing the reader with the viewpoint of the writer concerning the topic. Such a constellation helps the writer align the reader with the writer's positioning regarding the topic so that related ideational meanings construed after such a constellation are framed according to the writer's evaluation, thus construing evaluative coherence as the text continues to unfold. A Textual + Topical constellation helps the reader follow the writer's intended organization of ideational meanings, thus creating organizational coherence among the different ideational meanings that both proceed and follow. Finally, a Textual + Interpersonal + Topical constellation allows for a combination of coherent effects discussed above, yet prioritizes the organizational orientation. Such a "stacking" of multiple Themes assists the reader in following both evaluative and organizational meanings and demonstrates the writer's awareness of textual, interpersonal, and ideational types of coherence.

While the construal of coherence is evident in both drafts, it still seemed to remain emergent in the cohort of writers in this study, as multiple Themes did not increase significantly from T1 to T2.

5.2. Marked themes functions

Three marked Theme functions were identified for both T1 and T2. The table below provides the functions with examples of each one:

Table 3 Findings of the marked Theme functions with examples

Multiple Theme Constellation	Example
Topical	<i>At my previous job</i> , I achieved success in leadership when I became a shift manager... (Ra, T1)
Interpersonal	<i>It is true</i> that in order to own a computer and other devices, one may pay a respectable amount of money (Ra, T2).
Textual	<i>At the end of the road</i> I just wanted to say that I'm glad to study in XX, because it's one of the most coolest colleges around (Mo, T1)!

A significant increase between T1 and T2 was found for marked Topical and Textual themes, while no significant increase was found for marked Interpersonal themes.

Table 4 Findings of the instances of marked Theme functions

Theme Function	T1	T2	p-value (p<.05)	Significant
Topical	12	30	0.004	Yes
Interpersonal	6	7	0.80	No
Textual	19	61	0.003	Yes

Overall, the use of marked Themes increased significantly from T1 to T2, not only facilitating the reading of the texts but also suggesting a developing consciousness of the reader as an audience. As far as the types of marked Themes, significant rises were seen for Topical and Textual. Increased use of Topical Themes helps the reader follow the text, especially with regard to the orientation of time and place, thus helping the reader to frame within a specific context the ideational meanings to follow. This suggests the writer's awareness of the need to assist the reader in restricting such ideational meanings to the specific context at hand. Increased use of Textual Themes assists the reader in following the organization of the text, suggesting an increased writer's awareness of the need to orient/reorient the reader as the text unfolds. Interestingly, no increase was seen for Interpersonal Themes, perhaps signifying that the writers felt it appropriate to let the readers form their own opinion of the ideational meanings, without imposing their point of view.

5.3. Thematic progression

Eight TP patterns were identified for both T1 and T2. The table below provides examples of each one:

Table 5 Findings of the thematic progression patterns

TP Pattern	Example
Back	<i>With online education</i> [picking up on Theme 5 clauses before], you can take any program or course present in traditional four-year universities (Ma, T2).
Constant	<i>My mother</i> recommended me to study at [college name]. <i>She</i> told me that after I graduate from the... college I will be ready to be a teacher (Sh, T1).
Derived	First of all, I was loving [sic] English. <i>Since I was a child</i> [refers back to writer's 'loving' of English], I was all the time [sic] talking with myself in front of the mirror... (Ay, T1).
Extralinguistic	I believe that the advantages of online courses overweight [sic] their disadvantages. (Ma, T2).
Grammatical	<i>It's</i> true that on-line courses help students to earn time by getting rid of traffic jam, long distances, dressing up and other things (Sh, T2).
Hyperthematic	A student can usually take the course any time during the day or week (Ri, T2). [picked up from the beginning of the essay: Online courses should be part of student's classes in college...]
Linear	I chose XX college specifically because one of my teachers who taught me at high school. <i>This wonderful teacher</i> made me fall in love more and more in English, get high marks in it...(Ma, T1).
Split	I chose to learn English at XX college for many reasons: <i>First of all and the most important thing for me</i> are the wide green areas surrounding us at the college...(Mai, T1).

A significant increase between T1 and T2 was found for derived and extralinguistic TP patterns. No significant increase was found for back, constant, grammatical, hyperthematic, linear, or split TP patterns.

Table 6 Findings of the instances of thematic progression patterns

TP pattern	T1	T2	p-value (p<.05)	Significant
Back	4	6	0.61	No
Constant	26	17	0.33	No
Derived	12	37	0.027	Yes
Extralinguistic	1	8	0.021	Yes
Grammatical	3	9	0.083	No
Hyperthematic	18	24	0.410	No
Linear	24	23	0.888	No
Split	5	13	0.153	No

Regarding back and linear TP, there were surprisingly few instances, suggesting that building upon and developing previous ideational meanings as the text unfolded remained emergent among the students. More evidence of such lack of building and development can

be found in the consistent number of constant TP patterns from T1 to T2, as opposed to a decrease, as might be expected of more sophisticated writing. Further evidence can be seen in the lack of increase in hyperthematic and split TPs, both of which rely on the follow-up and development of ideational meanings at the macro- and hyperthematic levels. Grammatical TP did not increase, suggesting that a variety of realizations of grammatical TP might not have been present in the learners' linguistic repertoires. While the explicit building on and development of ideational meanings seemed to remain emergent, the use of derived TP rose, possibly indicating the writers' ability to pick up on a previous Rheme, yet not as explicitly as with the other TP patterns. Finally, while a significant increase in extralinguistic TP is noted, its occurrences of 1 in T1 and 8 in T2 deem this finding insignificant overall.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1. Multiple themes

As reported, there was no increase in the use of multiple Themes, from T1-T2 in all three constellations identified in the data. These results support the findings of Emilia, Habibi, and Bangga (2018), regarding EFL writers' lack of use of multiple Themes. It also resonates with the findings reported by Zhou (2020) concerning the inability of Chinese MA students. The lack of increase in the use of multiple Themes in the present study seems to suggest a devoid of writer awareness of the need to assist the reader in following the writer's explicit intended textual flow of ideational meanings and how these meanings should be interpreted. This results in readers having to work out these meanings on their own. While the use of multiple Themes seems to remain emergent for other learners, Reid's (1989) "reader responsibility" findings for L1 Arabic writers could account for the absence of explicit text/idea navigation markers by the participants in this research.

6.2. Marked theme functions

The increase in the use of marked Themes concurs with Ebrahimi and Ebrahimi's (2012) findings, which stated that though students tended to use unmarked themes at the beginning of the writing course, their use increased throughout their years of study. This resonates with Eggins (1994), who related the use of marked Themes as an indicator of writers' development of sophistication and diversity of resources. In reflecting on the course in this research, perhaps the emphasis on connectors and transition words helped highlight the importance of audience consideration as far as ideational and textual meanings yet did not do so about the encoding of explicit interpersonal viewpoints on the ideational meanings.

6.3. Thematic progression

Overall, the writing of the students in the present research can be characterized as emergent concerning the effective use of TP in creating and developing ideational meanings at the macro- and hyperthematic levels. Specifically, the results show that the writing of the participants in this research is similar to the writing of Korean learners in terms of the tendency to use the same kinds of Themes (Nam and Park 2015). Also, similar to Wang's (2007) findings, the writers in this study seemed to favor constant TP. However, the TP repertoire was expanded by the increase in derived TP.

Generally, it seems that the lack of explicit creation of cohesiveness could be attributed to the transfer of Arabic language stylistics, resulting in “circular and non-cumulative” nature of Arabic writing (Allen, 1970), leaving the reader to make connections that would normally be made explicit through a variety of TP patterns. This could perhaps explain the increase in derived TP, which, while acknowledging the need to assist the reader to connect ideational meanings because it does so indirectly, is still consistent with the “reader-responsible” (Hinds 1987) orientation of Arabic writing.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study support the literature regarding the difficulties EFL learners, particularly Arabic L1 writers encounter when creating cohesive EAP texts. However, the contribution of this study is that through the prism of the SFL notion of Theme, we have been able to surface some of the particular Theme-related features that show these difficulties.

This highlights the importance of raising the awareness of L1 Arabic learners in construing coherent texts through the skillful use of Multiple Themes, Theme functions, and TP. As such, we suggest that when working with L1 Arabic learners, time should be spent making visible the use of Theme to create cohesion. This can first be done by encouraging the learners to consider themselves as writers addressing real-world purposes, as opposed to simply fulfilling the presumed expectations of their teacher.

