Our government will follow up progress in various sectors, including small and medium enterprises, and entrepreneurship, particularly those based on innovation, artificial intelligence, and advanced technology. This is in addition to training and enabling youth to benefit from the opportunities made available in this vital sector, so that it could form a cornerstone in the national economy.

- His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik
From the Dean

It is true what Duncan MacDonald said, "The common facts today are the products of yesterday's research." Research will forever stay as an important tool in bettering the future. In these times of uncertainty, COVID-19 has turned our lives around and research is the only way out. Scientists and academics all over the world continue to study the causes, effects, and solutions to this pandemic. These studies are being used to step forward. So not only is research an invaluable tool for building on crucial knowledge, it's also the most reliable way we can begin to understand the complexities of various issues.

OJELT features significant research works from the university and all over Oman. This is a proof of our constant efforts towards achieving one of the university missions of providing a high-quality research environment that will meet the ever evolving social and economic needs of Oman.

Welcome to the sixth volume of OJELT!
It is our pleasure and pride to announce the release of the sixth volume of OJELT. This volume contains four research papers. The first paper entitled “Preferences and Perceptions of Students of English-as-a-Foreign Language (EFL) on Written Error Correction: Bases for a Developmental Program” investigates the preferences and perceptions of EFL students on written error correction in selected English Language Centers in the Sultanate of Oman. The second paper entitled “An Analytical Study of the Efficacy of the Online Support Classes Conducted for the Level 4 Students during the Covid-19 Pandemic” analyses the effectiveness of the L4 Revision Study conducted from 1 to 9 September at the UTAS Ibra, Oman. The third paper entitled “Pedagogical Innovations for Language Learning in Teacher Education” proposes Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPCK) as a framework for conceptualizing the complex systems of knowledge underpinning expertise in teaching with digital technology. The last paper entitled “The National Speech Contest and Its Usefulness in Enhancing the Public Speaking Skills of Students- An Evaluative Study” analyses the usefulness of conducting speech contests in enhancing the public speaking skills of the students and uses the feedback of the participants to determine whether such contests are to be held in future.

We express our sincere gratitude to the ELC administration and the contributors for their continuous support. We take this opportunity to request you to send in your research papers for publication in the seventh Volume of OJELT.
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Preferences and Perceptions of Students of English-as-a-Foreign Language (EFL) on Written Error Correction: Bases for a Developmental Program

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Abstract

This study explored the preferences and perceptions of English-as-a-foreign language (EFL) students on written error correction in selected English Language Centers in the Sultanate of Oman. It sought to determine the EFL students’ preferences and perceptions on the role of grammar instruction and written error correction in their writing skills and the challenges they met in relation to their preferences. The results of this study were used to design a Developmental Writing Program. A three-pronged questionnaire with Arabic translation was used to gather the data needed for the study. The descriptive-correlational method of research was used to analyze the data gathered from one hundred (100) GFP students. The results of this study revealed that students regard grammar instruction as a necessity in mastering writing in English, hence they expressed their need for more grammar lessons in their writing class. Furthermore, students perceived WCF as an essential part of learning writing in English. Also, they consider direct and metalinguistic written error correction techniques as effective but found the indirect method to be impractical. A developmental writing program was developed based on the student respondents’ preferences and perceptions on grammar instruction and WCF. Recommendations based on the results and for further study were presented.

Keywords: written error, grammar instruction, written error correction techniques, direct correction feedback, indirect correction feedback, metalinguistic correction feedback, reformulation
Introduction

Writing, one of the four macro skills for communicating, is deemed to be the most difficult by English-as-a-Foreign Language (hereafter to be known as EFL) students as it requires formal accuracy – the correctness of learner’s use of the language system. It is also the most tedious skill to acquire because of the writing process a learner has to go through to produce a well-written output.

In the English language classroom, obtaining accuracy, specifically in writing, is not the sole responsibility of the students. Teachers have an important role in guiding the students to successfully acquire the skill, i.e. teaching them how to write, prompting them to write, and guiding and giving them written corrective feedback (WCF).

Written correction feedback is primarily categorized into two: direct and indirect. Direct corrective feedback means showing the student where the errors are and giving the corresponding correct forms. On the other hand, indirect corrective feedback means drawing student’s attention to where the errors are without providing any corrections. In addition to direct and indirect, metalinguistic, focused/unfocused, electronic, and reformulation (Ellis, 2009, cited in Sanavi & Nemati, 2014) have also been used and tested.

Giving written error correction feedback has been a practice in writing classrooms for ages already. However, its effectiveness has been questioned when Truscott (1996, as cited in Al Bakri, 2015) strongly warns that WCF on form can be harmful and should therefore be abandoned. However, the researcher has seen a lot of success stories in using WCF as one of the teaching techniques in developing writing skills. Written error correction can be effective if implemented carefully. Students must be aware of the WCF methodology the teacher is going to use. A mismatch between teachers’ feedback and the students’ understanding of the feedback is harmful, especially on the part of the students. Thus, understanding students’ preferences and perceptions on written error correction is essential in any language teaching context.
Theoretical Framework

This study was based on the theories on second language acquisition/learning which have been identified to have implications to written error correction namely:

1. Pienemann’s Teachability Hypothesis

   This hypothesis states that instruction can only promote language acquisition if the interlanguage is close to the point when the structure to be taught is acquired in the natural setting (Pienemann, 1984: 37, cited in Kessler, Liebner, & Mansouri, 2011).

2. Schmidt’s Noticing Hypothesis

   This is another tested hypothesis that has been identified as relevant to error correction. Schmidt (1994), as cited by Leow (2015), defines noticing as “the registration of the occurrence of a stimulus event in conscious awareness and its subsequent storage in long-term memory”. Leow also outlined the key features of Schmidt’s Noticing Hypothesis:

   a) Attention is crucial for intake and, as an extension, for learning;

   b) Focal attention is accompanied by a low level of awareness called noticing;

   c) What is noticed in the L2 input becomes intake;

   d) Intake does not take place without some level of awareness associated with such a process at the preliminary stage of the learning process; and

   e) While not necessary for subsequent processing of the input, there is also a higher level of awareness involved during the learning process, namely awareness at the level of understanding.

   Looking at the key features of the hypothesis, it can be implied that its relevance to written error correction is undeniable. Noticing Hypothesis is supporting Ferris (2011) when she said that approaches to written feedback and classroom instruction about
writing errors will have to be tailored accordingly and that it is critically important that instructors take time to get to know their students at the beginning of the course.

Table 1 shows the related SLA/FLA theories with their implication to teaching and written error correction as identified by Corpuz (2011).

**Table 1. SLA Theories’ Implication to Teaching and Written Error Correction** (Corpuz, 2011).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SLA/FLA Theories</th>
<th>The implication to teaching and written error correction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pienemann’s Teachability Hypothesis</td>
<td>• The feedback provided by the L2 teachers is optimal during the stage when students are ready to internalize the feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• L2 teachers need to focus their feedback and error correction strategies to suit the language learning strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Language teachers should carefully consider what their L2 students are ready to learn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teachers should adapt their error correction strategies to their student's level of language development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schmidt’s Noticing Hypothesis</td>
<td>• Teachers should carefully consider what their L2 students are ready to learn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Error correction promotes awareness on the part of the L2 students, which according to the hypothesis, promotes effective L2 learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite the very loud argument that error correction shouldn’t have a place in language acquisition, there are still studies that assert its value in L2 writing. However, until today, there is still no final resolution to the ongoing debate on this matter. Hence, research on students’ preferences and perceptions of WCF was done to determine their significance in an L2 writing classroom.
Statement of the Problem

This study explored the preferences and perceptions of English-as-a-Foreign Language (EFL) students on written error correction in selected English Language Center in the Sultanate of Oman.

