

IMPROVING THE STANDARD OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION AMONGST SQU STUDENTS IN OMAN: CHALLENGES AND SUGGESTIONS

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Abstract: English language has become a global means of communication and interaction. It is a universal language used in certain functions such as business and notably in teaching and learning science and technology. Mastering English language doesn't only facilitate the process of learning but also an essential requirement in most of the occupations, employment and market. In Omani context, English language has been the main condition in job applications for both the governmental and the private sectors. Therefore, this research investigates the challenges facing English language and its level of usage among the students as medium of communication at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) since it's the only public university in the Sultanate of Oman. Besides, it examines to what level English language has been used in the campus and its development. The study provides some scientific approaches and empirical suggestions that the standard of the English can be enhanced and developed at SQU. It shed a light for the University management at SQU on how to improve English usage amongst students and the mechanism that can be used as a motivator as well as how to instigate students to speak or use English as a second language. For research methods, this research has used qualitative research by conducting interview with the academic staff at SQU and the analysis was done using interview protocol to generate the "themes" and solutions to the problem. In addition to this, it analyzed some students' assignments and reports using "Content Analysis" to generate the similarities and contrasts. Looking into findings, the

research revealed that the inadequacy practice of English language outside the classroom from the part of the students is the main reason behind the low improvement of English among SQU students. Lack of abilities in mastering English grammar rules and lack of public speaking have constituted to the problem. Besides, lack of classroom expression and presentation found to be one of the major problems for students poor English. As a suggestion for overcoming these problems and implication, a culture of reading and writing most take place personally amongst students by showing their initiatives. Strong emphasis on English language for new students and at foundation level; additional English course for existing students, establishing public speaking and debate as well as student's conference in English.

Keynotes: Communication; English Language, Oman; Sultan Qaboos University.

INTRODUCTION

Since His Majesty, Sultan Qaboos bin Said, became the ruler of Oman in 1970, he has been paying special attention to developing an advanced formal educational system, as he believes that education creates productive citizens who will take on the responsibility of developing the country. As Borg (2008) mentions, "His Majesty Sultan Qaboos has stressed the Sultanate's commitment to human resources development as a key priority for enhancing the process of education in Oman" (p. iv).

In a famous quote by His Majesty, "Let learning be even under the shadow of a tree," he encourages

equal education for every Omani and no one will be left behind. He assures the provision of the best facilities for Omani schools to enhance learning and to reach a high standard of education. Accordingly, primary, secondary and tertiary schools were constructed all around the country, equipped with all the materials and tools necessary at a very rapid pace. In the past, after students had finished the twelve years of the general certificate, they were sent abroad to neighboring countries in the Arabian Gulf to obtain higher degrees in education (i.e., Bachelor's, Master's and doctorate). They were also sent to other Arabian and European countries. The situation remained this way until His Majesty issued a decree to establish the first public governmental university in Oman in the 1980s.

Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) admitted its first cohort of young Omanis in 1986, who then graduated after four years in 1990 (Ministry of Information, 2008, p. 119). From that time, SQU has witnessed tremendous reforms seeking the noble goal of producing well-educated, productive and responsible citizens to take their part in developing the country. Currently, it includes nine colleges: Arts and Social Sciences, Commerce and Economics, Education, Medicine, Agriculture and Marine Sciences, Engineering, Law, Nursing and Science. Now, SQU is considered one of the leading educational institutions among the Arab world.

In continuation with the success that SQU has achieved through previous years, last year (2010) observed a reform based on the deep belief from the university administration that all students of the university should be endowed with a sufficient level in the English language. This educational reform "has radically changed both teachers' and learners' experiences of English language teaching and learning in Oman" (Borg, 2008, p. ix).

The reform stipulated that students admitted to SQU must take the Foundation Program English courses offered by the Language Centre (LC) at the university, regardless of their admitted specializations. Before this, the program was only mandatory for English instruction medium specializations such as the College of Science, Medicine, Engineering, Agriculture, Nursing, Commerce and some majors of Education, Arts and Law.

Despite the fact that students undergo a year of foundation English, that the medium of instruction is English in most majors, and that the availability of various programs to develop the students' level of English are present, the students still do not display a high level of English language proficiency. This issue has raised a lot of inquiries about the reasons that hinder students from acquiring a good level of

English that can be utilized in communication. Consequently, questions have also been asked about the strategies that could be followed to improve the level of English among SQU students. This research investigates the potential reasons behind this undesirable phenomenon and, correspondingly, proposes suggestions that could improve the situation.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

As the English language has become the first international and most widespread means of communication in the world, SQU students are obligated to acquire a considerably good level of English. To illustrate, the Ministry of Education and the Omani Royal Air Force require a certificate of band six in IELTS to prove proficiency for employment in the government sector. The low level of English proficiency prevents some institutions, both in the governmental and private sectors, from sending their faculty members to obtain further education, like a Masters or doctorate degree, since they have to score at least band six in IELTS. It is essential that students who seek the best job opportunities in professional occupations must be equipped with English language skills. The study aims to determine, in general, the perception (by instructors and students) of the level of students' mastery of English to be used in communication in and outside the university. Furthermore, it identifies the potential factors behind this particular low level of English competency.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

(a) What is the proficiency level of students at Sultan Qaboos University in the use of English language as a medium of communication? (b) To what extent is the English language usage (on campus and off campus) and its development? (c) What are some suggestions that could improve English language skills among SQU students? (d) What are the motivational factors for students to use English as a second language to communicate?

