Investigating The Integration Of A Workplace English Digital Course Into The Curriculum Of The University Of Technology And Applied Sciences In Oman

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Abstract

English for the workplace is considered a crucial factor across various fields, local and international. Accordingly, the training of undergraduates at technical and vocational institutes must include teaching and learning workplace English skills and competence. This study set out to investigate undergraduates' perceptions on the integration of a digital course offering workplace English to be used along with the existing curriculum at the University of Technology and applied Sciences (UTAS) in Nizwa. The proposed course will be developed in line with the results of the study and the literature review. A questionnaire survey used to gain insights from over 200 undergraduates at the UTAS. Findings of the study revealed that most of the participants were in favour of the idea of integrating the proposed course. The study provided a set of implications and recommendations that are of significant value for stakeholders and course designers in educational institutions and industrial sectors.

Keywords: English for occupational purposes (EOP), English for specific purposes (ESP), needs analysis, Workplace English Digital Course (WEDC).

Introduction

The deepening globalization and marketization of higher education have entrenched an incentive within the area of TESOL to exhibit more professional developments and reformations in the curricula and methodologies. Besides, for employability and the competitive standards in the labor market, both locally and globally, it has become essential for higher education institutes to consider the need of updating curriculum and course design in English language teaching in vocational and technical contexts. Thus, it has become the need of the hour to enhance students' competence in the English language proficiency to meet the demands of the professional sectors and the job market. Therefore, the demand for English for academic or specific purposes has been increasing, and students have to adopt English as a medium of instruction for post-secondary education (Jordon, 1997; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998).

In Oman, a considerable attention has been paid to the technical or vocational education by the Omani Government since the 1970s. In this respect, Al-Hussaini (2004) reports that "During the fourth developmental plan (1991-1995), the Government evaluated vocational education and drew up some plans for improving it" (p.22). This development requires giving a special focus to the English language teaching in technical and vocational education programs to be in alignment with the requirements of the modern job market.

The stress on the workplace has caused English for specific purposes (ESP) or English for occupational purposes (EOP) instruction to be increasingly developed at technical universities in Oman. The purpose behind this development is to foster the skills acquired in higher educational institutions and the ones required in professional sectors and job market (Almahrooqi, 2012)**.** Omani universities have decided to adopt new language policies and English education patterns to cope with the requirements of the modern education system and prepare graduates for future professional sectors and the job market. In Oman, there have been calls to start teaching technical students ESP/EOP courses to strengthen their ESP lexis, as being knowledgeable about the ESP lexis can best prepare them for future professional commitments (Al-Husseini, 2004; Al-Issa, 2006).

In addition to the development in English language teaching, there has been a rapid development of technology integration and computer-assisted language learning (CALL). This development has led to significant innovations in the education system, such as e-learning, blended learning, flipped learning, and self-paced, autonomous, and individualized learning.

Going through the literature, the researchers have realized a plethora of studies in the field of ESP conducted to investigate and address a variety of issues relating to the contexts of technology. However, there is a lack of research conducted to investigate strategies, methods, and techniques for enhancing and expanding the ESP/EOP in the technical context of Oman. Also, there is a lack of research showing the experience of offering ESP courses, technology courses through technology-based software, and modern platforms of e-learning.

Specifically, the study aims to:

1. examine the undergraduates' perceptions towards incorporating a Workplace English Digital Course into the academic curriculum as a supplementary training course to enhance their language skills and competency for the workplace,

2. explore the effects of the Workplace English Digital Course on undergraduates' motivation and academic performance during the study period,

3. explore the needs of the Workpalce English Digital Course from the perceptions of the undergraduates.

The study is designed to answer the following questions:

Q.1 What are undergraduates' perceptions towards incorporating a Workplace English Digital Course into the academic curriculum as a suplimentary material?

Q.2 To what extent does the Workplace English Digital Course affect undergraduates' motivation and academic outcomes while studying?

Q.3 What are the undergraduates' perceptions regarding the needs of the Workplace English Digital Course?

Statement of Problem

However, despite the large-scale investment the government has made to improve students' English language skills,
school and college graduates are often reported as lacking proficiency in English to the extent that it is an obstacle to

their employability (Alrawas, 2014). For example, Al-Issa's (2014) study of law graduates revealed that their limited

English language competence hindered their chances of finding suitable employment. Similarly, 72% of student

respondents in Al-Lamki's (1998) study considered a lack of English language skills to be an obstacle to getting a job in

the private sector for Omanis. These students expressed a concern that they were disqualified from applying for such

jobs because of their limited English-language communicative skills.