Specifically, this study aimed to find the answer(s) to the following questions:

1. What is the respondents’ demographic profile in terms of:
   1.1 age;
   1.2 gender; and
   1.3 level of English language proficiency?

2. What are the EFL students’ preferences and perceptions on the role of grammar instruction and written error correction in their writing skills?

3. What written error corrections do the EFL students consider effective?

4. Is there a significant relationship between the students’ level of language proficiency and their preferences and perceptions for written error corrections?

5. What are the challenges met by the EFL students in their preferences and perceptions for written error corrections?

6. What developmental program can be proposed to improve the EFL students’ preferences and perceptions on written error corrections?

The following hypotheses based on the above-stated problem were tested at a 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant relationship between students’ level of language proficiency and their preferences for written error correction.

2. There is no significant relationship between students’ level of language proficiency and their perception of written error correction.
RELATED LITERATURE AND STUDIES

Related Literature

The right perspective on error and error correction will enable teachers and students to conceive ideas on how to approach WCF effectively. With the right attitude towards WCF among and between teachers and students, it will facilitate the achievement of accuracy in L2 writing.

Ferris (2011) defines error as morphological, syntactic, and lexical forms that deviate from rules of the target language, violating the expectations of literate adult native speakers. If errors are a deviation from the rules of the target language, what do teachers do for the students to produce an accurately written output? The answer is error correction, the effectiveness of which can be achieved by making the approaches to written feedback and classroom instruction about writing errors tailored accordingly. She even asserts the significance of accuracy in the real world; therefore, teachers have to guide their students to become “independent self-editors”.

Error correction techniques have long been used by language teachers. One of the most traditional and commonly used error correction techniques is the use of correction code. (Maxom, n.d.), who introduces some symbols (e.g., Gr, Sp, Art, Ww, Ef) for written errors, said that teachers use a correction code when they mark written work so that the student can do some self-correction. McBride (n.d.) in her article, “How to Correct English Writing Errors”, suggested a new method of error correction in the classroom – the Group Writing. She claims that “Group writing seems to be an effective method of correcting English writing errors. Immediate feedback is quick within the groups and again when corrections are suggested in front of the entire class”. Baculi, A. M., et al (2012) state that Filipino English (ESL) teachers check written compositions of the learners with the majority in the use of direct WCF and indirect WCF (next to metalinguistic WCF and comments). From this, they infer that both direct and indirect WCF have significant effects on the students. However, Gabinete (2013) claims that teachers may differ in the amount and focus of feedback and the type of required essay primarily due to syllabus content. Moreover, she states that teachers provide feedback based on a rubric that was presented and discussed with the students.
Lambert (2015) indicated that students want and expect feedback and there is a need for us to carefully consider how we provide WCF and how much we provide. She proposed that *we can and should focus our efforts by correcting less and teaching more*. She suggested these three important techniques:

1. Present your WCF thinking process in class.
2. Have students review WCF during in-class revision sessions.
3. Use corpus research to target students’ common grammar errors.

In his review of related studies, Nassaji (2015) found that students displayed a favorable attitude toward feedback; however, those studies showed a discrepancy between teachers’ and students’ views toward feedback. Mismatches between teachers’ and learners’ views about the importance of feedback can also be pedagogically problematic, as it may negatively affect learning. Cabrera (2014) states that teachers may help students improve their writing skills through giving WCF, but they should guide them in modifying their errors. On the other hand, students must be open to corrections. Pedagogically, it is implied here that it must be clear to both teachers and students the what, how, and why of error correction.

**Related Studies**

Studies on approaches/techniques show that WCF is possible in both ESL and EFL classrooms. As found in studies (Chen, et al., 2016) on attitudes towards WCF, learners and teachers expressed a positive attitude towards error correction. However, some studies show disagreement between students’ and teachers’ perceptions of WCF (Al Bakri, 2015, Salteh and Sadeghi, 2015). Disparities between teachers’ and learners’ views on the importance of feedback may adversely affect the learning process. To put a resolution to this, Magno and Amarles (2011) derived some implications from the results of their study. Moreover, WCF Preference Survey should be initiated in language teaching institutions (Salipande, et al, 2011) to inform best error correction practices. Also, based on the results of the study conducted by Ulla (2014), looking at the L2 writing classroom intensively can lead to the creation of a language program that is believed to be beneficial to the students.
Based on the above, it can be implied that WCF can be very effective, only if students’ needs have been identified and addressed appropriately.

**Research Methodology**

The researcher made use of the descriptive-correlational method of research. A three-pronged questionnaire was used to gather the data needed for the study. The questionnaire was translated to the Arabic language to facilitate a thorough understanding of what has been asked among the respondents.

One hundred (100) GFP students were taken as respondents in the study. The responses were entered into SPSS 20 for statistical analysis. The following statistical tools and techniques were used to ensure valid and systematic presentation, analysis, and interpretation of data: frequency counts, percentage distribution, weighted mean, modes, analysis of variance, and p-value.

**Summary of Findings**

1. **Demographic Profile of the Respondents**

   1.1 **Age**

   Majority of the respondents (97%) were between 18 and 21 years old. Three (3%) of the 100 respondents were below 18 years old.

   1.2 **Gender**

   The male-respondents outnumbered their female counterparts. There were 61 (61%) male respondents and 39 (39%) female respondents who participated in the survey. This indicates a 6:4 (approximately) male-female ratio among the 100 respondents.

   1.3 **Level of Language Proficiency**

   The level of English language proficiency of the respondents is indicated by the GFP level they were enrolled in. There were 25 student-respondents from each of the four GFP levels.
2. Students’ Preferences and Perceptions on the Role of Grammar Instruction and Written Correction Feedback

2.1 Students’ Preferences on Grammar Instruction

Results show that learning grammar with textbooks and workbooks was the most preferred way of learning grammar among Level 1 and Level 4 students while learning grammar with teacher-made worksheets was most preferred by Level 2 and Level 3 students. As revealed by the grand mean of 1.99, the overall most preferred way of learning grammar was with the teacher-made worksheets.

2.2 Students’ Preferences on Written Correction Feedback

It was also manifested in the results that student-respondents preferred to receive feedback on their spelling errors, vocabulary errors, and grammar errors more than their organization errors, punctuation errors, and on the content of their written composition. Also, students expressed the need for their teachers to guide them to achieving accuracy, cohesion, and coherence, along with substance, in their writing. This was shown in the analysis of their responses where 62% and 54% of the student-respondents said that they need written correction feedback on their grammatical errors and content and organization, respectively.

2.3 Students’ Perceptions on Grammar Instruction

Students perceived grammar instruction as an essential part of learning writing in English. They indicated their need for more grammar instruction in English writing class because they think that learning grammar would improve their writing skill. Though it generated the least mean (3.88), the majority of them agreed that they keep the English grammar rules in mind when they write in English.
2.4 Students’ Perceptions on Written Error Correction

Students perceived WCF as an important tool for learning and improving their writing skills. This was revealed by the responses that generated a composite mean of 4.08, which is described as “Important”.