With these in mind, some pedagogical suggestions are presented:

1. Learners should be guided through text exemplars, making visible the specific realizations of multiple Themes, Theme functions, and TP as they assist in construing coherence within and between ideational and interpersonal meanings. This should be followed by extended, targeted writing practice.

2. Writing instructors should design writing tasks aimed at raising the rhetorical awareness of a genuine audience. This can be done through explicitly scaffolded assignments in response to real-world situations. Following this, student peer reviewers should read and respond to the texts, taking on the role of the presumed reader.

3. Given the stark differences between Arabic and English stylistics, contrastive analysis between writing samples in both languages should be done in class, to highlight that the languages follow different, yet legitimate conventions for construing cohesion.

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Review research paper

ChatGPT AS A LEARNING TOOL IN AN UNDERGRADUATE ADVANCED ACADEMIC ENGLISH COURSE AT SOUTH EAST EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract. *The role ChatGPT and similar AI tools inevitably play in every single aspect of contemporary life, including the field of foreign language teaching and learning can definitely not and should not be ignored and overlooked. Although the development of AI cannot be immediately and precisely forecasted, it is more than obvious that it is already dictating trends in foreign language learning. Given the heavy dependence of today's generations on technology, integrating ChatGPT into English language curricula in tertiary education can significantly enhance student motivation. This paper explores the potential of ChatGPT as a language learning tool in the context of tertiary education and advocates for policy of inclusion rather than policy of banning state-of-the-art technologies in the realm of tertiary education. It summarises and reports on the results and key findings from a student survey aiming to reveal how familiar is the undergraduate student population at South East European University (SEEU) with ChatGPT and shed light on students' experience with it so far. The paper also briefly elaborates on the pioneer attempt for integration of the artificial intelligence tool ChatGPT in the foreign language teaching process in the Advanced Academic English course at SEEU with the sole purpose of improving its quality and effectiveness.*

Key words: *ChatGPT, SEEU, Advanced Academic English, Higher Education*

1. INTRODUCTION

Individual students have different learning needs and styles. Moreover, groups always consist of mixed abilities students and the limited number of language teaching hours is often subject to reductions, therefore, proper use of ChatGPT can make it convenient for higher educational institutions to innovate and adapt their teaching methods to accommodate to the variety of students they serve. Since today's generations are completely reliant on technology, including ChatGPT in English Language syllabi can considerably increase motivation. It is of vital significance for tertiary education institutions to promote teaching that encompasses and not bans new technologies.

This paper briefly summarises relevant literature reviewed, focusing mainly on the advantages and challenges of including chatGPT in language learning. It gives an insight into the extent of familiarity of first year undergraduate students at SEEU with ChatGPT and the attempts for raising their awareness of the variety of language learning options it

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offers apart from copying in writing assignments. It also anticipates possible near future challenges we will be faced with and forced to tackle. Drawing on the key findings from the field research conducted at SEEU, which are aligned with relevant literature reviewed, this paper advocates for exploring optimal approaches to leverage ChatGPT in enhancing the English language learning experience at tertiary level. Rather than automatically prohibiting its use, the paper promotes the approach of mitigating the risks of plagiarism resulting from ChatGPT misuse in exams and writing assignments.

2. BACKGROUND

“Artificial Intelligence is a system with the same intelligence as humans and is characterised by the ability to learn, adapt, solve problems, make decisions and understand human language. Artificial Intelligence provides many conveniences in the world of education” (Shidiq 2023, 353).

ChatGPT (Chat Generative Pre-trained Transformer) is a series of popular generative AI chatbots developed and maintained by OpenAI. The large language models (LLMs) that support earlier chatbot models were unimodal and could only process and generate text. The latest versions of the chatbot are multimodal and can recognize images, generate images, engage in voice conversations, and search the Internet in real-time through the same conversational user interface (CUI) (Rouse 2024).

ChatGPT, the chatbot everyone is talking about ever since its appearance in November 2022, designed to respond to all kinds of requests is described as “a-general-purpose conversation chatbot expected to impact all aspects of our society significantly. However, the possible educational implications of this natural language processing technique are uncertain” (Alo. At al.2023, 42). ChatGPT has also been described as an “immense disruptor of the education field,” which should be used “as an opportunity to make substantial improvements in teaching and learning effectiveness” (Hong 2023, 40). According to Baskara and Mukarto (2023) the noteworthy consequences of ChatGPT for language learning, communication and education in general stem from the fact that it is a large-scale unsupervised language model trained on vast amounts of text data and able to generate coherent, contextually appropriate, human-like response to a given prompt. ChatGPT and similar artificial intelligence tools bring about opportunities, but at the same time create challenges and concerns to foreign language teaching.

2.1. Advantages of using ChatGPT in language learning

Traditional foreign language teaching methods can no longer meet the digital natives’ learning styles and needs, so Shidiq (2023) has every right to claim that it “becomes necessary for the world of education to participate in making changes in its learning system to increase the competitiveness of graduates in competing to equip them with the ability to think critically, creatively and collaboratively” (Shidiq 2023, 353). EFLT has to keep up the pace with the emerging technological developments. Due to students’ heavy reliance on technology nowadays, the inclusion of ChatGPT as a learning tool can significantly boost motivation. In a quantitative study on how ChatGPT impacts learning English, Ali, *at al.* (2023) confirm that ChatGPT-based teaching is motivational especially for developing reading and writing skills. Based on the findings from this study, the authors recommend that “ChatGpt should be used as a learning tool instead of fearing its negative impacts, which require further detailed investigations” (Ali, et al. 2023, 41). Hong (2023) reminds

that educators have consistently expressed concern about the adoption of new technologies as was the case with *Google search*, *Wikipedia*, etc. Within language teaching the greatest concern is related to unoriginal writing and plagiarism. As a solution, he suggests reducing homework assignments or assigning tasks that cannot be easily assisted by chatbots, such as keeping daily journals or summarising a lecture attended.

Among the numerous ways in which ChatGPT supports language learning, Kohnke, Moorhouse and Zou (2024) stress the simulation of authentic interaction by identifying meaning of a word in context, correcting and explaining language mistakes, creating texts from various genres, developing quizzes, annotating texts, as well as providing dictionary definitions, example sentences and translations.

One of the greatest arguments in favour of utilising ChatGPT as a foreign language tool is that it finally enables implementation of flipped classroom concept which can considerably improve teaching effectiveness and student performance by increasing teacher-student, as well as student-student interaction in a student-centred classroom with improves quality of classroom time. The ability of ChatGPT “to offer personalised instruction and generate authentic language material highlights its potential for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of language education” (Baskara and Mukarto 2023, 353).

Related literature on ChatGPT in language learning has shown that AI has “the potential to revolutionize the way of learning and teaching,” and that “the teacher’s role is essential in ... determining how to use it honestly, with integrity and transparency and agree on some rules of engagement” (Shidiq 2023, 355). The results of previous research published discussing ChatGPT confirm that ELT professionals should focus on finding the most viable ways of turning ChatGPT into a teaching and learning assistant as “the potential of chatbot technology for education and research is unbounded” (Hong 2032, 42).

The fact that ChatGPT is free of charge and easy to use makes it very convenient and easily accessible. This contributes immensely to its popularity. We can definitely not prevent students from using it so we are left with no other option than putting it to its most effective use.

2.2. Challenges of using ChatGPT in language learning

Apart from the obvious conveniences for the education system, due to its capability to generate a rich variety of text formats (formal, informal, creative, etc.), ChatGPT also poses challenges for the education system and “can potentially reduce some of the skills that students should master, including critical, creative and collaborative thinking skills ... including creative writing skills” (Shidiq 2023, 354). Among the identified drawbacks of ChatGPT which can seriously harm the language learning process are its misuse for cheating and performing tasks instead of the students themselves, providing feedback that is not detailed and systematic enough for improving students’ communication skills and the necessity for checking the accuracy of responses provided. In an attempt to avoid the aforementioned drawbacks of ChatGPT and similar AI language models, Athanassopoulous *et al.* (2023) suggest both teachers and learners using them responsibly, ethically and judiciously with a dose of reserve and scepticism.

Kohnke, Moorhouse and Zou (2024) are among the authors who discuss the accuracy of responses provided by ChatGPT and note that even though OpenAI warns of possible inaccuracy by providing users with the option to give their feedback in the form of thumbs-up or thumbs-down, the impressive and authoritative tone of the responses misleads users into accepting them unquestioningly. “The output of ChatGPT should always be filtered and revised. It should not be taken for granted because it is not complete and final and may contain incorrect output that always requires human intervention” (Ali, *et al.* 2023, 47).