RESEARCH PURPOSE

(a) To examine the proficiency level of English as a means of communication among SQU students. (b) To explore the extent of English language usage and its articulation in an academic setting. (c) To investigate the viability of suggestions that could improve English language at Sultan Qaboos University. (d) To explore the motivational factors lead students using English language in their everyday communication.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

It is crucial that lights is shed on the level of English language usage among SQU students because SQU

graduates are expected to demonstrate a high level of knowledge, skills and ability for being the graduates of the Omani only public university. Besides, this study is very significant because SQU students' proficiency in English determines their marketability and their suitability within a globally competitive workforce.

Moreover, SQU graduates are front-runners, defending the name and reputation of the university and nation not only in terms of their specializations but also as qualified enough to work with different nationalities or in different countries. In other words, it would be very disappointed to have well trained graduates in their specializations but unable to use the world's language in communication with others.

By having a clear picture of the situation after this research, the results will be beneficial, foremost, for the students themselves in the first place. This research will encourage the students to estimate their level of English and to find out means and methods to improve it if they feel their level is low. Eventually, once students realize how weak their proficiency in English is, that could be a motivation for them to learning the language. Also, they could improve their language by taking the initiative to utilize programs for language interaction that are already in place at SQU. Benefiting equally from these research finding is the English language staff, by realizing the essentiality of encouraging students to instill or practice English language among them. Thirdly, SQU administration can benefit from this study. That is, by recognizing the obstacles that prevent the students from acquiring a considerably good level of communication in English, the administration could make the necessary modifications and implement new strategies needed to overcome the low English level of its graduates.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are two major limitations of this study: sample size and instruments used to analyze the data.

Sample

The sample used in the study is not adequate in terms of number. The small sample number does not allow precise and accurate generalizations to be made. Besides, the students were asked to write about how they see their level of English among SQU students and to provide solutions if they think that the level of English is low among SQU students. Accordingly, the assignments they provided, which are subjective, cannot be an exact reflection of the actual student environment.

Instruments

In this study, there were only two interview questions: What are the problems that face SQU

students in learning English language? How can the level of English language be improved among SQU students? Therefore, the information gained is not ideally sufficient to draw concrete conclusions from them. It would be more effective and reliable to have had a larger number of questions to probe for more specific and valid information.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

English as a Global Language

Around the world, researchers and applied linguists have been trying to bring a number of theories and approaches to encourage teachers to choose the most effective methods to teach English as a second language. As a matter of fact, the acquisition of English has been explored by applied linguists since it began to be seen as the international language of the world. The purpose of those linguists was mainly to find the best way in which English learners use English in their everyday life. Communication is considered as the central area learners are asked to develop so that they will be able to use English effectively and naturally. However, in the Arab world in general, two main problems seem to dominate the area of communication between English learners: opportunities and motivation.

Opportunities in Learning English

Rabab'ah maintains, "There is little opportunity to learn English through natural interaction in the target language" (p.180). Added to that, the learning process itself lacks a seriousness in making learners use L2 as a means of communication, which is the most crucial aspect, as Al-Jadidi (2009) states, "...students will ultimately be equipped with tools in order to generate a spontaneous language use outside the classrooms boundaries" (p. 55). The problematic part lies in the student context of teaching another language to learners. Chang (2005) argues, "The vast majority of English teachers across the globe are teaching students with no intention of leaving home or to enter an English-speaking environment" (p. 611). This problem has also dominated in the Arab world, for example, learners are not provided with native speakers during the early stages at school. Therefore, their Arab teachers tend to use Arabic a lot during instruction, thinking that their learners would not speak to a native speaker of English, and so, therefore, does not encourage the students to speak English a lot.

The lack of opportunities to communicate with L2 speakers in the Arab world can also be caused by the nature of the environment. Chang (2005) stresses that "the typical Asian EFL setting lacks environmental opportunities for actual target language use" (p. 614). In other words, people around L2 learners do not encourage them to communicate in the L2, whatever

the L2 might be. As a result, learners do not see communication in the target language as something necessary.

Motivation in Learning English

In opposition to the first problem, which is mostly that of an external nature to the language learner, the second most notable problem that Arabic speakers face is internal or related to the psychology of the learners themselves. Such an internal factor comes mainly in the form of lack of motivation. As Dornyei (1994) stresses, "motivation is one of the main determinants of second/foreign language (L2) learning achievement" (p. 273). This observation can also be applied to the Arab environment. First, there are two types of motivation with regard to language learning: integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. Chang (2005) defines integrative motivation as the desire to learn a language to participate in the society, while he explains that instrumental motivation is "studying a language to [materialistically] gain something, such as money" (p. 613). Now, there is no doubt that the most effective type of motivation that learners need to learn and use a language effectively is the integrative motivation since it pushes learners to use the language as a means of communication in the society in order to gain something.