3. Written Error Corrections Techniques Considered by the EFL Students as Effective

Results of this study imply that students view direct and metalinguistic WCF techniques as very effective or extremely useful. On the other hand, they believe that the indirect method of giving feedback is not useful or ineffective. It was also noted that of the four metalinguistic WCF techniques, students found “Indicating the type of error without locating or correcting it.” to be not useful.

4. Relationship between the Students’ Level of Language Proficiency and their Preferences and Perceptions on Written Error Correction

4.1 Level of Language Proficiency and Preferences for Written Error Correction

The student's level of English language proficiency matters in their preferences for written error correction. The p-value was 0.036.

4.2 Level of Language Proficiency and Perception on Written Error Correction

Students’ level of language proficiency has no significant relationship to their perception of the importance of the instructor's error correction in English writings and the instructor's extended comments on assignments were not. However, students’ opinion on the instructor's explanation of errors in written composition (p-value = 0.008), was significantly influenced by their level of language proficiency. Also, there is no significant relationship between students’ perception of WCF techniques and their level of language proficiency.
5. Challenges

Research findings show that 40% of the student-respondents found utmost difficulty in understanding the codes used by their teachers in giving WCF. This was followed by “Understanding teacher’s feedback” which was seen as the second most challenging, at 35%, while “understanding teacher’s handwriting” (18%), the least challenging.

6. Developmental Program

Based on the findings of this study, a Developmental Writing Program (DWP) was created. The Program considered the students’ preferences and perceptions on grammar instruction and WCF.

Conclusions of the Study

Based on the presentation and analysis of the results, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. To the students, learning grammar would be more effective if teachers supplement the prescribed textbook and workbook with their teacher-made worksheets, use games in teaching grammar whenever appropriate, and utilize multi-media technology sparingly. They also preferred to receive feedback on spelling, vocabulary, and grammar errors in their written compositions, on all their drafts. Students regard grammar instruction as a necessity in mastering the writing in English, hence they expressed their need for more grammar lessons in their writing class. Furthermore, students perceived WCF as an essential part of learning writing in English.

2. Students considered direct and metalinguistic written error correction techniques as effective. They found the indirect method to be impractical.

3. The student's level of English language proficiency was significant in their preferences for written error correction. Generally, there is no significant relationship between students’ perception of WCF techniques and their level of language proficiency.
4. Student-respondents found utmost difficulty in understanding the codes used by their teachers in giving WCF.

**Recommendations**

The following recommendations are given based on the conclusions drawn:

1. The institution should establish a mechanism for giving written correction feedback to GFP students according to their level of language proficiency. The following should be taken into consideration:

   a. Teachers should take time to get to know their students at the beginning of the course;

   b. Teaching and error correction should be tailored to the individual level of the learner. They should primarily use direct and metalinguistic techniques in giving WCF. Also, they should use indirect techniques whenever appropriate, e.g., with stronger students;

   c. A list of error correction codes should be institutionalized and implemented;

   d. Error correction codes should be made familiar to the students before using them;

   e. Teachers should be given the chance to devise WCF strategies (in addition to the basic/common ones) which they think would suit their classes. It can be individualized, peer, or whole class; and

   f. WCF preference surveys should be conducted periodically.

2. Teachers of English should be made aware of the implementing guidelines of the established mechanism. These guidelines should be made part of the basic information given during the staff induction.

3. Students should be given the right perspective on WCF. They should fully understand the what, how, and why of the process.
4. A proposal for the implementation of the developmental program should be presented to the English language Center Council.

5. A related study with a wider scope should be conducted.

REFERENCES


An Analytical Study of the Efficacy of the Online Support Classes Conducted for the Level 4 Students during the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The news of two Omani citizens testing positive for Covid 19 virus on the 24th of February 2020 led to the confirmation of the pandemic breakout in Oman. One of the governmental measures taken to counter the risk of disease spreading was the suspension of face-to-face lessons. This caused a sudden jolt in the students’ study habits and learning strategies. The complete transformation in the study environment i.e., remote and virtual led to a total change in the pace of learning. This situation necessitated a need for widening learning strategies that would help students better adapt to home study. Taking all this into consideration, Level 4 students were given revision study lessons just before the exams. It was an intensive crash course revising the LOs that were to be tested in the forthcoming exam. This study analyses the effectiveness of the L4 Revision Study conducted from 1 to 9 September at the UTAS Ibra, Oman. This analytical study found that the online academic support program was fruitful despite a slight slump in the results considering the calamitous circumstances.

Keywords: Pandemic, ASP, virtual, strategies, efficacy, learning outcomes

Introduction – The Shift and the Jolt:

The new realities due to the COVID -19 pandemic have caused the education systems to adapt and produce new techniques of teaching. The students who have internet access and technical tools are more inclined to comply with online learning requirements. But, without overcoming the digital inequalities and problems, the same quality of online education cannot be provided for every student. Online learning offers teachers an
efficient way to teach students, using tools such as videos, PDFs and podcasts. Teachers can use them as part of their study plans. By taking these lesson plans beyond traditional textbooks to include online resources, teachers can become more capable and efficient educators. For students who have the right technology at their fingertips, learning online can be highly effective in many ways. On average, students consume much more material when learning online than in a classroom because they can learn faster online. E-learning requires much less time to learn than a traditional classroom setting because students can learn at their own pace.

Covid 19 resulted in the sudden shutting out of the student community from their physical classrooms. This abrupt shift to virtual modalities and the lack of necessary preparedness to tech driven strategies curtailed the otherwise unlimited potential of remote learning. Focus and self-discipline were the biggest challenges the students had to deal with. The students were all suddenly alienated from the secure and monitored learning environment which they were used to all these years. This resulted in negative emotions like being demotivated, frequently distracted and feeling disconnected. The online classes were lacking the positive effects of peer influence. The unlimited freedom and flexibility in time and space offered by the online classrooms had worsened the problem of excessive distraction. Students had the potential to overcome these challenges, but the crux of the problem was that they were not given any preparation time to understand the new strategies and associated technologies that were integrated into the current system. They had to learn it the hard way. The final exams were in the offing and the students were busy tackling the initial hitches of getting started and the uncertainty of the mode of exams. It was difficult for the teachers to measure their access to technology and their acceptance of the technology that was imposed on them. Though the online platforms offered primitive features for discussion rooms and collaborative activities, the students were reluctant to participate and speak up in open forums in the beginning. Again, these features failed to replicate the original experience of discussion and collaboration. It was surprising to note that the students were reluctant to turn on the cameras and show their faces in the online sessions during the first semester which indirectly indicated their reluctance to actively participate in interactive sessions. They reduced themselves to silent spectators. From a technological perspective e-solutions were not always available for the students during the initial period. The students felt that their academic future was at stake,
and this caused anxiety in students. The students needed more time to
direct themselves and familiarize with the new modes and channels of
interaction between peers and lecturers. Having considered all these
factors, the instructors felt a need to provide a comprehensive crash course
to make up for the gap in content acquisition and exam performance. This
enriched their preparations for exams and boosted their confidence. This
also helped them get over the feeling of uncertainty. Since the students
already had the benefit of the being familiar with the course content, the
impending exam dates enhanced the seriousness of the well-timed lessons,
and this led to a significant participation in this otherwise voluntary online
support program.

