Blended Learning in English Teaching and Learning: An Overview of Current Practice in Oman

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ABSTRACT

Education has undergone a revolution in the 21st century, witnessing the implementation of information communication technology (ICT) as a vital element of teaching and learning. As such, ICT is commonly used in all aspects of education, especially to teach English. In terms of English language teaching, traditional strategies have been replaced by modern techniques where technology is integrated. Recently, the blended learning model has been widely adopted as a viable strategy. Therefore, this conceptual paper addresses the use of ICT for teaching in Oman. It critiques this use, specifically within Oman's English language curriculum, with an in-depth review of the literature. It demonstrates that the blended learning model offers a flexible platform for English language education. It also recommends that Omani English language teachers apply blended learning principles and techniques in their classroom practice. Moreover, it reviews the blended learning framework implemented to teach English in Oman. The goal of this paper is to provide a comprehensive picture of how ICT may be introduced into Omani education. This is proposed based on previous studies conducted in the Omani context, and on the blended learning literature. However, there is a lack of information on the adoption of blended learning in Oman. The reviewed papers include five main elements: the use of ICT in teaching in Oman, problems that arise when applying ICT in teaching, the Omani English language curriculum, the blended learning approach, and suggested methods of using blended learning to teach English in Oman.

Keywords: Blended learning, English language, Fourth Graders, ICT

Introduction

Education has arguably been at the heart of global development and success in the 21st century (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Over this period, the education system in Oman has sought to link educational outcomes to the requirements for career success (Sultan Qaboos, 2012). It has been stated that globalization has brought the world closer to form a community like a small village, with increased interaction between people of different nationalities and ethnicities. Borders have become more indistinct, making effective connections ever more important (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012). In Oman, English language teaching began to receive serious attention from the government in 1970, when His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said succeeded to the throne (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012). Moreover, teachers were considered to be the key players in students' English language achievement (Al-Mahrooqi & Tuzlukova, 2010). The teacher's role is undeniably important for making students aware that they are responsible for their own learning (Al-Issa, 2006). However, Omani students tend to encounter problems when attempting to learn English. One of the reasons for these problems is the absence of technical teaching aids in schools and other institutes of learning. Consequently, no media, audiovisual communication, instructional systems, instructional design, vocational training or computer systems are used (Roblyer & Doering, 2013).

Numerous researchers have attempted to discover whether the incorporation of technology into the classroom assists students' learning in aspects such as (1) their engagement in meaningful activities, (2) their increased attention to

independent research and critical thinking (Drayton et al., 2010), (3) improved student performance (Jia et al., 2012), and (4) greater collaboration between teachers and students (Dawson et al., 2008; Mouza, 2008). Picciano et al. (2012) summarized research findings for the nature of online learning in K-12 education in the US, using a blended approach, which is an important element of the US education system. Research in the Netherlands has also identified a good relationship between English language proficiency and technology use in the learning process (English Proficiency Index, 2019). In addition, Wieggers (2014) has presented research findings for the use of technology in English language teaching, concluding that the integration of technology leads to more effective learning. In today's technology-driven world, children are likely to want to use online and digital devices that facilitate their learning, because they can watch video content in their own free time.

The Use of ICT in Teaching in Oman

Recently, the Omani Ministry of Education worked with Omantel, the Oman Telecommunications Company, to prepare Al-Mahammed School for Basic Education Cycle One (1-4) as a model of digital smart learning, whereby tablets, interactive screens and an Internet service were provided. Moreover, the Ministry of Education and Omantel have supported the digital transformation project for the education curriculum at Al-Athiba Training Centre, in order to meet needs in this area. Such experiences of applying the model in certain schools fall within a collective business plan to provide an interactive learning experience via ICT, so that this can then be generalised to other schools across Oman (Information Technology Authority, 2007).

The most important changes in teaching approaches in Oman is the adoption of technology to structure and perform teaching activities. Sultan Qaboos of Oman realized the significance of learning as the means by which the nation could keep pace with ICT development (Al Musawi, 2010). In his speech in 2011, he stressed the need to concentrate on improving awareness and responsibility among learners in Oman, whereby they should be supported in their efforts to gain experience and skills to reach higher cognitive levels (Sultan Qaboos, 2012). In September 1998, the Ministry of Education first introduced ICT into mixed-gender First Cycle schools of Basic Education (Al Musawi, 2010). Initially, seven computers were placed in the learning resource centres (LRCs) of the sampled schools (ibid.). Each learner from Grades 1-3 would then attend one weekly session of ICT-based learning, with two of these sessions per week for Grade 4 (ibid.). Meanwhile, in Second Cycle schools, each Grade would have two ITC classes each week (ibid.). However, it is argued that a mere one or two classes per week is insufficient for achieving Oman's productivity and aspirational goals for student advancement in technology. Furthermore, Oman has an impressive school ICT infrastructure, but limited and uneven connectivity. Consequently, there are computer labs, LRCs and other learning spaces in some establishments, consisting of, for example, science labs, training rooms and classrooms.