English and Marketability

The demand for English language proficiency for job applications has markedly increased. Therefore, there have been various establishments of exams that are specifically designed for job applications. Some of these international exams are: Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) (Templer, 2004, p. 10), International English Language Testing System (IELTC), and the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). According to Templer (2004) a certificate of certain level of English is becoming an essential condition when applying for jobs, as he states:

In Europe it is now ever more common to see a TOEIC score included in job descriptions or job offers in major firms such as Airbus, Coca Cola, Renault, Unilever, NEC Computer International. In Japan, Honda, Toyota, Nissan, Ricoh are all on board. More and more companies are demanding a TOEIC score from their present and future employees. (p. 10)

The Status of English in Oman

In Oman, English is seen as a very important language which is necessary to any sector in the government because of the belief that this language provides access to knowledge and science. Al-Jadidi

(2009) notes that "over 70% of the world's scientists read English, over 85% of the world's mail is written in English and 90% of information in the world's electronic retrieval system is stored in English" (p.20). In fact, for some people, talking in English is a way of showing other people that the speaker is an educated person. Despite these strong incentives to obtain a high level of English to be included in the community of academia, the problem remains that learners at SQU rarely use English as a means of communication. It is seldom observed that two Omani students talk in English to one another outside the classroom. Crystal (2003) says, "the more a community is linguistically mixed, the less it can rely on individuals to ensure communication between different groups" (p. 11). That is, if people strive to use L2 as a means of communication, few translators will be needed to facilitate communication between social groups. Here, even if a person has attended school and studied for 10 years, he or she will be less confident in communicating with English. Many reasons can be investigated to explain the situation in Oman, and that is why this problem needs to be examined thoroughly to find ways and solutions.

English and Marketability in Oman

In Oman, the trend of requiring a specific level of English language proficiency continues to spread in all sectors, whether the private or the governmental. The certificates that are more frequently demanded are IELTS and TOFEL. For instance, the Ministry of Education requires a minimum score of 6 in the IELTS from the applicants for teaching English in the Omani schools. Al-Issa (as cited in, 2002) observes that "English in Oman is considered important for tourism, and is widely used in business, particularly in banks, chemist shops, medical clinics, showrooms, general trade stores, restaurants, factories, hotels, insurance agencies and companies." In fact, Al-Issa (as cited in Al-Busaidi, 1995; Al-Balushi, 2001) believes that "English has been considered as a fundamental tool for 'Omanization' – a systematic and gradual replacement of foreign skilled labor by nationals." Having realized the great role of English language, the policymakers in Oman paid special attention to improve the level of English in the Omani society by which they assigned the English to be the medium of instruction in the higher educational institutions. One of these institutions where English is the medium of instruction is Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) which is the only state-owned university in the Sultanate. English was not only emphasized in higher education but also during grade school years. There has been a number of reforms concerning the curriculum and methods of teaching of English language at schools (Issan & Gomaa, 2010).

FINDINGS

What are the problems that face SQU students in learning English language?

PARTICIPANT REPOSENSE	CODING	THEME
<p><u>Participant 1</u></p> <p>Unfortunately, even after the language center's process of preparation in terms of English language, still some students of SQU face problems whether in their basic English or in applying that language. Through my experience, I can divide students into two categories according to their problems in English language. The first type is the one that has problems with English its self. This type has problems to memorize English vocabulary and to understand English grammar, therefore; their reading, writing and speaking skills are weak. The other type is the one that has a good background in English but do not apply their skills into reality maybe because they are not encouraged or they are simply shy. Shyness is a psychological problem that prevents the students from engaging in class activities and it also slows the students improvement if not prevents it. This shyness problem can prevent the students from participating in class if they give a wrong answer while one of their participations or were put down by the teacher. As a result of their feeling of embarrassment added to their previous shy personality, they will feel down about themselves, lose their remaining confidence and finally will not participate in class at all.</p> <p>It is obvious that I placed more emphasis on participation in class in the preceding sentences. That is because; Participation does really help students to improve their English and communication skills because in class there is always the teacher who is going to correct the students' mistakes in terms of grammar, meaning and pronunciation. In other words, the teacher here plays the role of feeding back his students, so students should get benefit from this chance and give themselves the green light to speak and participate freely in the class. Students should not fear teachers or even feel shy in front of other students because in terms of learning all students are learners and they are vulnerable to mistakes so, students should consider mistakes as a way of teaching them and improving their skills. Add to that , most of students lose their competitive soul when they encounter with students who are better than them in English, so they study in the shadow of those excellent students and give up competing because they believe that those excellent students will not be competed ever.</p>	<p>Some students have problem of mastering English language.</p> <p>Some have problems of applying the skills that they learned.</p> <p>Shyness prevent students from participating in class or in the universities' societies so, that will affect students' fluency in English.</p> <p>Students need to participate in the classroom.</p> <p>Students need to communicate and present in front of the classroom.</p> <p>Teachers should allow students to express their ideas and speak up.</p>	<p>Mastering grammar</p> <p>Application of skills</p> <p>Shyness</p> <p>Classroom participation</p> <p>Classroom communication</p> <p>Students' freedom of expression.</p>

PARTICIPANT REPOSENSE	CODING	THEME
<p><u>Participant 2</u></p> <p>As I am a student at SQU the communication among students in English is very poor. The students use their native language Arabic to communicate with each other while English is used in most colleges.</p>	<p>Not using English as a medium of communication amongst students</p>	<p>English communication</p>
<p><u>Participant 3</u></p> <p>However, students may face some difficult parts of English. For example, the spelling of a word may not</p>	<p>Students have problem of spelling and pronunciation.</p>	<p>Master English skills</p>