Research Objectives:

1. To measure the effectiveness of the L4 Revision Study Conducted
   from 1 to 9 September at the UTAS-Ibra, Oman

2. To evaluate the performance improvement of the students who
   attended L4 Revision Study Conducted from 1 to 9 September at
   the UTAS Ibra, Oman

3. To decide whether this revision practice should be continued in the
   coming semesters.

Methodology and Tools

Mixed Methods Design has been employed in this study to measure the
efficacy of the online support classes conducted at UTAS-Ibra. The results
of the L4 exam and the feedback of the teachers and students are the
research tools used in this study to measure the efficacy of the online
revision classes.

Participants and Location

The Level 4 students of UTAS-Ibra are the research participants of the
study. There were 269 L4 students in the second semester of AY 2019-20
and these students went through the L4 online revision classes in
September 2020 i.e., after six months. Random Sampling Method was
followed for the questionnaire administration and 41 students were
randomly chosen for the study. In the same vein, 6 teachers were also
randomly chosen with a view to getting their feedback about the online
support program.

**Academic Support Program: An Overview**

Academic Support Programs has generated strategies that can be implemented by educational institutes to increase the academic achievement of students, particularly for those who may be at risk of continuing the same course for many semesters. The program has devised many strategies to ensure students get the required guidance and support to enhance their knowledge and skills to be at par with other learners in the same discipline. In its most basic form, it can be described as coaching beyond the classroom times. This program not only provides urgently required motivation, individual attention but also mandates error correction to increase students’ academic skills. Mentoring also acts as a necessary methodology to address the needs of the learner. In the process, it provides windows of opportunities outside the classroom setting where the tutor will act not only as a mentor but also as a friend in need. Some educational institutes have formed nucleus learning communities within the institute to make for more personalized instruction and better understanding of individual student needs.

It has been observed that in countries or educational settings where English is taught as a Foreign Language, Academic Support Programs have become an indispensable part of the organization whether it is a school, a college or a university. In these institutes the English Language Centers have been following the method of screening the slow learners in the first or second week of the semester through diagnostic tests. Once the students are identified, the teachers concerned gear up for the remedial classes with specially prepared materials that would match the level of the learners. The selected students are allowed to attend the remedial class through a computer-generated system. The purpose of starting the ASP classes in the beginning of the semester is to give an opportunity to the learners to catch up with the advanced learners fast. The students who would have otherwise been left in the lurch for failing to live up to the curriculum and Learning Outcomes have been given a helping hand by ASP. Since the tutorial system starts early in the semester, the learners show their progress in the continuous assessments and later in the final exam. Thus, ASP helps the institutions cater to the needs of the weaker and academically challenged students. As a result of the Covid onslaught, classes were suspended with
immediate effect for all the students and the last semester was cancelled in
the Universities of Technology and Applied Sciences. However, L4
students were to take the Level Exit Exams (LEE) in September 2020 as
L4 exams are crucial in determining the future paths of the students. The
university administration considered all the L4 students to be academically
challenged given the extraordinary circumstances and conducted a special
ASP program for all the L4 students i.e., Online Revision Classes.

Revision is considered a continuous process, as memory deteriorates over
the passage of time. Daniel Willingham (2009) argues that students are not
conscious how their memories work and, as a result, do not know how to
study effectively. The final examination is a crucial step for both the tutors
and the students, it is a sort of feedback for the teachers and for the students
in addition to being a passport to enter the next level of learning. According
to the “faucet theory” (Entwisle et al. 2001), equal benefits are provided to
children of every economic background. Umar and Jalil (2012) argue that
children from less privileged circumstances tend to be less exposed to
digital technologies and applications. Therefore, special attention needs to
be provided to students who come from underprivileged sections of the
society or who lack the facilities or capabilities. However, the
extraordinary circumstances that ensued the pandemic made the
administration extend the benefits of these ASP classes to all the L4
students as they were all academically challenged because of the abrupt
closure of physical classes and the resultant gap of six months.

When it comes to revision, we have two groups, the spectacular dose of
overconfidence in some, which makes them say- I do not need to revise,
whereas the other group, who are confounded and are unsure of how to
revise. There are also some overconfident or shy students who study
without approaching anyone, stumble across and collapse in their
individual endeavors, not knowing that they are learning the wrong way
and fail to achieve their full potential. Online revision classes had all these
students as we had students who were absent for the entire duration and
some who were irregular. The online classes were conducted keeping in
mind the LOs and the needs of the students.

LSRW and Online Opportunities and Obstacles

Teaching LSRW skills online has its own merits and demerits. Understanding this will help the institutions and teachers in creating more
efficient ways of delivering the lessons and thus ensuring a smooth learning process for students. Many professionals believe that online learning has positive effects on the development of writing skills. White’s study (2003) also supports the same idea by stating that distance education students “tend to develop their writing and particularly reading skills more than oral and aural skills, in comparison to campus-based students”. The four language skills i.e., LSRW are the heart of a language class. Therefore, it is vitally important to analyze the problems of revising them online and the problems and opportunities that the L4 students had.

**Reading and Writing**

![Fig 1: L4 Students’ Feedback on Difficulty](image)

More than half of the student respondents i.e., 53.7% felt that reading skill was the most difficult to revise. That could be because of the nature of reading tasks online and many teachers appear to agree with this line of reasoning. Some teachers opine that this difficulty is inherent to the reading skill and is primarily caused by the limitations of an EFL learner.
Among the teachers, many attributed the lack of technological familiarity of the students for reading being difficult. It is especially important to recognize that students are in their home environment with different levels of technology, time, and support.

Online learning has positive effects on the development of writing skills, as the virtual environment tends to include writing tasks and activities much more than the activities of the other skills. This was quite evident in the feedback given by the students. Fig 1 demonstrates the fact that only 10% students found writing difficult. Since the concept of homework mostly includes writing, during online learning, the amount of homework should be taken into consideration. In addition to that, screen sharing makes teaching writing similar to the classroom phenomenon. Moreover, Moodle and Teams have features that make writing practice as good as the in-class writing practice. These factors could have made writing easier for the students.

**Listening and Speaking**

Listening is considered one of the difficult skills and the difficulty becomes intense when it is an online class. Creating effective online classes can trigger a lot of challenges like accent, pronunciation, speech speed. Vandergriff (1999:168) in Martinez (2010: 21) states that listening is hard work, and it needs optimal support and analysis. In addition, Gomez (2005 & 2008) in Martinez (2010: 21) states that listening is considered to be one of the most difficult things to be taught. He also opines that low proficiency
in listening skill is a common phenomenon in EFL classes. Online classes made this problem more challenging.

The advent of switching from class-based teaching to online teaching was quite challenging to several TESOL practitioners and relying solely on technology amidst the various technological issues. That challenge was visibly seen in the students’ feedback. Fig 1 shows that 26.8% students felt that listening was exceedingly difficult to revise. Level 4 students of UTAS felt that listening classes were difficult because they could not comprehend some of the words and almost 64% students felt more time should have been allotted for listening and reading.

![Fig 3: Students’ Feedback on Skill Time Allotment](image)

A general survey concludes that during the course of online learning, students could improve their writing skill to a great extent since writing skill was constantly used for almost all homework, assignments and projects. During online classes, writing became the new mode of communication, replacing speaking which is a vitally important skill in the postmodern global village. However, online classes seem to have helped many students overcome self-defeating self-consciousness. In a mixed-gender class, some learners were unable to focus on specific texts because of the classroom environment. While in a physical classroom they felt uncomfortable to express their thoughts, they could perform better at home. On the other hand, there were others who opined that traditional face to face learning was better, wherein they
could voice their opinions and learn their mistakes immediately. They also had the opportunity to converse with each other. In a face-to-face environment, teachers could read the thoughts and faces of students and could apply different strategies if they perceived any problems. These were some of the shortcomings of the online speaking classes. Nonetheless, students found speaking skills to be easy to revise and they were all happy about the classes. This could largely because of the first factor stated in this paper. Many found online speaking classes more fruitful because they were speaking from the comfort of their houses, and it did away with the uneasy self-consciousness that a classroom brings in.