With reference to the main concerns related to the use of ChatGPT in language learning, Baskara and Mukarto (2023) indicate that being an unsupervised language model, ChatGPT can produce biased, inappropriate, incorrect and misleading content. Apart from displaying serious limitations when dealing with complex and abstract concepts, it can also have a direct negative impact on teaching as a profession.

Yan (2023) observes that ChatGPT and similar AI technologies impose the need for reformulating and redefining the concept of plagiarism as they provide various methods to evade plagiarism detection. They render the definition and categorisation of plagiarism obsolete. One of the key questions we are currently faced with is should content produced by ChatGPT as a response to a prompt given be considered as plagiarism or not? Is it enough to simply indicate by citing that content has been produced by an AI tool? While this question might remain unanswered for quite some time, there is no dilemma that ChatGPT makes the need to raise awareness against plagiarism stronger and more urgent than ever before. First and foremost, plagiarism needs to be redefined and greater emphasis should be placed on detecting it since using summarising, paraphrasing and quoting as methods for avoiding plagiarism are no longer enough.

Since “the quality of the responses depends on the quality of the questions,” it is recommended that “teachers and students rephrase their questions if they are not satisfied with responses” (Kohnke, Moorhouse and Zou 2024, 8). As the response depends entirely on the prompt given, first and foremost, to write effective ChatGPT prompts, it is essential to be clear, concise, and specific. More details, further instructions and closer guidance on how to write prompts can be found in Rouse 2024.

3. FIELD RESEARCH

In order to reveal the extent of familiarity of the undergraduate student population at SEEU with ChatGPT and shed light on their experiences with it so far a field research in the form of an online survey on ChatGPT as a learning tool was conducted at SEEU. This field research also served as awareness rising to suggest possible ways of utilising ChatGPT as a foreign language learning tool.

The participation in this survey was optional and voluntary. The students were asked for an oral consent to participate after they have been informed about the purpose of the field research, the confidentiality of their personal data and the time needed for completing the questionnaire. To avoid the attempt for modifying their answers to please the teacher, the students were informed that they should not expect to be given extra grading credit for participation. The student respondents were informed that the main aim of the research was to reveal how familiar is the undergraduate student population at SEEU with ChatGPT and what their experience is with it for the research. The participants were clearly asked to bear in mind that there are no right or wrong answers and that their honest answers are highly valued as only such answers would give a clear insight into the perception and treatment of ChatGPT as a learning tool on the part of the students. The participants were also informed that their answers and personal data shall be kept strictly confidential and used for compiling an overall, general report in which personal names and/or email addresses shall not be mentioned. The survey was administered in a computer lab, during the last lecture at the end of the summer semester in the academic year 2022-2023 allowing students to give well-informed answers based on their personal experience. Although present in the computer lab, the researcher was only an observer who explained the research aim and procedure, and asked for oral consent for participation in the research. All the

technical questions the participants had were redirected to the other students with greater experience using ChatGPT.

3.1. Participants and data collection instrument

Participants in this survey were 35 undergraduate, full-time, first-year students aged 18 to 20, attending the Advanced Academic English course, in the summer semester of the academic 2022-2023. 60% of the respondents were female and 40% male. The respondents were from five out of the total of six faculties at SEEU: 68.6% from the Faculty of Contemporary Science and Technology, 14.3% from the Faculty of Law, 8.6% from the Faculty of Business Administration, 5.7% from the Faculty of Contemporary Social Sciences, 2.9% from the Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communication. There were no students from the Faculty of Health Sciences since the course Advanced Academic English is not offered to them. Advanced Academic English is an undergraduate, second semester course offered to first year students at upper intermediate (B2) level of proficiency from all SEEU faculties, except for the Faculty of Health Sciences. For a more detailed insight into the practical experience of designing and implementing the undergraduate Advanced English course, its objectives and grading criteria please consult Marjanovikj-Apostolovski 2023.

An online Google form questionnaire consisting of 21 questions was used as a main data collection instrument. The estimated completing time was somewhere between 10 and 15 minutes. The first three questions were demographic, focusing on details of the target population, such as the respondents' age group (Q1), gender (Q2) and faculty attended (Q3). The rest of the questionnaire consisted of a combination of open-ended (Q4, Q8, Q11, Q20, Q21), closed-ended (Q5, Q6, Q7, Q10, Q12) and likert scale (Q9, Q13, Q14, Q15, Q16, Q17, Q18) questions.

The survey questionnaire along with the detailed answers provided can be accessed at the link below:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1KIFRPVdq4_qhCRcLaRybaagNxb_U374eoY0CIFLHG-w/edit

3.2. Survey results and findings

When asked to define ChatGPT in their own words in Question 4, the respondents surveyed described it as: a *“human made artificial intelligence robot that can chat with humans and solve problems”*, *“artificial intelligence that helps us with everything”*, *“can help us for many things we need and is very good for us”*, *“artificial intelligence”*, *“AI tool that is very good at dialogue in English or most of the other languages as well. It can do things for you, talk to you, talk for you, etc.”*, *“AI chatbot made by OpenAI that can do every task you ask them to do”*, *“Helpful app which can solve many problems (about homework) that we have as students”*, a *“helpbot”*, *“a site that has a solution for everything”*, *“a website/app to help people with assignments, homework. It is a great tool to help everyone not just students”*, *“AI language model. It can be used for answering questions we don't know, offering creative writing suggestions, giving advice”*, *“a great tool to do the easy job for you. If you use it correctly you can learn a lot from it. I use it for html C++, math, and a lot of my courses”*. *“AI that contains all the information up to 2021”*, *“lifesaver”*, *“AI chatboot”*, *“This was created as a new way of learning things”*, *“AI that helps to answer some of the questions that people have”*, *“artificial intelligence tool that stands for generative pre-trained transformer”*, *“ an assistant that helps us find answers to questions we don't know”*, *“a platform, a tool in reality, from which you can get answers for almost everything and interact with it. It works as a Wikipedia but one that does assignments and things that it is asked to”*, *“An artificial intelligence, when you search for something and*

multiple bots at the same time provide the answer you were looking for”, “AI that helps with everything you need”, “One of the AI language models, published in November 2022. This language model can answer questions and help you with tasks such as emails, essays and code to help you with programming”, “Artificial intelligence ‘robot’ that will give you any answer that you ask, it can also do many things such as writing codes for building a website”, “AI language model that has been fed thousands upon thousands of literature text, on which it has learned how to communicate in the most efficient way possible through language”, “AI tool that is made to help people with solving different questions”, “a more precise and accurate form of ‘Google’ where you can ask a specific question and get an answer altered to your needs quick instead of doing extensive research that takes a long time. For me it’s like having a person on call who answers my academic or personal questions, who is also somewhat reliable source”, “a platform that knows 80% of your question that helps you do your work easier and provides help for something you need”, “AI chatbox”, “AI assistance that helps you with homework, writing assignments, essays, gives you new, creative ideas” “AI that helps you with anything you need”, “AI platform that makes finding valid information easier”, “AI tool that can be used to obtain various information in a very quick way. It can be used for academic purposes and personal advice as well”, “AI tool ‘google like’ but even better that helps us with anything we need. It has the answer for everything.”, “AI chatbot developed by OpenAI and released in November 2022”.

When asked about their experience with ChatGPT in Questions 5 & 6, a vast majority of 97.1% of respondents stated to have already used ChatGPT, mainly for research purposes, i.e. finding the needed information (77.1%) and just for fun or out of curiosity to see what exactly it can actually do (71.4%). Only 2.9% of the respondents who participated in this survey boldly and honestly admitted using ChatGPT for cheating in exams, although a much higher percentage was expected.

In response to Question 7, almost 83% of the respondents claimed that none of their professors and/or teaching assistants has suggested using ChatGPT in their studies, and only 17% claimed that they have been asked to do so once only. None of the participants opted for the option of being asked to use ChatGPT on more than one occasion. It would be interesting to conduct a research on the teachers’ views on ChatGPT as a handy teaching tool or a teaching assistant.

In Question 8 the respondents listed the following as reasons for which they were asked to use ChatGPT: “to make changes to the original assignment”, “to write codes for the html class”, “for some coding staff”, “for checking an assignment”, “to prepare for class”, “a professor suggested that it is a big service and we should use it”.