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In the context where the study takes place, several previous studies point out that several companies have reported that some new technical graduates lack the English language communication skills needed for employment (Almahrooqi and Denman, 2006; Alrawas, 2014; Al-Issa, 2014). For instance, Al-Issa's (2014) study revealed that the limited English comprtence of the law undegraduates was an obsticale in getting suitable employment. Besides, based on the observation of the researchers and

some technical teachers, some graduates from the foundation program are not quite familiar with the common technical words. The lack of technical English or English for occupational (EOP) skills may negatively affect the graduates at the time of employment (Ministry of Manpower, 203). Doubtless to say that this problem will inhibit their potentials to contribute effectively in the workplace. In addition, training fresh employees takes much time, effort, and cost to prepare them to sustain the requirements of the English for workplace. In response, there are calls to design ESP/EOP courses that can best prepare technical graduates for professional workplace purposes.

Besides the lack of proficiency in technical English required for the majors and future employment, there is another challenge facing both teachers as well as students, which is the lack of motivation. Probably, this issue is caused by the lack or absence of content-based courses in technical college programs, which allow students to apply integrative English skills based on learner needs and tailored for the demands of the specific fields in the job markets. The issue may also lead to the mismatch between skills acquired in higher educational institutions and the skill sets needed in the industry. So, it is necessary to realize that students learning a foreign language may only learn well if teachers find a way to activate and encourage their desire to invest effort in learning ESP or EOP. The main point is to find the best way to motivate vocational students to learn ESP or EOP. Probably, this issue is due to a gap in the needs analysis regarding the type of English required when designing syllabuses or courses for the workplace. If there is no formal needs analysis, it means that the syllabus of a course or program is not based on the real needs of students as it should be (Al Hinai, 2018; Al-Husseini, 2004).

In today's rapidly developing and changing world, there has been a serious need for developing and employing modern technologies and apps in learning and teaching languages. During the period of COVID-19 and probably after it, e-learning will continue as a dominating trend in academic as well as vocational education. The field of ESP/EOP for technical students is no exception. Accordingly, professionals and trainers in technical programs need to be aware of this mode of learning. The development of a digital software training program that meets the needs of modern digital education has become highly demanded. Besides, the software program will be of value for future graduates and employees, especially those looking for flexibility and freedom of learning to juggle their careers and school, as they are not committed to a fixed schedule.

The current study intents to take into consideration all these influential factors into consideration. Thus, the seriousness of these issues has motivated the researchers to conduct this research study as an initial step of the upcoming process of the development of a digital course offering workplace English. This study is considered the first of its type in Omani colleges of technology. The study attempts to employ a quantitative strategy of collecting data from students concerned with major technical issues in their curriculum. The respondents are the students who study in the ELC at the UTAS.

Significance of the Study

This study is considered significant through providing a synthesis of theoretical as well as practical views based on the literature review and data analysis, respectively. The present study is considered unique since it attempts to propose a digital course offering workplace English to be used as training based on the results of the study. The digital course will be specifically tailored to Omani undergradates. Also, the program is supposed to serve a nationwide context for the purpose of establishing better learning objectives and designing content and materials in a modern way that goes in line with the new trends of e-learning and the COVID-19 period. Thus, the uniqueness of the program in response to the consequences of these factors counts for a second significance.

Until now, there has been an enormous amount of research conducted to address various issues related to EOP in technical and vocational contexts, with the main focus on needs analysis as an essential step in building up the whole program or course. However, according to Long's (2005) argument that calls for "replication with different populations in different sectors" (p.12), this study deals with a new context and population, that is, the ESP for Omani technical context, which has not been addressed yet. No attempt has been made to analyze the EOP and the needs in technical and vocational sectors in the Arab world systematically and professionally to the best of the researcher's knowledge.

The entire study is also considered important in terms of the context. because it is for the first time that the foundation undergraduates in the College of Technology will be involved on such a large scale in the discussion of the needs for development in the EOP for technical and vocational sectors in Oman.

The study is also significant in terms of its potential impact on the process of syllabus design for English for workplace or occupational purposes programs in technical and vocational sectors. It is hoped that the findings of the study will be used by decision-makers and professionals for the enhancement of EOP teaching. A clear analysis of the undergraduates' language needs is a resource on which future improvement of the EOP in terms of content, sequence, and teaching material may be based.

Literature Review
The available research in the field of EOP, particularly in the Omani context where this study takes place, is very rare. However, globally, a good number of researchers have carried out research studies in an attempt to contribute to the field. Therefore, this paper looks into the relevant available research in order to get insights and perspectives on the EOP. Theoretically, this study is guided by the theory of EOP and needs analysis. In this study, both terms Englihs for the workplace (EWP) and English for occupational purposes (EOP) are used synonymously.

English for Occupational Purposes: Characteristics and Rationale
English for occupational purposes (EOP) is a branch of ESP that includes situations in which learners study English for work-related reasons (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 199). Terminologically, English for occupational purposes is a developed branch of English for specific purposes. It is a broad term that includes two major areas, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) (Dudly-Evans & St John, 1998). The EOP is distinguished from the EAP in goals, syllabus, content, and methodology. English for academic purposes is designed to meet the needs of students and professionals in educational contexts, while English for occupational purposes is designed to meet the needs of employees and professionals in the workplace (Jordan, 1997).