![Fig 4: Students’ Feedback on Specific Skills](image)

As could be seen from the feedback almost 43% students found speaking easy to revise. Moreover, almost 71% students felt that the speaking classes were helpful. This clearly corroborates with the findings from the literature review. The feedback data of Fig 1 again shows very clearly that speaking and writing were easy to revise. This establishes two important points. The first point is all about the online platform effectively minimizing the stage fright and shyness of many students. The second point is all about the predominance of writing in the online mode. Only 10% students found writing difficult to revise. It is also
safe to conclude that many students wanted more attention to be given on reading and listening skills.

**PT and LEE Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>L4</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 - 24.9</td>
<td>25 - 34.9</td>
<td>35 - 50</td>
<td>0 - 24.9</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>24</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>161</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fig 5: Progress Test Marks**

For assessing the effectiveness of revision study, students were categorized into three groups. For instance, the slow learners were those students who had secured marks between 0 - 24.9, average students between 25-34.9 and finally excellent students who secured 35-50 marks in their progress test and the level exit exam. Furthermore, they were sub-divided on gender basis. The total number of students who wrote the exam was 269, out of which 161 students were males and 108 students were females. The Progress Test (PT) results are used as a reference point to measure the efficacy of the online ASP classes conducted for the L4 students. The failure percentage in the PT exam was 12.26% and 19.70% students scored above 35. This also highlights the point that almost 68% students scored between 25 and 35.
It is common knowledge that skills fade overtime and language skills are no different. Jeffrey Karpicke, a professor at Purdue University reiterates the importance of retrievals in learning in his scholarly article for American Psychological Association. He says, “…recent research has established that repeated retrieval enhances learning with a wide range of materials, in a variety of settings and contexts, and with learners ranging from preschool ages into later adulthood”. A cursory glance of the PT and LEE marks demonstrates the fact that LEE results fare poorer in comparison with PT results. LEE results seem to invalidate the ASP assumptions and the well-established idea of the importance of retrieval. However, the introduction of circumstances and a careful analysis would be enough to turn the tables in favor of LEE results.
As can be seen from the overall data, there has been a slump in the pass percentage as it fell from 87.74% to 80.67%. However, the fall does not represent a gloomy picture for the centre for the following reasons. The overall data clearly suggests that the slump has been across the board irrespective of the performance and gender classifications. The percentage increase in the average students’ section (25-35) seems to suggest that the weaker and stronger students failed to capitalize on the revision classes. However, on closer scrutiny, the slump in the stronger students’ section overwhelms the gains made in the average student section. To put it in perspective, there has been a 24.1% slump in the stronger students’ section but there has been only 9.3% increase in the average section. Moreover, the failure percentage also increased by 14.9%. Therefore, it is logical to conclude that the slump has been across the board despite the possibility of a few upward movements. This slump should primarily be attributed to the absence and irregular attendance of the students in the revision classes. Out of 269 students, almost 100 students had attendance problems i.e. 40 students were absent through the program and the rest were irregular. It is remarkable to note that 19.7% students scored above 35 in PT exams as opposed to just 8.18% in LEE. Even the best students had to face the slump because practice is required to sustain skill levels. It is a well-established fact that skills fade over time and retrieval is necessary to get them back on course. Since some students did not attend the classes, their failure could justifiably be attributed to the fact of skill-fading. This demonstrates the fact that Online Revision Classes were not only well-intentioned but also truly relevant. Both the teachers’ feedback and the students’ feedback firmly establish the fact that the revision classes were highly effective. The slump is almost negligible if the calamitous circumstances and absenteeism are taken into consideration.
Fig 8: Teachers’ Feedback on the Efficacy of L4 ASP

All the course teachers emphatically said that the online revision classes were remarkably effective. They also said that the students who attended the classes found them beneficial.
Almost 88% students admitted that the revision classes were especially useful. As can be seen, only 61% students attended the classes regularly. Some of them did not even attend the classes. Given the limitations of the online platforms and the abrupt shift, 88% satisfaction rate is quite commendable.

Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Further Research

The study was conducted at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences-Ibra and therefore the findings are limited to the institutional circumstances. Moreover, the study included only 41 students and 6
teachers. It would be indeed a good research endeavor to explore the ramifications of online classes across Oman and include more students and teachers in the process. It would be even better if this research is done collaboratively by research bodies from various countries with similar socio-economic infrastructure. In addition, it would be insightful to take the feedback of the students who did not take the online ASP classes. The researchers strongly believe that a focal group discussion would be the ideal method to unearth more insights in this connection.

Conclusion

All things considered; it would be legitimate to conclude that the online support classes i.e., Special ASP were quite effective. Despite the gap of six long months, there is only a marginal slump of 7% in the overall results. This is an indicator of the success of the program given the challenging circumstances. But for this special ASP classes, the results could have been disastrous and depressing. Despite the limitations, the best possible remedial measures were carried out and they bore fruit.

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Pedagogical Innovations for Language Learning in Teacher Education

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Abstract:

The present paper proposes Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPCK) as a framework for conceptualizing the complex systems of knowledge underpinning expertise in teaching with digital technology. TPCK is a term introduced to conceptualize teacher knowledge reforming teaching skills and innovation. This conceptualization needs to go beyond the focus on knowledge necessary during classroom practice. Teacher learning for pedagogical innovation is becoming increasingly important in the 21st century as the focus in education has shifted toward lifelong learning and knowledge creation. The objective of this paper is to identify the level of ICT integration in teacher education for learning English Language. A total of 50 teacher-trainees were selected randomly from Nirmala College of Education, Ujjain to complete this quantitative study survey questionnaire. Findings illuminate that the teacher-trainees showed positive response towards the use of ICT. The present study emphasizes on the impact of TPCK in learning English and the attitude of the teacher-trainees towards the use of ICT tools in teacher education program.

Keywords: Information and Communication Technology (ICTs), Language Teaching, Pedagogical Innovation, Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPCK), Teacher Education.

Introduction:

Teacher education plays a vital role in reforming and strengthening the education system of any country. In India, Government Colleges for elementary teachers (GCETs), Colleges of Education (CEs) and University Departments of Education (UDEs) are major institutions that impact teacher training through various academic programs. The use of ICT in teaching learning process is a relatively new phenomenon and it has been
the educational researchers focus. The effective integration of this technology into classroom practices poses a challenge for teacher educators. The world is changing at a high pace and in order to make the students aware of present technological advancements, it is necessary for the teacher to understand the present paradigm and implement new ways of teaching. The present paper proposes TPCK as a framework for conceptualizing the complex system of knowledge that engages teacher trainees to resolve real world challenges while applying the knowledge in teaching with digital technology. TPCK framework introduces, three new kinds of knowledge for teacher competence and integrating ICT instructional practices. TCK (technological content knowledge), TPK (technological pedagogical knowledge) and TPCK. The framework emphasizes the interactive nature of the development - TCK, TPK and TPCK and provides a more abstract level of conceptualizing teacher knowledge to effectively integrate the use of ICT in pedagogical practice. This conceptualization needs to go beyond a mere focus on knowledge necessary during classroom practice. To engage teachers in ICT integration, in order to achieve their goals, one should equip teachers for "best practices" in ICT integration that contribute to improve existing teaching learning practice.