When asked to rate the level of satisfaction from using ChatGPT (Question 9), almost 86% of the respondents expressed their satisfaction with ChatGPT, more precisely 51.4% rated their satisfaction 4 out of maximum 5, where as 34.3% rated it 5 out of 5. It is more than obvious that students are quite satisfied with the use of ChatGPT and the very fact that it is free of charge makes it even more appealing.

Question 10 focused on the respondents’ willingness and readiness to use ChatGPT again. Interestingly enough the percentage of students who have used it already and expressed an interest or even an intention to use it again is identical, more precisely 97.1%.

In Question 11 when asked to state the purpose for using ChatGPT again, among the reasons respondents stated: “because it is very helpful”, “for information needed to do research or homework that I do not understand”, “maybe for a project to give me ideas or for anything that I need”, “explaining something I do not understand”, “for emergency

reasons”, “for programming exercises when my codes do not work”, “research paper”, “research or something I want to know”, “to write lines of code for programming”.

In response to Question 12, half of the respondents (51.4%) could not decide for sure if using ChatGPT is a form of plagiarism or not which is the only acceptable answer as the entire academic population is unsure of the treatment this innovative tool should receive. This is the most accurate answer which reflects the current situation. Slightly higher number of respondents consider it form of plagiarism (28.6%) compared to the 20% of the respondents who do not see it as a form of academic dishonesty i.e. plagiarism.

In Question 13 equal percentage of students (34.3%) somewhat agree and are neutral (neither agree, nor disagree) regarding ChatGPT as a good resource which should be used at universities. This once more confirms the current reality of divided opinions about the justification and effectiveness of ChatGPT as a learning resource in University studies. The students’ answers to Q12 and Q13 might be influenced by the teachers who present this language model as nothing else but a pure form of manipulation and cheating in exams especially with written out of class assignments.

The responses to Question 14 reveal that over half of the students who participated in this survey (57.1%) see ChatGPT as a convenient tool for cheating in exams, 37.1% somewhat agree, whereas 20% strongly agree with this claim. In contrast to these answers, in Question 15 a considerably high percentage of participants (82.9%) rejected that they have ever used ChatGPT for copying in exams.

In Question 16 which focuses on Using ChatGPT for completing written assignments and essays, 51.4% of the respondents claimed to not have used ChatGPT for completing written assignments and essays, whereas 28.6% admitted having used ChatGPT for writing essays. 20% of the students remained neutral in response to this questions probably out of uncertainty when should the credit for writing be given to ChatGPT.

Compared to the relatively low percentage of students who claimed to have used ChatGPT for completing written assignments and essay, in Question 17 over half of the respondents, more precisely 68.6%, stated that have used ChatGPT for checking and correcting their written work which in my personal opinion is a good tool for self-study, self-evaluation and self-correction.

In Question 18 it is really encouraging and refreshing to see that a considerable amount of students (14.3% strongly and 11.4% somewhat) disagree that the information provided by ChatGPT is always valid, correct and checked. At the same time it is very discouraging to see that 25.7% completely and 8.6% strongly agree that ChatGPT always offers valid, correct and checked information. This is where we as teachers should step in and raise students’ awareness of the fact that ChatGPT offers answers based on what is available as a source out there. Everything needs to be double or even triple checked to make sure the claims made and references provided are correct.

In response to Question 19, high 68.8% of the respondents declared to have never experienced any difficulties or problems when using ChatGPT. However, when asked to specify any problems and difficulties encountered in Question 20, students mentioned the following: “False information and bugging out”, “bugs”, “when writing lines of a code it would repeat the same mistake and not write it in full”, “ChatGPT is not as big as people make it. I believe AI more than I believe people. If used correctly and for good purposes it can help a lot. The only problem is that it will make people lazy and not working hard on things, not making effort”, “ChatGPT needs very clear instructions on the methods to do things, if it is not given the exact instructions it won’t deliver the needed results”, “sometimes when I ask it to do math problem it gives wrong answers”, “codes created by ChatGPT don’t always work and need to

be looked at, the essays written by ChatGPT are not very opinionated and the personal opinions aren't helpful", "it gives too much information that is not needed", "miscommunication, I had to elaborate a lot for it to understand what I was asking", "in order to get more accurate information you have to get very specific and detailed instructions in order for the information to be more in tune with the context of the matter". The underlined comments highlight the importance of properly formulating the prompts.

When asked to share any final thoughts about ChatGPT and make predictions regarding its future effects in Question 21 opinions were largely divided. Almost every comment was a combination of one positive, helpful and beneficial aspect of ChatGPT, and one very likely drawback or side effect. ChatGPT was viewed as an unstoppable and very useful tool which could easily turn into a huge problem if misused. Students warned against the overreliance on ChatGPT since just like the Internet, it is hard to tell if it makes our lives easier or more difficult.

The need for regulating the use of ChatGPT was expressed by a couple of respondents since in their opinion this language model definitely has certain advantages but with future consequences. For some students the cons outweigh the pros, whereas other remind that instead of opposing change, people should embrace it since almost every generation is faced with some new technological development. These respondents suggest educating ourselves instead of fighting against technology, claiming that the oldfashioned way of doing things was better when it technically was not. In their opinion there should be information about how to use newly developed technologies without breaking university rules and regulations. While to some students ChatGPT seems fascinating, to others it is very scary. The rest of the immediate benefits and potential future threats of ChatGPT according to the participant in this survey could be summarised as follows:

Immediate Benefits

- Making our lives easier and better
- Helping with coding
- Checking and correcting work already done
- Helping humanity
- Finding & getting information fast
- Getting second opinion
- Very helpful
- Very useful for people with dyslexia
- Boosting creativity and ideas
- Explaining university staff as good as or even better than professors
- Very beneficial method for studying if used properly

Potential future threats

- Not using our own ideas and our own work
- Developing addiction to it, not writing even a simple essay
- Becoming lazier and less creative
- Damaging productivity and logical thinking
- Jobs being at risk, Taking over jobs, Laying off people
- Students not studying and doing homework
- Solving any problem through ChatGPT
- Forgetting to do things correctly by ourselves
- Possible abuses
- Creating inequality between those who write themselves and those using ChatGPT
- People not using their brains
- Undervaluing professional in different fields
- Unlimited and unsupervised access for anyone
- Unqualified people getting positions
- Plagiarising
- People not learning because things are done for them
- Providing inaccurate results & incorrect information
- Impairing peoples' productivity
- People becoming 'parasites'

3.3. Discussion

Prior to administering the survey it was assumed that all the participants had already had at least some experience using ChatGPT. However, some of the students participating in the survey were creating accounts for the very first time with the help of their colleagues just before answering the questions in the survey. The fact that over half of the respondents (more precisely 68.6%) were from The Faculty of Contemporary Science and Technologies, might account for some of the answers provided, especially the definitions of what ChatGPT actually is, as well as the frequent mention of writing codes as one of the main reasons for using ChatGPT. It would be interesting to compare the results across faculties by conducting parallel case studies at all faculties within SEEU, especially if SEEU intends to officially regulate the use of modern technology in the teaching process.

“Help”, “Assist”, “Solve problems,” were the predominant ideas used by the students to describe and define ChatGPT. ChatGPT being “a reliable source”, easily “finding valid information” and “having the answers for everything,” were some of the common misconceptions discovered among students’ answers. We teachers have the obligation to deal with it. It has to be brought to students’ understanding that ChatGPT is far from always being reliable, as a result of which it should not be blindly and uncritically followed. Very often ChatGPT would apologize for not being able to answer due to the lack of information available, or would ask for additional, more detailed prompts. It would even apologise for not being able to provide assistance or guidance on unethical behaviour. “ChatGPT can produce text responses similar to human language, answer follow-up questions, admit its mistakes, challenge incorrect premises and reject inappropriate requests” (Hong 2023, 38). The assumption that the real number of students misusing ChatGPT for copying in exams was going to be much higher than the reported 2.9%, could be assigned to a common teacher paranoia of students attempting to cheat in exams in general. Although the answers to Question 8 in the questionnaire regarding the purpose for which the students were asked to use ChatGPT were not as specific and detailed as it was hoped, the answers do instil some hope for disseminating the idea of implementing ChatGPT as an effective language learning and teaching tool, especially due to the fact that ChatGPT offers a variety of possibilities for the revival of the concept of flipped classroom making its application seem never easier and more convenient.