The EOP is used in specific occupational settings, for specific purposes, and in accordance with the needs of the job descriptions and demands. Hence, the EOP courses are based on an analysis of the specific communicative needs in a workplace setting. Therefore, EOP courses often have titles like English for Nursing, English for Engineering, and English for Business. Furthermore, EOP courses are very specific in terms of material selection, syllabus, activities, and other components in order to deal with the needs of one area. For instance, in Business English, the focus must be on one area, such as English for Sales Presentation, English for Business Report, and Negotiation Skills in English. Alternatively, the courses may focus on the

more general needs of a specific industry: English for Banking and Finance, Legal English, English for Military Purposes, and English for the Oil Industry.

The rationale for integrating EOP into the EAP program at the university level is to implement language instruction taking into account specific educational needs that can be fostered by content-based instruction (Dudley-Evans, 2001). These didactic aims can be achieved by the incorporation of content material into language classes (Kavaliauskiene, 2004; Nation, 2001; Graves, 2000). language learning and content of subject matter can be brought together because a foreign language is most successfully acquired when learners are engaged in its meaningful and purposeful use. ESP instruction is designed to meet the needs of those wanting to learn English for use in their specific fields, such as business, science, technology, medicine, leisure, and academic studies.

English for occupational purposes is considered a learner-centered methodology as it takes into consideration the needs and wants of the learners when developing a curriculum (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Pedagogically, it is driven by needs analysis that determines all other components of the course or curriculum to meet the learners' needs, particularly syllabus design and materials selection. This means that the curriculum development and the methodology of teaching would focus on the particular needs of learners (Gatehouse, 2001). English for occupational purposes is also characterized by its focus on exposing learners to field-specific terminology to enable learners to function well within a specific workplace (Sifakis, 2003, p. 206).

In terms of materials, ESP/EOP is considered more effective than English for general purposes (EGP) because it deals with themes and topics that are based on the needs of the learners and situations (Long & Crookes, 1992). English for general purposes, however, deals with topics that fit general pedagogical and educational values. Strevens (1988) refers to the advantages of ESP/EOP courses that assist learners in several ways. One way, for instance, is that ESP/EOP courses are designed according to the learners' needs, interests and goals, and as such no waste of time and efforts are expected. Furthermore, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) point out that "ESP teaching is more motivating for learners than General English" (p. 10). Thus, the relevance, focus, and effectiveness ensure that the ESP/EOP goals are mostly accepted by the learners.

One of the common arguments about ESP/EOP courses suggests that they are more likely context/content-based, and as such, they generate higher levels of motivation than general English courses. The context of English for

specific purposes stresses the importance of teaching language based on the learners' needs with the intention of preparing them for the requirements of professional sectors. English for specific purposes is characterized by its emphasis on integrating the content of a subject matter with language teaching. In light of its scope and characteristics, tasks and are considered as more meaningful and challenging than those in the EGP.

English-related Skills Needed for the 21st-century Workforce

What are 21st-century skills? In answer to this question, Fitzpatrick and Robert (p.20) state that "These are the skills that graduates and workers must bring to the workplace in addition to their own expertise in their specific vocational or professional area." The twenty 1st century requires mastery of competencies that include skills of communication.

As a result of globalization and the role of English as the lingua franca of business (see Global English, 2011), the English language is no longer taught separately from the skills of the modern globalized era. Accordingly, there is a general agreement that English language training in the workplace is combined with the development of the 21-century workplace. The recent development demands more updated skills that graduates and workers must bring to the workplace along with their own expertise in their specific vocational or professional areas. Workers and employees need to learn the skills of the workplace through English even though they are not in direct contact with native speakers. Most 21st-century employees need English for the workplace for purposes such as business trips, online collaboration, presentations, emails, and various aspects of office work. In this respect, Trilling and Fadel (2009) point out that:

To be a fully productive contributor to society in our 21st century you need to be able to quickly learn the core content of a field of knowledge while also mastering a broad portfolio of essential learning, innovation, technology, and career skills needed for work and life. And when you apply these skills to today's knowledge and innovation work, you are participating in a global network. (p.16)

Trilling and Fadel (2009) created a model of the 21st-century skills in which they referred to three main areas in the workplace skills: (1) "learning and innovation skills" (2) "information, media and technology skills;" and (3) "life and career skills" (p. 48). The important thing is that these areas are language based skills and this means that must be implemented through English as a lingua franca.

English Language Communicative Needs of the 21st Century

This part of the literature review provides an overview of the communicative needs of the 21st century and the type of communicative skills that are mostly needed in English language training.

As has been previously mentioned that the 21st-century workforce requires special communicative needs that are to some extent different from the traditional needs of business English or English for specific purposes. Over the past decades, these courses mainly highlighted developing formal future workers' skills in the classic business tasks of formal presentations, letters, email writing, negotiations, etc. However, recent studies and theories during the 21st century have mainly emphasized the importance of English for informal interaction and socializing in workforce contexts. In this regard, Kassim and Ali (2010) and Forey and Nunan (2002) state that English learners need to learn the communicative strategies that are globally recommended to establish relationships and maintain rapport in the workplace. For example, they need to learn skills of holding formal meetings and discussions, participation in teamwork, developing an awareness of cultural differences, and the like. Below is an outline of the types of 21st-century communicative needs.