ICT in Teacher Education:

With the growing demands on set of technology-based education, it is necessary to include Information and Communication Technology in teacher education. With a scenario where information is accessible to a child at the click of a mouse, a teacher must be equipped with competence to use ICT for their own professional development. There is a major paradigm shift in the overall education system with implementation of better teaching concepts.

This technology invites learners to be more independent and the curricula to be more dynamic. Teachers need to complement their content and pedagogy expertise by utilizing online facilities. The effective use of ICT requires a change in classroom practice rather than mere acquisition of technical skills. Teachers need to familiarize themselves with possibilities, approaches and application in the use of ICT for the facilitation of teaching-learning. There are a variety of approaches to professional development of teachers in the context of the use of ICT in education. Professional development to incorporate ICT into teaching and learning is
an ongoing process. Teachers need to update their knowledge and skills as the school curriculum and technologies change. No more learning is a teacher centric static process, it is more of learner centric and flexible process, so an awareness of the technological pedagogical content knowledge is necessary in the present scenario.

**Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPCK)**

It is the domain of knowledge where all forms of teacher knowledge intersect. This is the form of knowledge that is required to plan and implement successful technology infused learning experiences. Mishra and Koehler (2006) describe TPCK as:

- The basis of good teaching with technology and requires an understanding of the representation of concepts using technologies;

- pedagogical techniques that use technologies in constructive ways to teach content;

- knowledge of what makes concepts difficult or easy to learn and how technology can help redress some of the problems that students face;

- knowledge of student’s prior knowledge and theories of epistemology;

- and knowledge of how technologies can be used to build on existing knowledge and to develop new epistemologies or strengthen old ones.

An example of TPCK is that an English teacher can teach drama in a constructivist learning environment. After the initial introduction of computers into the field of second/foreign language education, a large number of researchers have concluded that the technology holds greater potential for language learning. Creativity can be developed and innovation benefits both students and teachers. Constructivist approach using technological pedagogical content knowledge helps to develop skills of the teacher-trainees in teaching and learning English.

The various social science theories that underlie different models within the general framework of constructivist instruction were developed by diverse groups over the past century, Dewey (1916) and Vygotsky (1978). Proponents of constructivism respond that their pedagogical media help students learn these types of knowledge with more depth and engagement and with greater meaning and transfer to life settings. To understand the
kind of abilities required of teachers to engage in ICT supported innovations, one needs to find out the attitude of teachers to be able to leverage ICT tools as a pedagogical resource in teaching and learning English language.

**About the study:**

Today’s generation is so tech-savvy, students get engaged with what they are doing to improve learning outcomes with technology. Besides this, it provides students with digital literacy which is very essential to survive in the competitive world. It also broadens the horizons of many learners by making them connect to the entire world of e-learning. The present study emphasizes on the impact of TPCK in learning English and the attitude of the teacher-trainees towards the use of ICT tools in teacher education program. It highlights the importance of learning English in a constructivist learning environment. It also emphasizes on the challenges faced by teachers in India to implement the use of ICT tools as a pedagogical resource and makes an attempt to suggest varied solutions to the teachers with regards to awareness and implementation of ICT tools in the teaching-learning process.

**Objectives of the study:**

1. To find out the impact of TPCK on teacher-trainees in learning English.

2. To find out the attitude of teacher-trainees towards the use of ICT tools in teacher education program.

**Hypothesis of the study:**

1. TPCK has a positive impact on teacher-trainees in learning English.

2. Teacher-trainees had a positive attitude towards the use of ICT tools in teacher education program.

**Methodology:**

In the present study, the researcher, for examining the attitude of teacher-trainees towards the use of ICT tools in teacher education program constructed an Attitude Scale test based on Likert Method of summated ratings in which respondents specify their level of agreement to a statement
typically in five points: (1) Strongly Disagree; (2) Disagree; (3) Neither agree nor disagree; (4) Agree; (5) Strongly agree. Summative scales are constructed by taking answers to a set of survey questions that tap a common theme, or concept, and computing a score for each individual that can be used as a representation of their position (negative to positive, high to low) on the concept in question. Therefore, quantitative data is obtained, which means that the data can be analyzed with relative ease. The study was conducted on a sample of 50 teacher-trainees of Nirmala College of Education, Ujjain.

**Tools of the study:**

1. Attitude scale was constructed by the investigator to measure attitude of teacher-trainees towards the use of ICT.

2. Five-point scale Evaluation sheet to observe and measure the impact on teacher-trainees towards the use of ICT tools.

**Analysis and Interpretation:**

To find out the attitude of teacher-trainees towards the use of ICT tools in teacher education program, the investigator analyzed the data collected using percentage analysis. Based on the descriptive statistics (M+SD), (M - SD), (between M and SD) the total sample is categorized into three groups - High, Average and Low.

**Table – 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
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<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows the percentage distribution of Attitude of teachers towards the use of ICT tools in teacher education program. 52% of the sample i.e., 26 teachers have High attitude towards using ICT tools and comes under high group. 22% i.e., 11 teachers have medium attitude towards using ICT tools and comes under Average group and 26% i.e., 13 teachers have Low
attitude towards using ICT tools and comes under low group. A pie diagram has been drawn to show the percentage distribution of teacher’s attitude towards the use of ICT tools.

![Pie Chart: Percentage Distribution of Teacher's Attitude](chart.png)

**Figure 1 – Percentage distribution of the Attitude of teacher-trainees** towards the use of ICT tools. The figure above shows the High frequency attitude of teacher-trainees towards the use of ICT in learning English. Hence Hypothesis is substantiated.

**Role of teacher learning for Pedagogical Innovation with ICT:**

The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) document, *Information and Communication Technologies in Teacher Education: A planning guide* is a fine example of a holistic perspective and address both the context (*what is to be learnt*) and the process (*how the learning takes place*). In this document teacher education is situated in a framework of professional practice that requires attention to four themes:

*Leadership and vision, Lifelong learning, Context and culture and, Planning and management of change.* The teacher can develop a new professionalism to be able to play the role of catalyst in the knowledge society, where they:
- Promote deep cognitive learning
- Learn to teach in ways they were not taught
- Commit to continuous professional learning
- Work and learn in collegial teams
- Treat parents as partners in learning
- Develop and draw on collective intelligence
- Build a capacity for change and risk and
- Foster trust in processes. Great expertise is developed while teaching in a digital environment and scaffolding the materials to develop deep-reflective thinking.

**Findings:**

When used appropriately, ICT especially computers and internet technologies enable new ways of teaching and learning. These new ways of teaching and learning are underpinned by constructivist theories of training and constitute a shift from a teacher-centred pedagogy. ICT will change these old traditions it can enhance:

- Active learning
- Collaborative learning
- Creative learning
- Integrating learning
- Evaluative learning

Related research findings show that a significant number of teacher educators have experience in using ICT in teaching, but there are challenges involved with students, content, interface, and environment related factors that impacted rapid diffusion of ICT. Barriers to ICT include institutional policy, lack of incentives, and a need for more support and education in the creating, using and sharing of instructional materials. Lack
of training and awareness of ICT is a major obstacle on pre-service teachers for potential inclusion of ICT in an education repository.