With reference to mentioning “*emergency*” as a reason for using ChatGPT again in Question 11, follow up interviews would help understand the idea better and get more detailed answers, however in the absence of follow up interviews, I would allow the liberty to interpret this as being pressed for time when meeting deadlines for completing assignments and projects.

There is an interesting mismatch between the answers for Question 14 and Question 15, i.e. the fact that students are aware of the convenience of ChatGPT for copying in exams compared to the very high percentage of students who declared to have never attempted (mis)using it for cheating in exams. One possible interpretation for this could be that students simply do not consider it as cheating since they have produced their specific prompt when requesting the chatbot to perform a certain operation for them.

The answers to Question 18 once again highlight the need for teachers to intervene and raise students’ awareness of the fact that ChatGPT is not an all-knowing, always right and completely reliable source of information. This is a major drawback compared to all its convenience in the ability to process available information super fast and almost instantly offer a response to a given prompt.

The underlined insightful comments made by the respondents in Question 20, highlight the importance of wording the prompts given to ChatGPT and the need to teach users, both teachers and students, how to write proper prompts. The more precise and direct the prompt, the more relevant the response obtained. The need for regulations on the proper use of ChatGPT occurred more than once.

3.4. Suggestions for further research

Far more extensive, long term research needs to be conducted in the area of emersion of technology in ELT in order to better understand how can EFLT be more efficiently facilitated, supported and enhanced and all that not at the expense of job losses and plagiarism eruption. The major limitations of this study are the number of participants and the time frame due to which follow-up, semi structured, in-depth interviews and focus groups could not be organized. A semester long parallel studies involving teachers and students from all six faculties at SEEU would offer by far more insightful findings and would enable drawing more precise conclusions.

An immediate future research which logically stems directly from this paper is the survey of teachers' perception and treatment of ChatGPT as a teaching and learning tool. It would be interesting to see what potentials of ChatGPT as an effective tool do teachers see, as well as their readiness and willingness to utilise ChatGPT in their teaching practise. Covering each of the four basic language skills separately, i.e. suggesting practical ways of implementing the cutting-edge technology in the process of their development along with measuring their effectiveness is yet another research focus which deserves due attention.

A questions pressing for an answer is whether the integration of ChatGPT in EFL learning will help students cheat and pass exams without studying, or it will encourage students to learn more in order to pass exams. Closely related to this last issue and inevitably imposing on every language teacher is the dilemma whether ChatGPT is really going to kill traditional language learning and teaching at higher education and leave many teachers jobless, or it will just turn out to be nothing more than another useful learning tool (as grammarly, Google translate, etc.). I personally choose to be on the optimistic side and say no, however, the future developments in this direction are really challenging to anticipate.

Hopefully, this paper will intrigue ELT professionals to reflect on their teaching reality and the possibility of including latest technology in it, evaluate potential benefits and challenges and suggest innovative socially, morally and academically acceptable, proper and safe ways of employing ChatGPT and similar technologies within the context of tertiary ELT.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As one of the students cleverly put it as an answer to Question 4 of the questionnaire: "If you use it (ChatGPT) correctly you can learn a lot from it." It is the central premise of this paper - utilising ChatGPT correctly and in an academically honest manner as an effective foreign language teaching and learning tool. All our attention should currently be focused on finding the right balance between using GhapGPT for assistance and support and avoiding its misuse for plagiarism and passing exams without studying.

ChatGPT is a real-time tool for encouraging and promoting autonomy in language learning as it is available 24/7 allowing students to work on their own pace anywhere and

anytime, focus on items they need more practice in, and get not only personalized learning materials but also assessment and feedback. In a nutshell, ChatGPT offers all the essential prerequisites for autonomous language learning. Offering all these possibilities, ChatGPT enables the concept and practice of flipped classroom to be revived again.

It is of vital importance to invest expertise into learning about the options and possibilities offered by ChatGPT rather than wasting enormous energy on fighting to ban ChatGPT from higher education institutions. This language model is here to stay and not likely to stay outside higher education institutions. It will only gain popularity so we should make most of it for the benefit of both parties involved in the language learning and teaching process while maintaining the already established principles of academic integrity and honesty. In order to use ChatGPT as a language learning tool, teachers and students alike should first and foremost learn how to interact with it. Both parties involved in the language teaching/learning process need to develop digital competences for utilising the tool in a pedagogically beneficial and ethical manner. We teachers should focus all our know-know and experience first of all on learning and then instructing our students how to properly word and formulate the prompts when using ChatGPT in order to get the most relevant response. We language teachers are also obliged to warn students against ChatGPT using fictional, non-existent sources. We have to ensure students develop the habit of meticulously checking the sources and references suggested by ChatGPT. Properly crediting sources is essential at tertiary education as it represents the last opportunity for instilling this habit into current students and future professionals in all spheres of society.

The limitless possibilities ChatGPT offers make summarising, paraphrasing and quoting insufficient for avoiding and fighting against plagiarism. It is now more crucial than ever to educate individuals about the risks of spreading unverified and uncredited ideas, facts and theories.

In order to raise the awareness of the potential of ChatGPT as a language learning tool, in the undergraduate Advanced Academic English course at SEEU, ChatGPT was used as a writing assistant for self-checking, self-correcting, comparing and rewriting students' work. Students were asked to use ChatGPT to check the introduction of the group research paper for spelling and grammar mistakes. They were also asked to prompt ChatGPT for an improved version of the conclusion they wrote for their group research report. They were instructed to closely analyse and discuss the suggestions within their groups and produce the final version of the introduction and conclusion of the group research report before submitting it for grading.

Yan (2023) is one of the many researchers and ELT practitioners who warns against the possibility of unethical use of ChatGPT and proposes developing and implementing an application protocol for proper use of technology in language teaching rather than impeding students' opportunities to encounter and utilize AI-based tools. Currently SEEU has no policy on using ChatGPT whatsoever, but it is my personal conviction that education institutions need to offer specific guidelines for using tools such as ChatGPT, modify and adapt the current teaching and assessment practices so as to properly prepare students for a "*world where AI-driven digital tools are part of daily life*" (Kohnke, Moorhouse and Zou 2024, 10).

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Review research paper

TEACHING ESP IN THE DIGITAL AGE: IMPLICATIONS FOR CRAFTING EFFECTIVE COURSE DESCRIPTIONS FOR ONLINE LEARNING

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Abstract. *As technology continues to advance rapidly, the field of education has witnessed significant transformations. One prominent outcome is the emergence of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), which offer accessible and flexible online learning opportunities. MOOC descriptions play a crucial role in attracting and informing prospective students about the course content and objectives. However, existing studies have yet to provide a comprehensive, step-by-step guide for creating compelling MOOC descriptions in English. This study aims to bridge that gap by offering practical recommendations and implications for instructors and course developers seeking to enhance the effectiveness of their MOOC descriptions. Drawing on previous theoretical frameworks and an empirical investigation, this guide synthesizes the existing body of knowledge and examines recent MOOC descriptions to provide insightful recommendations. By focusing on both the persuasiveness and informativeness of MOOC descriptions, this study equips ESP practitioners with the tools to train educators to engage and captivate potential learners in the online learning landscape.*

Key words: *Massive Open Online Courses, MOOCs, course description, ESP*

1. INTRODUCTION

The advent of technology has facilitated communication and access to online resources, leading to a significant proliferation of platforms offering Massive Open Online Courses (hereafter referred to as MOOCs). According to Hoy (2014), MOOCs can be defined as “online classes that anyone, anywhere can participate in, usually for free. They are made up of short video lectures combined with computer graded tests and online forums where participants can discuss the material or get help” (pp. 85-86). The most popular MOOC platforms in sequence are Coursera, EdX, Udacity, Udemy and Khan Academy (Conache et al., 2016). According to Cetina, Goldbach and Manea (2018), Udemy offered 65,000 online courses on more than 142 topics, and these courses were taken by 20 million students. The students who enroll in Udemy MOOCs are from around 200 countries and one third of them are from the United States (Qiu, 2020).