- Formal and Informal Presentation- The emphasis in the workplace recently has been on developing workers' skills related to tasks such as formal presentation, writing letters or emails, formal negotiations, informal interaction, and others.

- Social Communication-This is among the most important communicative skills that are required for workers in order to excel in the workplace. |Some authors, especially in the field of business English (e.g., Kassim & Ali, 2010; Forey & Nunan, 2002), have argued that English learners need to be equipped with communicative strategies to establish social relationships and maintain rapport in the workplace. It appears that small talks in the workplace environment are very important for professionals and employees to demonstrate their ability to function effectively in English and, thereby, gain better possibilities of progressing in their companies.

  In an attempt to investigate the role of oral communication skills needed by engineers in the workplace, Kassim and Ali (2010) conducted an empirical study. The researchers came out with a major finding that apart from dealing in English with technical information, engineers in Malaysia also need to have good social and communication skills in order to excel

in the workplace. This implies that participating in small talks was considered more important than carrying out daily tasks in English.

- Intercultural Competence-It is, also called global competence, another communicative skill that employees and workers need to be equipped with when traveling abroad or communicating with coworkers from different cultures. Global competence includes skills such as attitudes of tolerance, flexibility, openness to other cultural perspectives, and knowledge of other cultures. It also has skills of effective collaboration and communication with people from different cultural backgrounds in a foreign language (Hunter, White, and Godbey, 2006; Grandin and Hedderich, 2009). "In the case of 21st-century engineering, it has been suggested that "the future belongs to those who learn to work or team together with other groups without regard to location, heritage, and national and cultural difference" (Grandin & Hedderich, 2009, p. 363). This point may be applicable to graduates from various professional areas who will need to use English to communicate and collaborate in their future careers.

- Technological skills- Another important development in the workplace is technological skills merged with English language proficiency. This means that learners in professional and vocational contexts need to combine language skills with the ones of e-skills to be able, for example, to collaborate virtually with other individuals (Collier, 2007). Thus, the basic e-skills of the 21st century include the ability to implement new strategies for effective online research, evaluate websites, deliver presentations using digital tools such as animation, PowerPoint, and other web 2.0 applications such as wikis, blogs, conducting video conferencing, writing emails, etc. (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

In summary, we have seen that integrating EOP into the academic curriculum or EAP program has become an important trend in education and training contexts. Thus, it is necessary to consider that offering English skills in isolation from the workplace skills such as the ones mentioned earlier is invalid. It is also essential to consider that undergraduates must develop their English language skills in combination with workplace competencies and knowledge. Accordingly, curriculum and course designers, stakeholders, and trainers in vocational contexts need to take into account the approaches and structuring of EOP courses.

Needs Analysis
Needs analysis is considered an important procedure in designing ESP courses to prepare learners to communicate effectively in the tasks

prescribed by their field of study or work situation (Graves, 2001; Richards, 2007). Besides, needs analysis is very important in evaluating the validity and quality of a textbook whether it is suitable for ESP learners of any discipline at any context. Al-Khalidi (2020) in her research on EAP course design reported that needs analysis is considered the foundation of course design that determines the selection of other components (for further discussion on needs analysis, see Al-Khalidi, 2020).

When designing business courses, ESP practitioners must take into account the needs analysis as an important stage to analyze how the learners can develop effective communication skills in business tasks such as meetings, conferences, negotiations and job interviews.

The critical issue raised by Nation and Macalister (2010) is "what needs to be learned" (Nation and Macalister, 2010, p. 24). For this question, the authors refer to three important approaches that determine which type of needs analysis should be focused. The first approach was advocated by Munby (1987) and called "Target-situation Analysis" that deals with the analysis of the target situation and focuses on what learners need at the end of the program or course (Jordan, 2004). The second approach was proposed Richterich, and Chancerel (1987), called "present-situation analysis", which deals with what theleraners need at the beginning of the course. The third approach, was proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) called "Learning-centered Approach" which draws a distinction between "target needs" and "learning needs". The former deals with "what the learner needs to do in the target situation," while the latter deals with "what the learner needs to do in the learning situation." Furthermore, Hutchinson and Waters categorize target needs into three types: 'necessities,' 'lacks,' and 'wants as briefly outlined below.

Necessities- This category focusses on analysing the needs of students that helps them perform effectively in the target situation.

Lacks-This category takes into account any gaps between the learners' previous knowledge or competencies, that is what is already known, and the needs of the target situation.

Wants-This category deals with the learners' interests and desires.

Hutchinson and Waters (1991) also proposed another classification of needs analysis that is described in terms of objective and subjective needs.