<p>show what the exact pronunciation is. This is because English words came from many different sources. It is not a 'pure' language. The other thing is that some native English speakers use a lot of idioms, that is - words used in a way which is not their obvious meaning and students may not understand. But I say to those students don't worry. You will find that you can understand and communicate even when you have not been learning English for long!</p> <p><u>Participant 4</u></p> <p>The languages in general are something that human being require by practicing and using. It is an issue that SQU students don't practice and use English in their daily life to be able to speak it although most the subjects that they study are in English. They should practice English and use it in SQU and in their daily life in order to improve their language.</p> <p><u>Participant 5</u></p> <p>Most students talk and speak in Arabic outside classrooms , so that affect their improvement in learning English.</p> <p><u>Participant 6</u></p> <p>Students at SQU need to improve their English language in order to develop themselves first, their university, their society ,and their country Oman. The weaknesses in English language is due to not practicing the language , and they think that English is just inside the classrooms.</p>	<p>Students should communicate and practice their skills even if it is incorrect.</p> <p>Students have problem of practicing English</p> <p>Communicating in English</p> <p>Students tend to use Arabic instead of English.</p> <p>Difference between spelling and pronunciation, and not understanding hidden meanings of words prevent students from improving their English .</p> <p>Sultan Qaboos University students are struggling in learning English as a result of not using and practicing English in their daily life.</p> <p>Communicating with friends in Arabic.</p> <p>Not practicing English, and using it just in the classes hamper students' improvement in learning English.</p>	<p>"practice makes perfect"</p> <p>Solving problems skills</p> <p>Using Arabic outside classrooms affect students' fluency.</p> <p>Lack of awareness and mastering skills.</p> <p>Problem of application</p> <p>Arabic language preference</p> <p>Problem of practicing</p> <p>Communication</p>
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Question 2: How can the level of English language be improved at SQU?

<p><u>Participant 1</u></p> <p><i>1-Students Role:</i></p> <p>There are some solutions to improve SQU students' skills in terms of English language and communication. This process depends 90% on the students themselves, so the students are demanded to work hard in this process in order to develop their skills in terms of English and communications.</p> <p>If we look at English or any other language (tool of communication) we will realize that it is all about memorization. Students should memorize as much vocabulary as they can, understand grammar drills and then memorize them, memorize even the pronunciation of words and memorize the spelling of words. Consequently, if the students do the memorization part, they can obtain the basic level of English and continue at their own comfortable speed.</p> <p>One more thing is that students should be able to apply what they have memorized and learnt into speaking which can</p>	<p>Students' personal effort in improving his or her communication skills</p> <p>Learning English language almost depends on students themselves by memorizing and applying the words, but SQU take the responsibility of providing obligant courses to improve English language.</p> <p>Student should practice what</p>	<p>Student's personal improvement</p> <p>Cooperation between students and SQU to consolidate the language.</p>
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<p>preserve their acquired language from the darkness of forgetting. I can summarize my own discovered philosophy of learning any language in general and English language in particular in DESIRE, WORKING HARD and PRACTICE. As everyone is totally aware, most students like to learn English and speak it fluently but this aim and pure desire is not enough to obtain their purpose, so they should work hard to learn the language. Then, they should practice it. This process needs a lot of patience to be successful. It is always been recommended to read more in English which enables students to know new vocabulary. Moreover, students should get their ears used to English language by watching and listening to different programs broadcasting in English.</p> <p>In addition, students can use internet to learn English through, for instance, they can network with other learners from different countries so they can both enjoy their time and benefit from it. By this way, they receive new words and know the correct pronunciation of some words.</p> <p>2- SQU Role: Not only the students should work by themselves to develop their English and communication skills but also SQU can play a big role in this process. I think that spending one year or only one semester in the intensive course is not enough to shape and strengthen the students English and communication skills. I suggest that this process should be continued through different ways. For example, designing English courses that are accompanied with the major's courses sponsored by the language centre to support the students English language skills will be helpful. I insist that those courses should be Compulsory so the students will attend the classes regularly and get a continuous revision about English. If the courses are optional, the students might not attend regularly especially if they are stressed by their daily schedule. I personally believe that if the students and SQU completed their efforts and unified their energy to develop English skills and communications, they will succeed.</p>	<p>they learned.</p> <p>Student can improve their English skills through watching and listening to English programs.</p> <p>Student can use internet to learn more about English.</p> <p>Students should be encouraged to practice their English.</p>	<p>Improving through media and technology</p> <p>Internet usage</p>
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PARTICIPANT REPOSE	CODING	THEME
<p><u>Participant 2</u> Since effective communication is based on good language, SQU students need to improve their English. To improve English it starts from foundation program. SQU administration should found strong foundation for first year students. What I mean by strong foundation. Qualified teachers, good curriculum and good system policy. Teachers are the basic of education process. They have a lot of responsibilities they can make huge differences in students life. Teachers are more than guide for students they are considered as fathers at school good teaching is as much about passion as it is about reason. It's about not only motivating students to learn, but teaching them how to learn, we need teachers who ably to encourage students to learn .Good teaching mostly depends on teachers. Teachers should have special qualifications beside knowledge such as respect students' ability to solve problems, and understand students. SQU should provide qualified teachers to encourage</p>	<p>Foundation year at SQU is the basic to enhance students' English language, so providing qualified teachers, good curriculum, and better system policy will boost students' fluency.</p> <p>Motivating and encouraging students to learn English language.</p> <p>Teaching allowing students to communicate in the classroom.</p>	<p>Qualified teachers, curriculum, and policy system corroborate the language.</p> <p>Intensifying English courses</p> <p>Making English</p>