Conclusion:

To conclude, teacher learning to build capacities for professional innovation using ICT needs to go beyond knowledge to encompass the enhancement of meta cognitive, social and socio-metacognitive capacities. In addition, a positive attitude towards the use of ICT in teacher education for learning English is necessary. The goal will be achieved if teacher induces and reflects the use of ICT in learning English for the holistic development of personality.

Suggestions:

Integration of ICT in teaching motivates teachers. Hence pre-service teachers should be motivated to prepare lesson plans with the help of computer so that computer skills can be developed among them. Access to computers and practical knowledge of computer operations via capsule programs and computer workshops, hands on experience will help them overcome computer phobia. In addition, seminars and lectures by the experts should be arranged and teacher should apply these expert views in their practical and real situations. Orientation programs should be organized for raising the proficiency of the teachers towards the exact use of computers.

References:


The National Speech Contest and its Usefulness in Enhancing the Public Speaking Skills of Students- An Evaluative Study

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Abstract

Public speaking scares people all over the world. Peter Desberg, a professor in Psychology at California State University says that fear of public speaking among some ranks as the mother of all fears, even outranking the fear of death. The idea of speech contests is to spur the students’ interest in public speaking and thereby equip them with the rudimentary knowledge of public speaking. Research in this area appears to strongly suggest that contests are indeed a great way to enhance motivation and interest. This study aims to analyse the usefulness of conducting speech contests in enhancing the public speaking skills of the students and uses the feedback of the participants to determine whether such contests are to be held in future. The data analysis and interpretive assumptions seem to suggest that it would be prudent to conduct contests that encapsulate a crash course in public speaking. This evaluative study recommends regular conduct of contests with a capsule course to enhance the public speaking skills of the students.

Keywords: Contest, capsule course, glossophobia, public speaking

Introduction

“The right word may be effective, but no word was ever as effective as a rightly timed pause.” Mark Twain

Public speaking plays a vital role in education and business. It has the power to inform, persuade and entertain. Speaking in public is a skill and has become a prerequisite for success. Speaking to a large, small or online audience causes certain levels of anxiety and concern in people. Generally,
students with EFL background suffer from Glossophobia i.e. a strong fear that encompasses feelings of embarrassment or possible humiliation. Many are not born public speakers; some are afraid of public speaking. Nonetheless, it is possible to become an effective public speaker with adequate training and practice. Public Speaking has been the research topic of the longitudinal study in UTAS-Ibra. In continuation of that policy, this evaluative study aims to analyze the usefulness of conducting contests of this nature in enhancing the public speaking skills of the students. More importantly, this evaluative study is carried out using the feedback of the students.

The Research and Consultancy Committee of the English Language Centre in collaboration with the English Society and Ibra Toastmasters Club conducted a Virtual National Level Speech Competition on the occasion of the 50th National Day Celebration and ten students from all over the country came forward to participate in the contest. Though the team tried really hard to get more participants, it was very difficult for them to get many participants. Despite sending invitations to many HEIs, the team could get only ten participants and this confirms the assumptions of glossophobia among students. The students were informed of the theme, platform and the rules well in advance and Fig 2 attests to the fact that the students have been duly informed.
The English Society strives hard to encourage students to participate in various language related programs and the coordinator is also a founding member of Ibra Toastmasters Club. Ibra Toastmasters Club is not only a part of Toastmasters International but also an inseparable part of the community outreach program of UTAS-Ibra. Toastmaster International is a non-profit educational organization that teaches public speaking and leadership skills through a worldwide network of clubs. It trains and provides ample opportunities to aspiring speakers and instils a sense of confidence and pride. Ibra Toastmasters Club has so far produced a number of competent communicators and leaders and continues to lend a helping hand to the student community. Thanks to Ibra Toastmasters Club, the idea of National Speech Contest became a reality. There were five judges from Ibra Toastmasters Club and all are well-trained in both public speaking and evaluation. Fig.3 shows the ballot that was used by the judges to evaluate the speeches of the contestants. There are three important components to evaluate the contestants. They are as under:
Fig 3. Judges’ Ballot

Content – 50 marks ‘Celce-Murcia (2001) believes that oral presentation is an activity which improves students' speaking skills. Content is important in any public speaking activity and in Toastmasters ballot, content is divided into the following subcategories:

- **Speech development** - structure organization, support material
- **Effectiveness of the speech** - achievement of purpose, interest, reception
- **Speech value** - ideas, logic, original thought

Delivery – 30 marks ‘Non-verbal communication in instruction incorporates behaviours that do not use words’ (O’Hair & Ropo, 1994). Just as language uses symbols to convey meaning, our body, consciously and unconsciously, carries messages, attitudes, status of relationships, moods, indifferences, positive/negative feelings and so on’ (Kar & Kar,
In Toastmasters ballot, delivery has been divided into three subcategories:

- **Physical** – appearance, body language, speaking area
- **Voice** – flexibility, volume
- **Manner** – directness, assurance, enthusiasm

**Language 20 marks** Paul Ekman says, “We talk with our vocal cords, but we communicate with our facial expressions, our tone of voice and our whole body” (Khanna, 2015). In Toastmasters ballot, language has been divided into two subcategories:

- ** Appropriateness** – to speech purpose and the audience
- **Correctness** – grammar, pronunciation and word selection

The contestants were informed of the criteria and the ballot was sent to them prior to the contest. The contestants were, therefore, given ample time to prepare and practice in line with the criteria.

**Research Objectives**

1. This study aims to analyse the usefulness of conducting speech contests in enhancing the public speaking skills of the students. The study uses Toastmasters International as a platform to encourage and train undergraduate students to become public speakers. The participants were evaluated based on the Toastmaster’s international speech evaluation criteria.

2. The study uses the feedback of the participants to determine whether such contests are to be held in future.

**Research Methodology and Research Tools**

The study uses qualitative method to evaluate the usefulness of the contest. The participants were given a questionnaire with open-ended questions. The questionnaire included questions on conducting contests every year, speech preparation, important aspects of a good speech, role of body language, use of props, stories and anecdotes and the need for a training program on public speaking. A Likert scale was used to understand the
choices of participants where 5 is ‘strongly agree’ and 1 is ‘strongly disagree’.

Location and Sample

The contest was conducted online by the Research and Consultancy Committee of UTAS-Ibra. The participants were from different HEIs of Oman and there were nine participants. Though ten students registered themselves for the contest, only nine students participated in the contest. These participants constituted the sample.

Literature Review

Public speaking scares people all over the world. Peter Desberg, a professor in Psychology at California State University says that fear of Public speaking among some ranks as the mother of all fears, even outranking the fear of death. People usually find excuses when it comes to speaking in public. This can very well qualify for a phobia and this phobia is widely seen among the EFL students. Elamparithy et al. (2020) assert that glossophobia is quite common among the students in Oman and they add that public speaking is dreaded by the students. Language anxiety and test anxiety certainly affect a person’s public speaking skills. Many school and college going students in the Middle East face a lot of challenges in expressing their ideas in English when they shift from Arabic medium of instruction to English medium of instruction. A recent study by Sivaraman et al. affirms that as many as 35% do not understand the lectures given in English and Said Al Sadi et al. assert that the English challenge is faced by students across the spectrum. Ozturk and Gurbuz observe that the fear of making mistakes while speaking English and the embarrassment of being corrected could very well be two main reasons for the general non-participation of the students. It has been observed that young adult participants usually encounter things like stage fear, nervousness when they face a large audience for the first time. There certainly is a sense of anxiety that makes them ill at ease on the stage. Language anxiety can be caused by several different reasons. MacIntyre, as quoted by Dewaele (2013) states that language anxiety affects not only the way in which learners perform but also the way in which they perceive their performance. Many learners seem to be very concerned not only with their performance in the target language, but also how they view their performance. Another factor that causes anxiety among students is the
presence of multiple judges at the time of performance. Their presence spurs their level of anxiety although they were initially confident of their performance. Rodger in his insightful thesis differentiates between reticence and communication anxieties where the former has a lot to do with ignorance and the latter with serious anxiety concerns despite the subjects possessing requisite knowledge. He also records that as many as 20% suffer from communication anxiety problems.