The two categories above 'necessities' and 'lacks' suit objective needs, whereas the category of 'wants' is closer to subjective needs (Jordan, 2004).

Methodology

Research Design
This study seeks out to investigate the perceptions of undergraduates at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Oman towards the proposal of designing a digital course offering English for the workplace. For this purpose, a questionnaire survey method was employed (Dörnyei and Csizér, 2012, Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, the survey was selected as the most appropriate method since the research goal is to collect original data from many respondents. Several sources of information contributed to the development of the survey questionnaire such as previous studies on ESP/EOP, feedback from colleagues in the context of the study, professionals and employees in Omani oil and gas companies and institutions, plus the researchers' teaching experiences at the university.

The questionnaire survey is composed of three main sections. Each section includes several items related to one goal and one research question. The first section includes items (1-7) relating to students' prceptions on integrating the digital course into the existing academic course to be used as a supplementary course to foster their English language skills. The second section includes items (1-7) relating to their opinions regarding the effects of the expected course on their motivation while preparing for their undergraduate study. The third section, on the other hand, relates to undergraduates' perceptions on the digital course needs regarding the process of course development.

Sample
The participants in this study are undergraduates at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS). The undergraduates are post foundation students and students in major departments (engineering, business, and IT). The sample of the study consists of 200 students, male and female, whose age ranges from 18-22.

The study's sample represented the targeted population that fits the context and objectives of the study. The student sample was chosen based on their experience in the language courses and materials across four foundation levels. The importance of choosing experienced persons will no doubt contribute to supporting the purpose of presenting comprehensive

and meaningful findings (Dornyei, 2012; Punch, 2009; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Denzin and Lincoln, 2008).

Prior to answering the questionnaire survey, the researchers delineated the purpose of the study and the items via emails and informal meetings. The respondents were informed that their views and perceptions would contribute to designing a significant digital course that will be used in the future for training purposes by undergraduates and young employees.

Instruments of the Data Analysis
The data collected from the questionnaire survey were analyzed and displayed descriptively using statistical features such as frequency counts and percentages. The tool of Google Forms was used to collect the data quantitatively online. The responses were automatically recorded and represented in a Google spreadsheet in an analyzable format using graphical representations such as bar and pie charts. The analysis presented a summary of responses with percentages for each questionnaire item.

Findings of the Study
This section reports the findings obtained from the data analysis providing answers to each research question. The findings are organized into three sections according to the research questions and objectives. For clarification and illustration, tables with items and percentages are attached along with the discussion. Every table, is attached with a list of abbreviations such as A, agree; N, neutral; DA, disagree; and F, frequency."

Section One Findings: The impact of the Workplace English Dgital Course (WEDC) on students' English Language Skills and Competence

This section assisted in exploring how the expected digital course impacts students' skills and competencies if it is integrated into the existing curriculum. Section One is related to Question One "What are undergraduates' perceptions towards incorporating a Workplace English Digital Course into the academic curriculum as a supllimentary material? In response to this question, the survey included a set of questionnaire items concerned with investigating the impact of the course on students' language skills and competencies. Thus, Finding One outlines quantitatively the percentages of the respondents' answers. Table 1 below presents the findings according to each item with the percentages.

Table 1.The Impact of the Workplace English Digital Course on Undergraduates' English language Skills and Competence

	Item	A	N	DA
1	The Workplace English Digital Course improves my communication skills required for the workplace.	88.6%	11.1%	0
2	The Workplace English Digital Course is sufficiently helpful to improve the vocabulary required for the workplace.	85.2%	11.5%	2.3%
3	The workplace English digital course is an efficient way to improve my technical and vocational English.	88.9	9.5	1.6
4	The Workplace English Digital Course is sufficiently helpful to improve my listening skills for a variety of the workplace settings.	85.2%	9.5%	4.8%
5	The Workplace English Digital Course is sufficiently helpful to improve my reading skills for a variety of the workplace settings.	92.1%	7.9%	0
6	The Workplace English Digital Course prepares me to improve my speaking skills in a variety of workplace situations.	76.2%	20.6%	2.3%
7	The Workplace English Digital Course is sufficiently helpful to improve my writing skills for a variety of the workplace settings.	84.1%	12.7%	3.2%

A, agree; N, Neutral; DA, disagree

The impact of the Workplace English Digital Course on communication skills - Table1 shows that a large percentage of students (88.6%) agreed that the WEDC improves their communication skills for the workplace. However, the table shows zero disagreement in this regard. Around (11.1%) remained neutral.

The Impoact of The WEDC on Learning the Required Workplace Vocabulary-Based on Table 1, the majority of the respondents agreed on the impact of the proposed course on improving the required vocabulary for the workplace. In comparison, only (2.3%) reported disagreement. Around (11.5%) remained neutral.

The impact of the WEDC on listening skills- Table 1 reveals that a large percentage of the respondents (85.2%) agreed, while only (4.8%) who disagreed on the impact. Very few respondents (9.5%) remained neutral.