<p>students to improve communication in English and qualify student for credit course. We need to develop our curriculum, because this resent curriculum are not capable to qualify students to communicate in English. Students enter credit courses unable to communicate in English. They lack critical thinking skills.</p> <p>The curriculum does not help students to develop their communication skills the all system is not designed to improve English language for communication that why most students face problems in their study for example I know some students were very smart at school and when they study at the university they don't complete their study or their education when I asked theme most of them said that English is very difficult challenge. For example, what we studied in foundation program is how to write a paragraph and some common vocabularies so we can see most of the students at SQU are facing problem in speaking and grammar.</p> <p>*We need teachers use modern teaching methods as new technology such as use internet to teach English. *We need students who speak English as native language, they will benefit SQU students. *Student who study in English specialization need more scholarships to English countries. *We need added foundation grade to general students grade because don't care about first year they take it as a rest since it doesn't graded so they study only for pass the exams and they don't care about the benefits. In conclusion improving communication and English language in SQU is not easy process, it needs much time and efforts, but if students, teachers and administration cooperate with together there will be no difficulties, and we will come over these problems.</p>	<p>Modifying the curriculum and more emphasis on English communication.</p> <p>Students founding English language a challenge for them and withdraw from their studies.</p> <p>Teachers using technology to improve English language in the classroom.</p> <p>Providing more scholarship to study in English countries.</p>	<p>compulsory</p> <p>Communication in the classroom</p> <p>Technology usage</p> <p>Studying in English countries</p>
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PARTICIPANT REPOSENSE	CODING	THEME
<p><u>Participant 3</u> There are many ways in which SQU students can improve their level of English, but only each student has to find the right way for him. Here are a few tips or ways that might help:- To improve English language, students should read, .1 read and read. Read anything in English like stories, books and newspapers. They can read short stories out loud and try to see, say and hear the words to reinforce their memory. They shouldn't read something difficult because they have to work step by step and to enjoy themselves as well. If they face any new word, they can write it down in a notebook and find its meaning and try to use the word as possible as they can. That will help them having their own dictionary which they can refer to in order to remind them of the new words they have learned. For the SQU student, it can be even more daunting because apart from increasing English vocabulary, they also are required to learn academic language. Furthermore, they can watch English movies with subtitles which are very useful way because they</p>	<p>Cooperation of students, teachers and management to improve English language.</p> <p>Students should have initiative to improve their English by themselves</p> <p>Applying English language in all aspects of life such as, reading,</p>	<p>Reading, listening, writing, and using the language help students to overcome their problems in learning English.</p> <p>Studying in English countries</p>

<p>would be learning new words and in the same time knowing how to pronounce them.</p> <p>2. Speak the language whenever you can with your friends and family and don't be afraid or shy that others will tease you. In fact, they will admire you for your courage and confidence. Moreover speaking with others will help you to practice the language practically. You can also start a discussion in English to give yourself a chance to use a huge amount of vocabulary. In fact, my most important piece of advice is: "Do something (anything) so that you will get something. If you don't do anything, you won't get anything. Just speak and speak as much as you can and wherever you are. Make it your hobby, and you will definitely enjoy it!"</p> <p>3. Listen to songs and conversations and find out what they are talking about and what the words you didn't understand are. Try to listen again to them to know the words you didn't know. Refer to the lyrics to, read them and know how to pronounce them. Listening to the radio and even listening to your friends will help you to improve your listening skills.</p> <p>4. Practice to write paragraphs and essays about anything you would like to write about. Pay attention to the shape of the writing and your spelling. You may like to participate in different websites and start to comment on any topic to practice writing more and more. To improve your writing you can write in your diary in English and have an English dictionary and be its best friend to check your spelling.</p> <p>5. Teachers have a significant role in improving English language and communication among students in SQU. They can ask their students not to talk with any language except English at least as long as they are at SQU, so that it helps them in developing English skills. Besides that, teachers must correct every error in the language that students make because this will help them a lot so that they won't make again.</p>	<p>writing, and listening increase students' chance to discern English.</p> <p>Students should use English language to communication among themselves.</p> <p>Listening to the media, TV, Radio and music to improve their English language.</p> <p>Students should practice their writing skills by writing stories and paragraphs using internet spelling checker.</p>	<p>Cooperation</p> <p>Students self-improvement</p> <p>Classroom presentation</p>
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PARTICIPANT REPOSE	CODING	THEME
<p>Participant 4</p> <p>There are many ways or solutions that may help students to improve their English language.</p> <p>First of all, to be able to speak English fluently, students should use English in their conversations and chatting. They should speak in English not only in SQU but also in their apartments and homes. That of course would help them to require more speaking skills such avoiding grammar mistakes while speaking and using stress in speech or conversations. That will also enhance their confidence and help them to communicate with others fluently. Speaking is the most important skill in all languages, so the students should improve it.</p> <p>Secondly, there are many extra English courses in SQU held by English and translation community every semester. Attending these courses will improve students' English. There are many types of these courses such speaking, translation and English in general. I am attending speaking</p>	<p>Teaching allowing communication to take place in the classroom and students classroom presentation.</p> <p>Communication among the students is need to improve students English skills.</p>	<p>More English programs</p>