Whitworth and Cochran assert that skill training is vitally important to make students confident and self-assured. Allen iterates that students with skill deficiencies are to be corrected in order for them to be able to perform well as public speakers. Basic public speaking course, according to Robinson, is the "ideal setting" for the treatment of anxiety related to public speaking. Farhan Raja says that 75% participants in his study admitted to have the fear of public speaking. More importantly, he reports that 95% of them think that their fear can be overcome with proper counseling, coaching and instructions. Though there is a course in public speaking in almost all the HEIs of Oman, they are not adequate to train them well as there is a paucity of time and resources. Most importantly, the students do not know enough to take full advantage of the course. Hence, there is a need to get them interested in public speaking even before they get to study it academically. The idea of speech contests is to spur their interest in public speaking and thereby equip them with the rudimentary knowledge of public speaking. Research in this area appears to strongly suggest that contests are indeed a great way to enhance motivation and interest. Dziob et al. claims that contests are really a good way to ignite students’ interest even in the early years of education. Ozturk and Debelak (2008), Thrasher (2008), and Wankat (2005) also affirm that contests usually motivate the students and enhance their interest in the subject concerned. Josh Neubert claims that competitions have at least ten benefits including enhancing team work, developing academic heroes and increasing intrinsic motivation. Having considered these established positions, the researchers decided to conduct a national level speech contest and evaluate the assumptions based on the feedback given by the students. Based on the literature review, the following research questions were formulated:

**Research Questions**

1. Will students be interested in public speaking contests despite their fear of public speaking?
2. Will they take to training after the contest?
3. Provided they are ready to undergo training, should it be short or long?
4. Should similar contests be conducted in future?

**Analysis of the Feedback**

The contestants were very enthusiastic about the contest and they remained energetic throughout the course of the contest. Their enthusiasm is so visibly reflected in their feedback.

![Fig 4. Students’ Feedback about the Idea of National Level Contest](image)

As is seen in the graph above, all the respondents strongly agreed that the idea of a national speech contest is really good and it should be conducted every year. Though there were only nine contestants, they all strongly agreed that conducting a contest is a good idea and it corroborates well with the research findings delineated in the literature review.

![Preparing for the speech conduct was very easy.](image)
As is seen in Fig 5, majority of the respondents (55.6%) ‘agreed’ that preparing for the speech conduct was very easy while 22.2% ‘strongly agreed’. It is to be noted that 22.2% students were neutral about the question. This could be because of various reasons like fear, anxiety, self-doubt and a lingering feeling of inadequacy.

When it comes to the knowledge of important aspects of a good speech, majority of the respondents (77.8%) agreed to have already known them while 22.2% strongly agreed to have known them. Though they all claimed to know the important aspects of a good speech, their responses clearly indicated gaps in their internalized notions of a good speech. It is beyond reasonable doubt that this gap in their internalized versions needs to be assiduously probed. For, there are glaring inconsistencies in their claims. Fig 7 vividly illustrates the inconsistencies in their notions.
If the students’ claims in Fig 6 are to be true, they should not have said that content alone is enough to appeal to the audience. This statement bears testimony to the fact that there are glaring inconsistencies in their knowledge about public speaking. Nonetheless, these inconsistencies and gaps deserve a detailed investigation and a careful analysis. Therefore, the researchers decided to carry out a separate investigative study of the gap between the claims of the contestants and their actual abilities.

When the students were asked about their readiness to attend a training program on public speaking, majority of the respondents (55.6%) strongly...
agreed to do so while 33.3% agreed. The research team already developed a crash course (C.A.L.L) based on its previous experiments with the students and the strategy has also been published in a journal of international repute. There is another way of training the students and that requires dedication, commitment, resolve and lasting interest i.e. regular participation in Toastmasters meetings.

![Fig 9. Students’ Willingness for Online Toastmasters Sessions](image)

Though majority of the respondents (66.7%) ‘strongly agreed’ and 22.2% ‘agreed’ to attend the Toastmasters online meeting to learn more about the art of public speaking, only 2 students attended the online meeting when a meeting was arranged for all the participants. Research findings suggest that majority of the students are motivated by fleeting interests and peer competition. Eleuterio Salvador Buquiran in his well-researched thesis on Toastmasters International says that about 40% club members leave every year despite their positive firsthand experience. If this is the case for professionals for whom public speaking is mandatory for success and growth, the case of students is understood without much being said. Therefore, a crash course like C.A.L.L accompanied by contests would go a long way in enhancing the interest of students in public speaking.

**Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Further Research**

There were only nine participants in the contest and they constituted the sample. Therefore, the paucity of sample is the most striking limitation of the study. There could have been a one-on-one interview with participants which could have been more insightful in terms of validating the
interpretive assumptions. The study would be more meaningful and pragmatic if the same study is conducted with a larger sample and focal group or one-on-one interviews. It would be prudent to carry out a repeated measures study with and without C.A.L.L to measure its usefulness in enhancing the public speaking skills of the students.

Conclusion

Considering the feedback of the students, it is quite apparent that they liked the idea of speech contest. It is also evident that they want similar contests to be conducted every year. Though students appear to welcome the idea of a training program with open arms, they tend to value short-term training programs over long-term training-cum-participatory sessions. Therefore, it is extremely prudent to conclude, given the previous and current research findings, that crash courses and contests ought to be packaged together for the desired learning to take place. Taking these findings into consideration, this evaluative study recommends regular conduct of contests with a capsule course to enhance the public speaking skills of the students. After all, incidental learning is still one of the best methods of teaching.

Reference


GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

*Oman Journal of ELT* welcomes articles that

1. Reflect the contexts of English Language Centers in the Colleges of Technology,
2. Find solution(s) to the problems of teaching and learning EFL in Oman,
3. Introduce innovative teaching techniques,
4. Deal with reflective teaching which draw on both teachers' experience and theory of ELT,
5. Discuss materials designing, and technology-aided teaching.

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- Dealing with the main concepts and theories clearly.
- Using a wide range of appropriate sources and integrating the key ideas from the sources into a coherent and analytical framework.
- Examining the issues from more than one perspective.
- Outlining and specifying the limitations of the main implications of theory for policy and/or practice.
- Having clear research questions.
- Justifying the data collection method.
- Having clear research findings, conclusion and evaluation.
- Having a consistent quality of the writing, expression of ideas and references required for publication.

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Articles should

- not have been published previously,
- be between 1000 and 3000 words,
- be typed using Times New Roman, font size 11, with single line spacing,
- have all hyperlinks in the article and in the References deleted,
- conform to the latest edition of the MLA style manual,
- use sub-headings.
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