The impact of the WEDC on reading skills-The results according to Table 1 are not that different from those of the listening skill. Most of the respondents (92.1%) reported their agreement. In contrast, no one student reported disagreement, and a few students (7.9%) were neutral.

The impact of the WEDC course on speaking skills-With regard to the speaking skill, Table 1 indicates that the majority of the respondents (76.2%) agreed on the role of the proposed course in enhancing their speaking and communication skills required for the work place. Less than one third of the respondents (22.3%) remained neutral, while the table shows only (2.3%) fo the students who disagreed on the impact.

The impact of the WEDC course on Writing skills- According to the writing skill, Table 1 shows percentages that are the same as those for the speaking skill. Table 1 indicates that the majority of the respondents (84.1%) agreed on the role of the proposed course in enhancing their writing skill required for the work place. Very few respondents (12.7%) remained neutral, while the table shows a very low disagreement (3.2%) in this regard.

Section Two Findings: The impact of the Workplace English Dgital Course on Students' Motivation

Table 2. The Impact of the EOP Courseware on Students' motivation

	Item	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1	I am motivated to learn English for the workplace.	71.4	23.8	4.8
2	I believe that having the Workplace English Digital Course helps to increase my learning motivation.	74.6	20.6	4.8
3	The Workplace English Digital Course increases my self-esteem as it is related to my future career.	76.2	22.2	1.6
4	The Workplace English Digital Course increases my autonomy in learning English.	88.9	11.1	0

5	The Workplace English Digital Course reduces learners' anxiety towards English language learning.	77.8	14.3	7.9
6	The Workplace English Digital Course makes learning more enjoyable than a general English course.	90.5	9.5	0
7	The Workplace English Digital Course helps me to learn technical and vocational English at my convenience.	81.9	19	0

A, agree; N, Neutral; DA, disagree

This section provides answers to research Question Two "To what extent does the proposed Workplace English Digital Course affect students' motivation?". The data shown in Table 2 reveals how the student sample perceived the effects of proposed course on their motivation while studying at the university. Obviously, the respondents expressed their agreement on the proposed digital course.

Students' motivation to learn English for the workplace. This item is related to exploring the respondents' motivation in learning the workplace English skills. Table 2 shows that the majority of the respondents (71.4%) are motivated, whereas only (4.8) are demotivated. Around one third of the respondents (23.8) remained neutral.

The impact of the Workplace English Digital Course on mtudents' motivation- Table 2 shows that the majority of the respondents (74.6) reported their agreement. Around one third (20.6%) of the respondents were neutral, whereas only (4.8%) reported their disagreement.

The impact of the Workplace English Digital Course on students' self-esteem- Table 2 reveals that around half of the students expressed their agreement (76.2 %). However, those who disagreed were very few (9.1%). Around one third of the students (22.2%) were neutral.

The impact of the Workplace English Digital Course on students' autonomy in learning workplace skills- Table 2 shows that the majority of the respondents (88.9%) reported their agreement on the role of the proposed course in increasing their autonomy in improving their English

skills. In comparison, the table shows zero disagreement in this regard. Those who remained neutral were only (11.1%).

The impact of the Workplace English Digital Course on controlling students' anxiety towards English language learning. The results related to this item are not quite different from the previous ones. Table 2 indicates that (77.8%) of the respondents expressed their agreement, while only a few respondents (7.9%) expressed their disagreement. Also, a small proportion of the participants (14.3) remained neutral.

The impact of the Workplace English Digital Course on the learning atmosphere- This item is related that whether the proposed course makes learning more enjoyable or not than the general English course. Table 2 shows that (most of the respondents (90.5%) agreed on this feature in comparison to zero disagreement. A few respondents (9.5) were neutral.

The impact of the Workplace English Digital Course on vocabulary learning- Table 2 reflects the participants' high agreement (81.9) in contrast to the zero disagreement. Less than a quarter of the participants (19.%) remained neutral.

Section Three Finding: Students' Perceptions Regarding the Needs of the Workplace English Digital Course

Table 3. Students' perceptions towards the needs of the workplace English digital course

	Item	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1	I need the Workplace English Digital Course for my future career.	96.9	0	2.3
2	I need a course offering English for the workplace to be used along with the academic curriculum.	89.1	9.4	1.6
3	I think that the workplace English digital course must be only based on the needs of the workplace in Oman.	43.8	42.2	14.1
4	I think that the workplace English digital course must be based on the needs of the global workplace.	93.7	4.8	1.6
5	I think that the workplace English digital course must be based on the needs of the global workplace and the needs of the local	80	5	15

	workplace.			
6	I think the workplace English digital course must include authentic situations related to the workplace.	95.2	4.8	0
7	The workplace English digital course must include skills of communication required in the workplace locally and globally.	90.3	9.7	0
8	I think the workplace English digital course exposes me to the culture of the workplace through the websites, activities, and platforms of online learning.	84.1	12.7	3.2
9	I think that the course must include an online evaluation system to assess our performance while using the course?	77.8	14.3	7.9

According to Question Three "What are students' perceptions regarding the needs of the Workplace Englosh Digital Course?" the respondents were required to rate the overall needs of the WEDC digital course and specific needs related to the process of course development. Table 3 shows that the Agree option had higher rate than the Disagree and the Neutral option. The results are displayed below in terms of items (1-9) as showsn in Table 3.