<p>course this semester. It has added a lot to my speaking and enhanced my confidence in delivering speeches and conversations. Such courses open for all students in SQU and for free, so in my opinion I think these courses are a great chance for the students to improve their English. Moreover there are certificates given to the students who attend those courses and these certificates may help the students in the future.</p> <p>Thirdly, SQU can encourage students to improve their English by holding some English language competitions. For example, hold a competition on spelling difficult English words or a competition on delivering a speech in English fluently. At the end, the students who do well should be awarded by SQU; such encouragement will be something great for the students. Moreover, SQU can award the students who win by sending them abroad to study English and specialize in English if they want. It would be a great opportunity for SQU students to improve their English effectively.</p> <p>Furthermore, SQU or even the students should establish a website from which SQU students can learn English. That website should be made of many departments. First, academic communication or chatting in English department which will help the student's communication skills and English skills. In my opinion, students will like the site and it will help them in improving their language. Second, grammar department for studying English rules and grammar which will improve students' accuracy. Thirdly, a department for speaking with native English speakers. That can be done by making partnership with famous English learning websites such as BBC. That absolutely will improve students speaking skills such their accent. Students will have the chance to speak like native English speakers. Moreover that website should have some electronic English learning books. I am sure that SQU will be happy after having such thing which will help them in their English and communication skills.</p> <p>Another good idea in my opinion is establishing a community for reading and discussing English art. Students should be given the same book to read for a period of time and after that they should set together and discuss the book that they have read. Such process will improve students' English reading skills.</p>	<p>Students using English in their department and homes.</p> <p>Providing more English programs and courses.</p> <p>University establishing English debate and competition.</p>	<p>Practicing through writing</p> <p>Classroom communication</p>
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PARTICIPANT REPOSE	CODING	THEME
<p><i>Participant 4</i> (cont.)</p> <p>Furthermore, making partnership with foreign universities will help SQU to apply good English teaching programs. There are a lot of universities which teach English language such as Oxford and Cambridge. If SQU made a partnership with those universities, the system of teaching English in SQU will be improved. When the curriculum is very perfect and effective, the students will be able to gain more skills and information.</p> <p>Moreover, SQU should involve the students in English language conferences. That may improve student's communication skills. Listening and speaking to English academic speakers will of course improve the accuracy of the student's language skills. Also SQU should hold</p>	<p>Students should be affiliated with foreign program and media.</p> <p>Students should involve in</p>	<p>Debate and competition</p>

<p>workshops in which they teach the students some effective ways to study English vocabulary, grammar, writing and reading.</p> <p>Reading and writing are the important skills in English so, in order to improve students language SQU should establish a newspaper for improving student's language. This newspaper encourages students to read and also to write by including student's works such as short stories, poems and articles. Awarding the students who write good work will be a good idea and it may be a way for establishing new Omani writers.</p> <p>Another nice point that might improve student's language is installing English learning software in the computers in SQU labs. Students can log on and practice English on those software.</p> <p>At the end, in my opinion I think SQU students like studying English language. There are many processes done by SQU that would improve students' language. Language center is doing a great job in enhancing student's language skills and I hope that students do too in order to have students speak fluent English.</p>	<p>English arts and drama</p> <p>The SQU should be affiliated with foreign universities and adopting their programs</p>	
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PARTICIPANT REPOSE	CODING	THEME
<p>Participant 5</p> <p>To improve English language and communication among students in Sultan Qaboos University we need:</p> <p>First of all, administration of Sultan Qaboos University must put some roles that prevent the students speak Arabic language in the class which subjects are English and if any student do that, the doctor cuts marks from his/her grades. That will improve using English in communication between students in the class.</p> <p>Moreover, the doctors should give the students opportunity to write in English through give the students assignment to write essay or paragraph. Also, they give the students assignment in speaking that will improve their knowledge and develop their skills in English language.</p> <p>Moreover, the doctors give their students some subjects and ask them to work with group to write in some subjects or speak in it, and some doctors give each two group one subject and ask them to do debate. That improves the students' language and develops the communication between students.</p> <p>Furthermore, the administration of Sultan Qaboos University puts extra class at the night of speaking, writing, grammar and reading for Sultan Qaboos University students and those classes are elective for all Sultan Qaboos University students but forced for English department students because they must improve their language because they will be a teacher in the future and they must teach their students very well.</p> <p>Also, the administration of Sultan Qaboos University prefer gives the English department students opportunity to study in countries like Britain, Australia, America and</p>	<p>SQU should frequent organize students English conference.</p> <p>Frequent English workshops is deed</p> <p>University computer laps should be equipped with English programs</p> <p>Management should make English compulsory for students.</p>	<p>Affiliation with foreign media</p>

<p>many other countries, that their language is English, because the students will study the right language when they communicate with native speaker. Also, they will develop their ability to communicate with foreign people and that improve their personality.</p> <p>Moreover, the administration of Sultan Qaboos University must take care of group of English and translation because it is very important for many English students. Most English students enter this group to improve their language, so if the administration of Sultan Qaboos University develops this group that will help the students and they will take more benefits from it, also this group helps students communicate with each other.</p> <p>Indeed, in the summer the administration of Sultan Qaboos University should give the students who are weak in English extra classes in many subjects in English to improve their language.</p> <p>Also, the administration of Sultan Qaboos University must encourage the communication between Sultan Qaboos University and other colleges in Oman or in any countries to develop the communication between Sultan Qaboos University students and students in those colleges and that will help Sultan Qaboos University students to get benefits from that students and apply some of their roles and application that help Sultan Qaboos University students in their study.</p> <p>In addition, the doctors should give the students some stories to read or some movies to see to study from there. That will help the students in reading, listening and speaking. Moreover, the administration of Sultan Qaboos University must focus on the first year of the students because now the students do not get any benefit from foundation year because most of the students say that they only want to pass the levels because the levels' grads will not be write on the parchment , so this foundation year only waste of time, so the grads of these levels must write on the parchment to impose the students to be care of studying English on foundation year and study very well.</p> <p>Finally, English language improves through communicate with other people, write in many subjects, read many articles and stories, listen to music and watch movies.</p>	<p>Lecturers should make English compulsory in the classroom and "fine" for those who speak others.</p> <p>Lecturers should assigned students to do English project and present it in the class</p> <p>Practicing the language and forcing students to use it at SQU by rules such as the student who not speak in English his/her marks will be reduced. SQU students' cooperation with native English speakers improve their English.</p>	<p>English art and drama</p> <p>University affiliation with foreign universities.</p> <p>Students conference</p> <p>More English workshops</p>
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PARTICIPANT REPOSE	CODING	THEME
<p><u>Participant 6</u></p> <p>I think students can improve their English by many ways. The first way is that they should speak English to each other inside and outside classes. The communication in English language between them will help them to speak fluently. Reading books which are written in English language can help the students to improve their English. They should read books of different specializations in order to know much new vocabulary. Each student needs to write down every new word he or she read and then try to use it as much as he/she can. In addition, students should know the meaning of each word and try to use it when they speak. They should go to SQU libraries and use the books that are benefit for them.</p> <p>Students should use English centers like the Writing Center in the Language Center to improve their writing skills. They will get benefit from the experience of the teachers there and the teachers would be happy to help them. Also, using internet is a good way to improve students' language. For example, they can use websites that teach</p>	<p>University should opened extra classes for weak English students</p>	<p>English language will be improved through communicating with other people, writing in different topics, reading many articles and stories, listening to music and watching movies.</p> <p>Equipping labs with English programs</p>