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The increasing numbers of online courses in general and MOOCs in particular may reflect the increasing numbers of tutors (trained and untrained) who are participating in online education. In MOOC platforms such as Udemy.com, writing the course description is a task that is left to the tutor who might not be aware that MOOC descriptions are not merely informative texts but might also have other communicative purposes. Therefore, the aim of this study is to contribute to the field of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) by formulating implications and suggesting recommendations that could help online tutors (who may or may not have training in education) write effective MOOC descriptions in English that are able to persuade students to enroll in a particular MOOC. In other words, the primary objective of the present study is to offer a comprehensive, step-by-step guide for the development of effective MOOC descriptions. This guide is informed by a meticulous examination of both previous theoretical frameworks as well as an empirical investigation conducted by the author to be able to support the recommendations with solid examples. By synthesizing and building upon the existing body of knowledge as well as examining recent MOOC descriptions, this study aims to provide practical recommendations for instructors and course developers seeking to enhance the persuasiveness and informativeness of their MOOC descriptions. So, the research question of this study is: What pedagogical/practical implications and recommendations may be formulated based on the outcomes with regard to writing effective MOOC descriptions?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

ESP PERSPECTIVES AND THE RELEVANCE OF EFFECTIVE MOOC DESCRIPTIONS

Scholars such as Hutchinson and Waters (1987) have acknowledged ESP as a viable solution to the question of why learners need to acquire a language other than their mother tongue. Strevens (1988) juxtaposed ESP with General English, emphasizing that ESP materials are tailored to specific contexts to meet learners' specific needs. For instance, a particular ESP course might focus on developing a particular skill, such as writing, through innovative instructional approaches (Strevens, 1988).

While Strevens (1988) presents a comprehensive definition of ESP, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) contend that both Strevens' (1988) and Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) definitions lack completeness. Consequently, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) proposed a twofold ESP definition. Firstly, they highlight the "absolute characteristics" of ESP, emphasizing that it is designed to cater to learners' specific needs and incorporates the underlying methodologies and activities of the disciplines it serves (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, p. 4). Secondly, they outline the "variable characteristics" of ESP, including features such as targeting adult learners, focusing on specific disciplines, employing distinct methodologies from general English, catering to intermediate or advanced students, and presupposing a foundational understanding of the language system, though adaptable to beginners (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, p. 5).

The present research context aligns with this definition as it involves the design of a step-by-step guide aimed at assisting learners in composing effective MOOC descriptions in English. Such a course would be responsive to the tutor's needs and would be founded on instructional approaches closely associated with the field of online education and persuasive writing.

The present study contends that MOOC descriptions employ various persuasive techniques to entice readers to enroll, such as highlighting the course benefits and offering incentives to potential students. Hoy (2014) observed that “anyone can design a MOOC”, and consequently this may imply that individuals uploading MOOCs may lack the necessary training or knowledge in crafting effective descriptions. In light of this, the current investigation could serve as valuable training material for MOOC tutors, aiding them in enhancing their proficiency in writing compelling MOOC descriptions. Moreover, for tutors experienced in composing offline course descriptions, this research proves beneficial by raising awareness regarding the alterations in the communicative purpose of course descriptions.

Doo et al.’s (2020) research reveals that only a limited number of MOOC designers receive training prior to creating their courses, highlighting the need for comprehensive training programs focused on MOOC design. While the current investigation may not directly impact MOOC design, it undeniably holds implications for crafting effective MOOC descriptions, which play a pivotal role in shaping the initial perception of a given course. Thus, the inclusion of effective MOOC description writing in MOOC designing training programs is deemed essential.

Hajeer (2023) found that many MOOC descriptions were perceived as unappealing to students due to their explicit marketing style. This could be attributed to the insufficient ESP training that instructors receive before crafting MOOC descriptions. Consequently, MOOC instructors may resort to unsuitable training material, unsuited for educational content promotion. As copywriting is a topic with limited academic attention, practitioners on social media platforms and online forums (Blynova & Kyrilova, 2018; Gnezdilova & Selezneva, 2019) are providing education on copywriting. However, the content provided by these practitioners may lack a solid theoretical foundation or sound empirical research.

Several investigations, such as Avand’s (2009), Sadeghi et al.’s (2013), have demonstrated the positive impact of genre-based instruction on ESP students. Consequently, an analysis of MOOC descriptions based on the Rhetorical Move Structure (RMS) framework is expected to be of value to ESP practitioners seeking to teach the art of crafting effective MOOC descriptions. Subsequent sections will provide further details on the Rhetorical Move Structure (RMS) analysis of MOOCs.

3. METHODS

This section offers comprehensive information concerning the theoretical framework and previous studies that were utilized to derive the recommendations. Additionally, it outlines the empirical methodology employed by the author to formulate the suggestions and recommendations.

3.1. Elements and Effects of MOOC Description: A Theoretical Framework

To attain a more profound comprehension of the constituent elements comprising MOOC descriptions, a study was conducted by Hajeer (2021) to unveil the rhetorical move structure employed within such descriptions. The rhetorical move structure approach formulated by Swales (1981, 1990) primarily focuses on discerning the communicative purpose of a particular section (consisting of one or more sentences) within a given text. Swales (1981) contends that a text is composed of various parts, each

possessing a distinctive communicative function that contributes towards achieving a specific communicative purpose. This intent is not impartial but rather serves as a crucial element of the overall purpose of the text. Consequently, as defined by Biber et al. (2007), a move can be understood as “a section of text that fulfills a particular communicative function” (p. 23). The RMS analysis of MOOC descriptions holds promise for ESP practitioners aspiring to instruct the crafting of effective MOOC descriptions. The current RMS model (refer to Figure 1) serves as a valuable tool for enhancing the awareness of prospective MOOC instructors regarding the various moves and steps embedded within these texts. This framework provides writers with a structured approach to produce compelling MOOC descriptions, thereby optimizing their effectiveness.

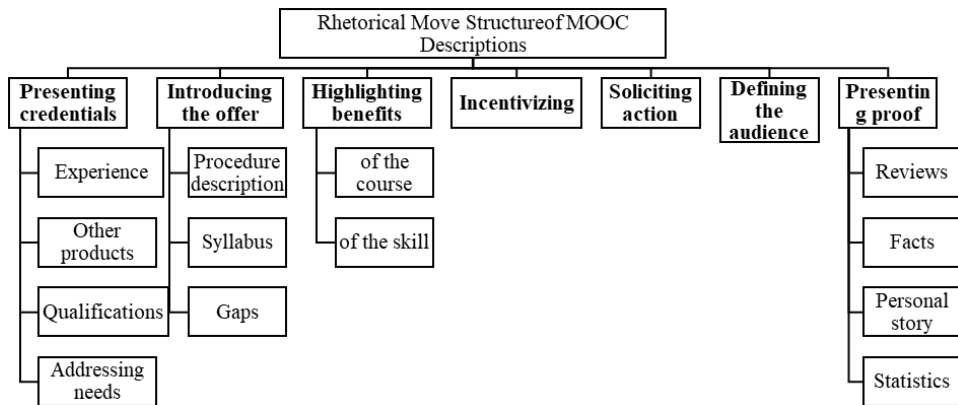


Fig. 1 The Rhetorical Move Structure of MOOC Descriptions, Hajeer (2021)

Hajeer’s (2021) investigation showed that MOOC description comprise seven moves (i.e., parts), some of these moves embody a number of steps (i.e., subparts). Each of these moves or steps has a communicative purpose, in other words, a purpose that it seeks to achieve, such as persuading or informing, among others. The following table is constructed based on Hajeer (2021) study and includes all the moves and steps along with their communicative purposes.

As for Measuring the Effect of MOOC Descriptions on Potential Readers. Hajeer and Toptsi (2022), conducted a study to investigate the impact of Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) descriptions on individuals considering enrollment. The objective of the interview-based study was to elucidate and enhance our comprehension of how MOOC descriptions affect prospective students. Furthermore, it aimed to discern the specific elements of the descriptions that influence readers’ decisions regarding course enrollment. This study findings indicated that the presence of detailed syllabus, organized and well-ordered subsections, triggered feelings, description of the procedure, incentives, and reviews from previous students have influenced the decision of the readers.