The need of the Workplace English Digital Course for future career- As can be seen in Table 3, all respondents voted for the need of the digital course. The majority of the respondents (96.7%) think that the WEDC course is important for their future career while only (2.3%) of the respondents didn't believe in the role of the course for future purposes. The zero rate is for those wgo remained neutral.

The need of the WEDC to be used along with the existing academic curriculum-According to Item 2, the majority of the respondents (89.1%) voted for the agree option, while only (1.6%) voted for the disagree option. A few respondents (9.4) were neutral.

The WEDC must be only based on the local needs of the workplace in Oman. Item 3 reveals the respondents' perceptions regarding whether the

course must be only based o the local needs of the workplace in Oman or not, the responses were between agree (43.8%) and neutral (42.2%). A few respondents (14.1%) reported their disagreement.

The WEDC must be only based on the local needs of the global workplace. Item 4 revealed a different perspective of the respondents from that in Item 3. The majority of the respondents (93.7%) agreed that the course must be based on the needs of the global workplace. Only (1.6%) of the respondents disagreed and (4.8) remained neutral.

The WEDC must be only based on both the local and global needs of the workplace- Item 5 revealed the respondents' agreement on designing a course based on the local and the global needs of the workplace. Aound (80%) of the respondents voted for the agree option, while (15%) voted for the disagree option. Those who remained neutral were very few (5%).

The WEDC must include authentic situations related to the workplace context. Item 6 concerning the situations or senarios that must be included in the course as examples. the results in Table 3 show the respondents' high agreement (95.2%), while zero disagreement. A few respondents (4.8) remained neutral.

The WEDC must include must include the required skills of communication in the workplace-Item 7 is similar to the previous items in showing the respondents' high agreement on including skills of communication that are required in the workplace locally and globally. The agree option was very high (90.3%) in comparison to the zero disagreement option and the neutral option that was only (9.7) of the respondents.

The importance of the WEDC through the employment of the e-learning platform. Item 8 explored a very important thing regarding the e-learning mode that must be used for delivering the course. The majority of the participants (84.1%) reported their agreement while only (3.2) reported their disagreement. Those who were neutral were only (12.7%) of the participants.

The WEDC must include an online evaluation system for assessing undegraduates' performance-Item 9 revealed students' responses towards whether the digital course must include an online evaluation system to enhances students' skills of learning English or not. Importantly, the result showed that the "agree responses were (77.8%). This is a very important result that will be further elaborated on in the Discussion of Findings Section.

In comparison, only (7.9 %) reported their disagreement and (14.3%) remained neutral.

Discussion of the Findings

This study explores undergraduates' perceptions on the integration of a workplace English digital course in the academic curriculum. The major findings revealed that the majority of the respondents' perceptions were positive towards the proposal of designing a digital course offering English for the workplace. This implies that the undergraduates consider the proposed course important and necessary for their academic progress and future career as well. The findings also implies that the English language proficiency is a job requirement because it plays a vital role in workplace communication.

   Overall, the general findings may lead us to conclude that students want English language centers in technical universities need to consider the workplace language needs and communication practices. Considering the needs of the workplace English provides undergraduates with the skills and competence required for communication in the workplace

   The first finding reflected the students' high interest in the significant role of the proposed course. Most of them believed in the positive impacts of the course in enhancing their English language skills and competencies required for the workplace. This result is consistent with previous results obtained in previous studies (Neville, 2018; Shahraniza, 2016; Kassim and Ali, 2010). These studies highlighted the importance of integrating ESP or EOP into curriculum development and training programs. The most finding in this section is the high rate given to the two skills, speaking and writing, compared to the reading and listening skills. This finding confirms the importance of speaking and writing skills in the workplace, as most tasks require a high degree of speaking and writing skills (Kassim and Ali, 2010; Malicka et al., 2019; Shahraniza, 2016; Abdikarimova et al., 2021).

   Section one findings also reflected the participants' awareness of the significant role of the workplace English digital course in enhancing many aspects of workplace communicative competencies such as effective communication, global interaction, negotiation, conferencing knowledge, workplace skills, business and personal entrepreneurial skills, as well as motivation to enhance their professional development. These conclusions, in turn, lead to another conclusion that is the necessity of considering and highlighting workplace competencies as a key component in curriculum

design and training courses (Lackéus, 2014; Yussof et al., 2019; Ferreras-Garcia et al., 2021; Deardorff and Jones, 2012).