<p>grammar and strength their English. Also, they can use the Model that is in SQU website. It contains a lot of information that are helpful such as listening to records, practice solving quizzes, reading articles and even more. Also, students can contact with the teachers through Model.</p> <p>Reading magazines and newspapers is a useful way for improving English language among students. The libraries at SQU provide English magazines and newspapers every day. When the students read them, they are practicing their English and improving it. A student learns the sentence structure, the use of articles, spelling, grammar and much vocabulary only by reading magazines and newspapers. The students can apply what they read in their writing, so reading is useful to improve their writing skills. Also, reading stories that are written in English is a good way of improving the students language and they are everywhere in SQU. Here are some ways to improve students' level of English:</p> <p>READ IT Students need to read as many English books, newspapers and magazines as they can find.</p> <p>LISTEN TO IT Students should try to listen to some of the radio stations.</p> <p>TALK IT They should talk to friends who are also learning English. Make a rule that perhaps for an hour, or when they go out together, they will only speak English to each other! Find native English-speaking people who will give them conversation practice.</p> <p>VISIT AN ENGLISH-SPEAKING COUNTRY. Joining the English lectures that SQU arranges also is a useful way for improving English language. Every week SQU arranges many lectures that all students can join or watch if they want. Not many students join these lectures, but there are many of them who go and watch them. Personally, I think that by offering gifts to the students who join these lectures, the number of the students will increase. These lectures give the students the confidence to speak fluently in front of people and use English whenever and whatever they want.</p> <p>Another way of improving students' English and the most important way is watching English movies. I recommend students to watch English movies and try to concentrate on the speaking of the actors. Students can enjoy watching the movies, but at the same time they learn and improve their language. They acquire new vocabulary by watching these movies. There are many useful movies that benefit the students like educational movies.</p> <p>Making the students love their English language is an important way to improve English language at SQU. When the student loves his or her subject, he or she gets high marks in that subject. How can we make students love English? The answer is first by the teachers. They can have an effect on the students to push them to love English language. Second, the student himself/herself can love English only by seeing people around him/her speak and use English. Making the students addicted to English language is what is needed.</p>	<p>University strengthening English language starting from the beginners</p> <p>Using English as a medium of communication in the campus</p> <p>Students' fluency in English can be enhanced by speaking, reading, and writing in various subjects. When students face a new word they have to read it first, then hear the pronunciation, and finally use it in their writings and conversations.</p>	<p>Making English compulsory</p> <p>Using "fine" in the classroom</p> <p>English projects and presentation.</p> <p>Extra classes for weak students</p> <p>Speaking, reading, and writing are the most important ways to improve students' English language.</p> <p>Strengthening English language at the early stage.</p> <p>Communication</p> <p>Students reading magazines and foreign papers.</p> <p>Practicing four skills</p>
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Table 1: Main Reason behind minimal proficiency in English Language

Reasons behind low English proficiency	Percentage (%)	From the prospective of
Minimal practice of English outside classrooms	62.5%	SQU students
Lack of reading and writing culture	25 %	SQU staff
Other reasons	12.5 %	SQU students

Table 2: Suggestions to improve English proficiency

Suggestions to improve English proficiency	Percentage (%)	From the prospective of
Motivating students to have their own initiative in learning the language and not to depend merely on the lectures offered by SQU	87.5 %	SQU staff & students
Other suggestions	12.5 %	SQU students

Despite the fact that the Omani government is paying a significant amount of attention to equip young Omanis with a professional level in English, the graduates of the higher education in Oman do not display the expected level of English language. Al-Issa (2006) mentions:

However, while English is the medium of instruction in all the science based courses and a compulsory subject in the arts-based courses, the vast majority of these students fail to demonstrate any communicative competence in using this vital international language. This is despite the fact that they have studied English as a foreign language for nine years prior to enrolling in these institutes. (p. 218)

METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

The research has used qualitative method by conducting interviews with two academic staff at SQU in which an interview protocol was used to generate themes and solutions to the problem. In addition, the research analyzed students' assignments and reports using "Content Analysis." These assignments were given to the students to do them at home with open time and the students were asked about their own perceptions of the level of English among SQU students. The students were basically asked to answer two questions which are: (a) What are the reasons behind the low proficiency of English

language among SQU students? (b) How can the level of English language be improved among SQU students?