Table 1 The communicative purposes of the moves and steps

Move/step	Communicative purpose
M1 Presenting Credentials	Demonstrate the credibility of the tutor of the course.
M1-S1 Experience	Highlighting the experience of the MOOC tutor.
M1-S2 Other Products	Demonstrating the exceptional knowledge of the tutors by revealing information about their contributions to the field that they specialize in.
M1-S3 Qualification	Strengthening the credibility of the tutors by highlighting their qualifications.
M1-S4 Addressing Needs	Mentioning the needs of the target audience.
M2 Introducing The Offer	Presenting the offer (i.e., the course) to potential students.
M2-S1 Procedure Description	Offering further information regarding the ways in which the MOOC is delivered.
M2-S2 Syllabus	Familiarizing the potential students with the contents of the course.
M2-S3 Gaps	Highlighting or implicating the drawbacks of the other courses in the platform.
M3 Highlighting Benefits	Adding value to the course.
M3-S1 Of The Course	Listing the benefits that potential students would gain if they took the course.
M3-S2 Of The Skill	Referring to the positive outcomes that potential students would gain if they learned the skill itself regardless of what MOOC they choose to enroll in.
M4 Incentivizing	Attracting the potential students to enroll in their MOOCs by offering them additional gains.
M5 Soliciting Action	Encouraging the potential students to take the course.
M6 Defining the Audience	Defining the potential beneficiaries from the MOOC either by listing the features of the MOOC itself, or by describing the target audience.
M7 Proof	Supporting the tutor's statements with statistics, reviews, facts or personal stories.
M7-S1 Reviews	Highlighting the positive experience (with the MOOC) of the previous students.
M7-S2 Facts	Supporting the claims of the tutors with facts.
M7-S3 Personal Story	Proving to the potential students that the skills developed or the knowledge taught in the advertised MOOC are indeed useful.
M7-S4 Statistics	Backing the claims of the tutors with different types of (numerical) proof.

3.2. The Empirical Approach: The Criteria of Corpus Design and Analysis

The corpus design process spanned a one-year period from 2022 to 2023. A total of 25 MOOC descriptions were gathered from the Udemy.com platform for inclusion in the corpus. Since the descriptions are publicly accessible, there was no need to seek permission for access. The selection criteria for texts in the corpus were based on word count and the types of courses offered. The chosen MOOC descriptions ranged between 600 to 1000 words, which represents the average length observed in most MOOC descriptions. In terms of course

variety, preference was given to descriptions of courses that garnered higher student interest. This selection process was not without challenges, considering the wide range of courses available on the platform. Ultimately, the chosen MOOC descriptions primarily focused on computer sciences (e.g., ethical hacking and programming), business (e.g., marketing, management, and financial analysis), and education (e.g., train the trainer, online teaching, and teacher training).

The data analysis procedures commenced with the integration of the corpus into Atlas.ti v7.5.7, a software commonly employed in qualitative research. This particular tool facilitates the manual assignment of tags to text units. The initial stage involved the identification of the rhetorical move structure analysis of MOOC descriptions, as previously outlined in a pilot study by Hajeer (2021). For more comprehensive information, refer to Figure 1.

Subsequently, extracts that exhibited frequent usage were carefully selected and subjected to minimal modifications, thereby transforming them into pre-constructed sentences. These sentences serve as valuable resources for MOOC writers aiming to enhance the efficiency of their course descriptions.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. General Recommendations for Writing MOOC Descriptions

Drawing from the aforementioned studies, this section presents overarching recommendations that would assist the tutor in developing a comprehensive comprehension of crafting a MOOC description in terms of its length, structure, tone, anticipated reader response, and the sequencing of various sections and subsections within the description.

- **Length:** It is advisable for the authors to refrain from generating extensive descriptions. Certain interviewees reported challenges in maintaining concentration when confronted with MOOC descriptions exceeding 800 words. Consequently, it is recommended that the length of a single description be confined to a range of 600-800 words.
- **Layout:** It is recommended that writers of MOOC descriptions strive to create visually appealing content. This can be achieved through the utilization of text organizing devices, such as bullet points or numbering, to present multiple ideas in a structured manner. Authors may also employ formatting techniques, such as boldface, italics, and underlining, to emphasize specific terms or concepts within the description. Subsequently, it is advised that authors meticulously proofread the text to identify and rectify any misspellings, typographical errors, or grammatical inconsistencies. The interview study findings indicate that such errors can undermine the tutor's credibility. Furthermore, visual allure can be enhanced by incorporating images (e.g., tutor, review providers, or infographics) and videos (e.g., tutor's introduction or recorded testimonials from previous students) into the description.
- **Tone:** Considering that the primary objective of MOOC descriptions is to persuade readers to enroll in the featured courses, it is observed that many tutors frequently resort to an excessive employment of marketing language typically associated with promoting tangible products, such as toys or mobile phones. However, the findings of the present inquiry indicate that adopting such a tone is unlikely to yield the intended outcome of encouraging readers to enroll in the course.
- **Feelings:** It is advisable for authors to strive towards evoking positive emotions in readers when crafting MOOC descriptions. The interviewees highlighted two positive

emotions, namely excitement and assurance. Tutors can incorporate the element of excitement by providing a comprehensive explanation of the course topics accompanied by vivid descriptions of how these topics can be practically applied in the readers' lives. Additionally, to instill a sense of assurance, MOOC description writers can address the concerns of learners, particularly beginners. These concerns may encompass fears of losing motivation or not meeting deadlines. Upon identifying these fears, tutors are recommended to emphasize the solutions offered by their courses. By doing so, tutors effectively remove the obstacles that impede readers from engaging with the advertised MOOC.

- **Order:** First of all, authors are advised to highlight the level of difficulty of the advertised MOOC at the beginning of the description, preferably in the title. For example, “German Course for Beginners.” This approach is likely to be well-received by readers, as it provides them with immediate information regarding whether the course meets their needs, without having to read the entire description. Secondly, it is recommended that writers of MOOC descriptions place reviews from previous enrollees towards the end of the description. All illustrations (figures, photographs, line drawings, graphs) should be numbered in series and all legends should be included at the bottom of each illustration. All figures, photographs, line drawings and graphs, prepared in electronic form, should be converted in TIFF or JPG (max quality) files, in 300 dpi resolution, for superior reproduction. Figures, line drawings and graphs prepared using elements of MS Drawing or MS Graph must be converted in form of pictures and unchangeable. All illustrations should be planned in advance so as to allow reduction to 12.75 cm in column width. Please review all illustrations to ensure that they are readable.

4.2. Recommendations Regarding the Moves and Steps

This section intends to provide recommendations with respect to the themes and the language of each part of the MOOC descriptions. These recommendations are hoped to help the writers of MOOC descriptions to enhance the effectiveness of their MOOC descriptions.

4.2.1. Presenting Credentials

The aim of this move is to highlight the credibility of the tutor and it encompasses four steps, namely, experience, qualifications, other products, and addressing needs.

- **Experience:** The instructors can accentuate their experience in various ways. The writers of MOOC descriptions can choose one or more of the following approaches:
 - **Highlighting their teaching experience:**
 - I’ve been teaching (...field...) for (...number...) years.
 - I have been teaching (...field...) since (...number...) years.
 - **Highlighting experience in their own field:**
 - I have been working as a (...profession...) since (...year...).
 - I am a professional (...profession...) with real experience in (...field...).
 - **Highlighting the numbers of years of experience:**
 - This course is based on my (...number...) years of experience in (...field...).
 - **Highlighting the number of their students:**
 - I have helped more than (...number...) student to (...goal...).
 - I’ve already taught (...number...) students and received (...number...) positive reviews.

- **Other Products:** tutors can also emphasize their experience by referring to their contributions to the field. In what follows the three ways in which this step can be approached will be demonstrated along with ready-made language suggestions.
 - o Referring to a website, course or publication:
 - My other course (...title...) is the perfect complement to the current one.
 - I am the author of (...book....). I run a website called (...website address...).
 - o Offering details about the success of the product:
 - My published book is available in (...number...) languages.
 - My best-seller book has sold (...number...) copies.
 - (...number...) students have joined my previous courses.
- **Qualifications:** in this step, the qualifications of the tutor are mentioned. This step can be introduced in one (or more) of the following ways:
 - o University Qualifications (e.g., BA, MA, PhD)
 - I have a PhD in (...field...) and a master's degree in (...field...).
 - I hold a (...academic degree...) degree from (...university...).
 - o Non-academic institutions
 - I qualified as a (...specialization...) Certified from (... institution ...).
 - I am a certified (...specialization...) from (... institution ...).
- **Addressing Needs:** by addressing the needs of the students, the tutor can show their expertise in their field. These are some language structures that may help in introducing this step:
 - When people start learning a new skill they often face (... difficulties...). But in this course, I/we will help you (... solution...).
 - Many learners aspire to (...wishes...). In this course we/I will help you achieve this by (...solution...).