Section Two findings demonstrated the students' interest in the proposed digital course in raising their motivation to learn and develop workplace skills and competencies along with the general English language skills. This finding confirms the contribution of e-learning and the theory of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in higher education (Al-Khalidi; 2021, 2022). The proposed digital course is considered a modern technique that plays an important role in promoting self-learning, engagement, and motivation. This finding confirms the results of a previous study regarding the pedagogical benefits of technology integration in learning and teaching practices. For example, Al-Khalidi (2021) carried out a study to investigate the perceptions of undergraduates regarding the impact of technology in education. Al-Khalidi came up with several findings and themes that confirmed the role of technology integration in creating motivation, involvement, and engagement (For further discussion, see Al-Khalidi, 2020, 2021 a, b, and c.)

Section Three findings revealed the participants' satisfaction with the advantages of the proposed digital course in learning as an effective mode of e-learning. This indicates their awareness of the potential effects of the digital course on educational learning, such as the global and local workplace skills, reducing learning challenges, developing workplace skills, and the like. The results proved the necessity of implementing e-learning technologies into university education and training programs. This finding confirms the results of several previous studies that have revealed the positive effects of e-learning from the students' insights (Al-Khalidi, 2020; 2021; Chang, 2016; Puentedura, 2012). For instance, in this regard, Al-Khalidi (2020) reported that "within the field of TESOL, in addition to the characteristics of the net generation and the digital technology innovation, language learning itself has become highly demanding as it requires learners to have frequent practices to achieve language proficiency" (p. 107).

This finding goes in line with what Dudley-Evans (2001) suggested regarding the integration of the EOP into the EAP program. According to Dudley-Evans' perspective, the rationale for integrating EOP into the language program is to foster specific educational needs through content-based instruction. Language learning and content of subject matter can be brought together because a foreign language is most successfully acquired when learners are engaged in its meaningful and purposeful use.

Acknowledgement

Conclusion

This study aims to explore UTAS undergraduates' perceptions on the integration of a workplace English digital course (WEDC) into the existing academic curriculum. The study has come up with the conclusion that the majority of the undergraduate respondents who participated in the questionnaire survey, are in favor of the proposed course. The results of the study have provided evidence that the WEDC integration would contribute to boosting their English language skills and competence and increasing their motivation during the period of study at the college. Most importantly, the results explored their need of the course. Based on their perceptions, the course is considered a kind of training program that helps prepare them for the requirements of the future workplace.

After the analysis of the obtained findings, the researchers recommend that curriculum developers and stakeholders in the entire context as well as other similar contexts, are encouraged to develop the WEDC to be employed along with the academic curriculum. Integration can be done in the form of asynchronous learning, where undergraduates can engage with the course content, activities, and online quizzes anytime and anywhere.

Further research is required to explore two important questions. The first question is concerned with the process of course development, in the sense of what content, materials, and activities are to be included. The second question, on the other hand, is concerned with investigating the specific needs of the workplace to be blended and injected with the instructional design of the course content.

Recommendations

The findings of this study and our teaching experience stimulated us to suggest several recommendations that may be of value to stakeholders and trainers in academic and industrial institutions. Generally, the technical institutions in higher education need to take into consideration the importance of training to prepare the graduates for the workplace in line with the global requirements and standards. This entails that the higher education institutions need to reconsider their visions and learning

objectives to align with the modern workplace and self-employment requirements.

Universities of technology and applied sciences, in collaboration with vocational institutions in Oman, need to develop a training course to offer skills in English for the workplace. Today's workplace is moving online. Accordingly, stakeholders in higher education must take advantage of the benefits of virtual learning that has proved to fit the lifestyle of many students who are considered digital natives (Brown and Lee, 2014). The flexibility of an online course provides undergraduates with the opportunity to learn and grow professionally while studying. Thus, developing digital software or an app composed of a combination of syllabuses, activities and tasks, materials, and assessment quizzes is necessary. Potentially, the Workpalce English software will assist students in gaining knowledge and skills in the workplace, such as effective communication, problem-solving, negotiation, conducting formal meetings, and the like. Moreover, the proposed software will assist undergraduates in gaining workplace English competence and improve their overall language proficiency.

The EWP/EOP courses are targeting the goal of improving and heightening undergraduates' knowledge and skills (Al-Mahrooqi and Denman, 2016; Bhat and Singh, 2018; Al Hinai, 2018). Therefore, the learning objectives must take into account EWP/EOP knowledge, values and incentives, competencies and potentials, and skills of social as well as professional communication.

Developing EWP/EOP competencies must be embedded within teaching practices. This entails that teachers and instructional designers need to consider how to make competencies teachable and learnable behavior. This also requires from instructional designers and educators to employ the effective and modern techniques for training purposes.

Limitations

The limitations of this study are in the method of data collection and sample. First, concerning the method, we believe that the questionnaire survey is not quite sufficient to collect all the required information in terms of quantity and quality. Semi-structured interviews are required to gain more in-depth data. Second, the sample of respondents was limited to only one branch of UTAS. Further undergraduates, along with professors at the English Language Center and major departments (IT, Engineering, and Business departments), need to be involved in this study to contribute further to the validity and reliability of the study.

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