SUMMARY AND INTERPRETATION

Despite the fact that the sample of the research is relatively small, the responses provided a variety of suggestions from one respondent to another when the sample and the interviewees were asked the question: "What are the reasons behind the low proficiency of English language among SQU students?" Of those sampled, it was felt by respondents that one of the most major reasons behind low proficiency of English was a lack of reading and writing culture among SQU students, which are two essential foundations for learning a language in an academic setting. The second major reason for low proficiency voiced was lack of motivation in learning English language among the students, which leads to considerably limited interaction with the language apart from lectures, courses and classes. In other words, there is rare practice or use of English outside the classroom. Surprisingly enough, shyness was one of the factors that prevented students from using English outside the classrooms or participating in societies or groups to improve their English, which affects students speaking skill and their fluency in particular. Another factor is related to the English language itself, that is the spelling of some English

words is not always a representation of the pronunciation. Besides, the vagueness of some English words all these issues related to the language make the students feel that English is difficult to learn.

As Table 1 above shows, about 62.5 % of the sample believes that the main reason behind the minimal proficiency of English language among students at SQU is the inadequate amount of practice outside the classrooms.

When the sample were asked about their suggestions to improve the level of English in the question: "*How can the level of English language be improved among SQU students?*", the responses were consistent with the previously suggested reasons behind the low level of proficiency. From looking at Table 2 on the following page, one fundamental proposed solution was that the students should be encouraged to do their own part in learning the language. For example, students should not rely on lectures offered by the university. Rather, they must have their own initiative. Environments of reading and writing for non-academic purposes should be established so that the students consider reading an enjoyable process. Furthermore, the students need to be provided with authentic English interactions, such as encouraging students to practice some social aspects like making friends from other English speaking countries.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Considering what has been suggested by the respondents, if students are to acquire English language, they are obligated to take some of the responsibility to find ways by which they improve their English competency. For students to improve their English language communication, for instance, they need to be watching English programs and movies because watching movies or English programs allows a learner to be exposed to the language authentically. From watching a movie, learners consciously and unconsciously attain many learning outcomes such as expanding one's personal lexicon and training his or her ears for listening and monitoring pronunciation of existing words as well as listening to English music and news.

Regarding the point of establishing a reading and writing environment, students should be advised and exposed to extra-curricular activities that deal with learning English. At SQU, there is an English and Translation Society which offers various activities for students who seek to learn the English language. Some of these activities include: speaking courses (both for advanced and beginners), writing workshops (creative writing), competitions (in English grammar and vocabulary,) and debates. Through exposure to English outside of the

classroom, those students participating in such activities will, doubtlessly, improve the level of proficiency in English among the students.

From a methodological standpoint, on the part of SQU, teachers should always encourage students to be responsible for their English learning process. A way in which this can be done in a meaningful and practical way is to ask teachers to implement coursework and classroom work that encourage students to participate in activities outside the classroom. Not only should students be asked to do these tasks as course requirements, but also for additional self-enjoyment purposes. One possible out-of-classroom activity could be to ask students to do book and movie reviews in English repeatedly throughout the semester.

From an opportunity standpoint, SQU could implement student publications. This would allow the encouragement of the students to start writing in English if they knew there would be public outlets for published writing, (e.g., an in-house student publication journal). In addition, but giving opportunity for oral communication, students could be given the chance to give speeches or presentations in English for non-academic purposes through mini-televised programs at the university.

Not only do these suggested opportunities for applying their English skills sound interesting to the students, but they will also, it is hoped, result in becoming habitual patterns on the students' part.

SUGGESTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

From the research done here, there are some suggestions in improving students English communication abilities and recommendations for Sultan Qaboos University management to ponder and some considerations for government and policy-makers to consider to upgrade the overall general standard of English usage in Oman.

The mastery of the English language is apparently of major concern in the academic arena, whether for students, faculty, or administration. As appears in the findings, the responsibility of SQU students' low level of English falls upon many parties: students, faculty, and administration.

As the findings reveal, students should take responsibility in learning English by devoting considerable time and effort to acquire English. It is impractical for a student to expect mastering English without directing their conscious and subconscious efforts to acquiring English. It is, hence, recommended that students be self-motivators where they put English at the center of their lives. If learners generate a positive English learning environment,

they can convince themselves that the English language is an easy language to learn.

Second, the findings also support the idea that the faculty at SQU should increase students' chances to practice English through meaningful and fruitful ways. That is, students seem to have few chances to consolidate their English, particularly speaking, because lecturers allocate little time for students to engage in discussions during lessons. It is advisable that SQU academic staff increase student talk-time as it allows students to be exposed to English in meaningful settings. Students should also be helped to overcome their shyness to speak English through empirical and well designed methods to overcome shyness.

Third, it is undeniable that there is a poor English reading culture in Oman due to the facts that Omanis speak Arabic and that there is little Omani literature written in English. It should, therefore, be expected that students are not encouraged to read in English simply because the English literature does not relate to the actual life of Omani students. A solution in hand is to encourage students' English writings through publication in and outside SQU. In fact, should students' writings be taken seriously, students will start writing Omani literature in English. This is, indeed, the role of SQU administration by means of allocating a part of SQU's budget for published English work by students.

To conclude, the proposed recommendations are realistic and practical because they provide a rich environment for students to achieve a standard level of English by the time of graduation. It is just a matter of motivation and opportunities that learners are in need of. All parties: students, faculty, administration, and society have to unite their efforts should they expect a better and bright future for English among proficiency SQU students.

AUTHOR NOTE

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