4.2.2. *Introducing the Offer*

The aim of this move is to furnish further details that are relevant to the MOOC itself like the topics that are going to be covered. This Move consists of three steps, namely, Procedure Description, Syllabus and Gaps.

- **Procedure Description:** This step is crucial as it help the reader build an image of the learning procedure. Therefore, it should contain all the necessary details which can help the potential students build a complete image of the MOOC. In order to achieve this, including the following details is recommended:
 - o **Structure:**
 - We will go through the entire process of (...task...) This includes the following steps/procedure/parts/practices/levels/.
 - This course will guide you through every step starting from (...first step...) to (...final step...).
 - I'll show you how you can (... another step...). After that, I will explain (...concept...).
 - Ultimately (...final step...).
 - o **Methods:**
 - This course follows a (...practical/theoretical...) approach.
 - I teach through cases, so for every tool/technique/framework/model/case I provide an example.

The course is a practical, step by step guide which is accompanied by examples/templates/cases/analyses/....

Motivation is very important in the learning process, so I/we have tried hard to make this course fun/relevant/entertaining/engaging/rewarding/....

o Tools:

Quizzes/exercises/summaries/... are provided during the videos.

o Duration of the course:

This course contains over (...number...) hours or video instruction.

We will spend around (...number...) hours learning this skill.

- Syllabus: tutors are strongly advised to diligently strive towards incorporating an organized, coherent, and reader-friendly syllabus. The significance of this section cannot be overstated. It is highly recommended that tutors include a comprehensive list encompassing all the topics to be covered in the course. Furthermore, it is also advisable to provide an elucidation of each topic, accompanied by relevant definitions, illustrative examples, and practical applications that highlight how the acquired skills or knowledge can be applied to real-life scenarios. It is crucial for tutors to refrain from employing technical jargon without providing proper explanations, particularly when the course is targeted towards beginners, as this may lead to confusion. Moreover, tutors should steer clear of presenting the syllabus as an unstructured block of text, and instead utilize organizational devices such as bullet points or numbering. A recommended structure for the syllabus is as follows:

Topic: an example

Example: CSS framework: this help build responsive websites.

Topic: a definition

Example: SPSS: A statistical software for data management and advanced analytics.

- Gaps: the aim here is to show the superiority of the advertised course over other ones through comparison. The following aspects of comparison and language structures can be taken into consideration.

o Recency:

Unlike other courses here, this course is updated on a regular basis.

Many courses in (...platform...) are released once and never updated. On contrary, this course is updated regularly.

o Quantity of the content

This course is different from the other ones you'll find on (...platform...) as it contains more video content.

This course will cover topics that are missing from other courses.

o Tutor's experience

The instructor of this course has (...number...) years of experience in (...field...) which is more than most of the course's instructors.

The tutor of this course has more experience in (...field...) than many other instructors in (...platform...).

4.2.3. Highlighting Benefits

This move comprises two steps: the benefits of the course and the benefits of acquiring the skill. In this subsection, the tutor is expected to enumerate the advantages that potential students would gain by enrolling in the advertised course, as well as the benefits of acquiring the skill itself. It is recommended that writers of MOOC descriptions avoid using

exaggerated claims about the benefits of their courses, such as “you will become a millionaire” or “you will master the art of winning any argument.” Instead, authors are encouraged to adopt a more realistic approach, such as “The skills learned in this course can contribute to salary growth” or “This course equips you with the tools to construct arguments professionally.” The following methods outline how the communicative purpose of this move is achieved, along with suggestions for the language use.

- Of The Course
 - Promising improved professional practice:
 - At the end of this course, you will be able to confidently (...benefit...).
 - After taking this course you will be able to (...benefit...).
 - Promising a better job:
 - You can use the skills you build in this course to get a better job or to increase your hourly pay rate.
 - This course includes the set of skills that you need to secure a better job.
 - Promising higher income:
 - To get higher income, you need to get the necessary skills and that is what you will get from this course.
 - With the right skills, which you will learn in this course, you can increase your income.
- Of The Skill
 - Highlighting the market demand:
 - Companies/institutions usually rely on (...people with the advertised skills, e.g., engineers, teachers, planners...) to (...achieve a particular goal...).
 - There is high demand in the market for (...e.g., financial analysts...).

4.2.4. *Incentivizing*

To incentivize readers to enroll in the advertised course, tutors are advised to provide additional incentives. Below, a set of potential options is presented, accompanied by pre-existing language structures.

- Money-back guarantee
 - You are guarded by a (...number...) days money-back guarantee.
 - This course offers you the chance to be reimbursed if your expectations were not met.
- Personal support
 - I'll be here for you every step of the way. If you have any questions about the course, content or anything related to this topic, you can always post a question in the course or send me a direct message.
 - I/my team/we will be ready to answer your questions within (...number...) hours/days.
- Recency
 - This course is constantly updated to be current with the latest developments of (...field...).
 - I regularly update this course to reflect the latest changes to (...field...).

4.2.5. *Soliciting Actions*

The communicative objective of this move is to motivate readers to enroll in the course. It is advisable to exercise caution when employing this move. Below are suggested language structures for achieving this purpose: Go ahead and click on the enroll button.

- Take this course to (...goal...).

Enroll in this (...course title...) course today.
 I hope to see you as a student in the course when we next meet.
 Start your journey today learning about (...skill...).

4.2.6. *Defining the Audience*

In this section, the objective is to identify the individuals who would derive the greatest benefit from the advertised course by specifying the groups to which they belong, such as age or professional groups. Hajeer's study (2021) reveals that the more relevant categories a reader aligns with, the more persuasive the MOOC description becomes to them. Therefore, it is recommended to conduct a thorough analysis of the potential student categories to which they may belong. Below are some categories that can be utilized, accompanied by suggested language formulations.

o Age

Anyone above the age of (...number...) can attend this course.

Only those who are above (...number...) can take this course.

o Profession

If you are (...profession...) then this course is good for you.

If you are an employee and would like to start your own business.

o Level of difficulty

No advanced knowledge is required for this course.

No previous knowledge on any of the listed topics is required.

4.2.7. *Proof*

Tutors can employ this move to substantiate their claims with evidence. It encompasses four optional steps: Review, Facts, Personal Story, and Statistics. The following are suggestions on how each of these steps can be introduced.

- **Reviews:** While providing language suggestions for this step (as they are written by previous students) may not be feasible, some recommendations can be offered for selecting appropriate reviews to include in the description. It is advisable to choose reviews that contain valuable information for potential students, such as how the course assisted them in attaining their goals or how the acquired skills were applicable in their lives. Additionally, reviews that offer a detailed opinion about the course can be beneficial. However, it is advised to avoid including reviews that solely praise the course or the tutor, as such reviews had a negative impact on the interviewees in the present study.

- **Facts:** This step involves incorporating facts that substantiate the tutor's claims. One possible reason why many interviewees in Hajeer and Toptsi's (2022) study were not influenced by this step could be attributed to the absence of references to trusted sources. Hence, when tutors aim to present a fact to support their claims, it is recommended to include a verifiable reference. Below are suggested language structures that can be utilized to introduce this step:

You may not know but (...fact...) (reference).

It has been reported by the (...source...) that (...fact...).

- **Personal Story:** tutors also have the flexibility to incorporate a personal story wherein they can elucidate how their expertise (the one they are imparting through the course) contributed to their personal or professional achievements. No specific language structures can be

provided for this step, as the choice of language structure depends on the content, length, and purpose of the personal story being shared.

- Statistics: this is where the tutors use statistics to back their claims. Like facts, it is recommended to use statistics from trusted sources and mention these sources all the time. Some language structures that can be used to introduce this step are:

According to (...source...) (...statistics...).

As reported by a study conducted in (...date...) by (...source...).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The objective of the present study was to derive implications and propose recommendations to online tutors regarding the creation of effective MOOC descriptions. The preceding section provided overarching recommendations encompassing aspects such as the structure and length of the description, tone and elicited emotions, as well as the sequencing of moves within the descriptions. Furthermore, specific guidance was furnished for each move and step, accompanied by pre-established language structures for authors to utilize. These recommendations aim to assist ESP practitioners with training writers of course descriptions in general, and specifically those crafting MOOC descriptions, in producing compelling and impactful descriptions. It is important to note that the outcomes of this study may not be generalized to all MOOC platforms, as our analysis focused on the Udemy platform. Hence, future research that compares MOOC descriptions across different platforms is anticipated to yield valuable insights.

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