To date, around 20% of schools in Oman are equipped with computers, and around a third of schools have adequate connectivity for students to search the Internet (DSL connections). However, most have to rely on slower connections, such as via a mobile network, and there is little or no promotion of student-centered Internet use. However, one of the most important factors of successful implementation is training. In the context under study, teachers should be trained in the use of computers and other technology, and in methods of using technology to help students learn easily and effectively. ICT tools are designed responsibly to ensure that their implementation is not short-lived but rather sustainable over time. In encouraging young learners to create their own online classrooms in Oman, previous students have learned how to produce animated content and websites, as well as to programme various computer functions using advanced programming languages (MoE, 2008).

Challenges to the Use and Teaching of ICT

Because of rapid technological development, technology is tightly integrated into the learning of Cycle One students in Oman. Technological strategies and methods are applied to the curriculum in accordance with the desired aim of enriching the eductional experience of young learners (Al-Musawi et al., 2019). It has been observed that in academic contexts, students achieve more when suitable technologies are utilized, indicating technology as a primary factor of enhanced learning (MoE, 2019).

One of the benefits of using technology in the classroom is to manage the proliferation of information and knowledge, while dealing with growing student numbers, but not impairing the quality of the learning (Al Musawi, 2019). It has been observed in virtual classrooms that online and distance learning technology plays an essential role in facilitating the administration of education. Furthermore, technology contributes to the improvement of education systems. This

has involved Omani teachers outlining the advantages of applying technology in their classrooms, including the fact that it saves time and effort, helps develop skills and learning capacity, informs of new approaches in education, adds to the general pool of information, and facilitates teaching (Al-Musawi et al., 2020).

In Oman, Elementary education exhibits a combination of fundamental skills, knowledge, and usage strategies (ibid.). Learning in Oman where there is a focus on learners' preferences, and physical and psychological needs, interests and abilities (ibid.) may be classified into two domains. The first consists of Islamic Studies, Arabic Language, and Social Studies, while the second comprises Science and Mathematics. Teaching methods are structured according to the rule that the education of younger learners should have a lasting effect (MoE, 2019). However, Oman is considered to provide a low-to-medium technology environment, although it meets certain conditions for obtaining the full benefit of ICT in foreign-language teaching in schools. For the success of any ICT integration, devices and online-learning specialists should be sourced to establish a solid infrastructure (Pirani, 2004). The basic facilities required for ICT implementation include hardware, a high-speed Internet access, a reliable platform, experience, and continuous teacher training. The latter is considered essential to the successful use of technology in English teaching (Baylor & Ritchie, 2002; Pirani, 2004).

In this sense, Khan (2005) recommends that institutions and teachers be made aware of how to strategically and fully integrate technological approaches. For example, practitioners and their departments should combine managerial, evaluative, legal and ethical factors when seeking a digital transformation in teaching and learning. In this technology environment, students need to be equipped with the requisite knowledge and skills for the digital age of the 21st century. They therefore need to gain confidence in using and dealing with digital and technological data and resources. Moreover, they need to know how to generate, present and, more importantly, appraise data for accuracy and authenticity. Al-Musawi et al. (2020) found that most Omani teachers appear to use Android applications such as TeacherKit, QR code readers, and augmented reality programs (for example, HP Reveal®) by connecting their phones to screens to display lesson content to all learner's present. Teachers have found that using these applications helps develop students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills. However, these teachers are unlikely to have much knowledge about 21st century digital skills in general. The Oman Ministry of Education has formed a commission to draft a national skills profile, which includes techniques for helping in-service teachers and their institutions to integrate digital skills into curricular activities (MoE, 2018).

Despite the significance of English as a potent instrument for fulfilling diverse goals, Omani learners have always faced difficulties in language learning. Al-Mahrooqi (2012) consequently reported findings in a paper entitled: A Student Perspective on Low English Proficiency in Oman. The above study sampled 100 Sultan Qaboos University students who had previously graduated from public-sector schools. The results showed that 85% of these learners believed that the actions and performance of their teachers were the main reason for their low English proficiency. In particular, these students cited outdated traditional learning methods, which are teacher-centred. Emenyeonu (2012) adds that students play a passive role in the traditional classroom, merely receiving information from teachers. The classroom layout is also structured into straight lines of students working independently of each other, which affects their communication skills and reduces actual English language use.

In spite of these potential difficulties, the Omani government's education policy fully supports English language teaching in the nation's schools and higher education institutions, with a strong belief that "Oman needs English, the only official foreign language in the country, as a fundamental tool for 'modernization' and the acquisition of science and technology" (Al-Issa, 2007, pp.199-200). According to Renard (2010), for Oman's educational institutions to be able to fulfil their duty and become progressively more aligned with global standards, they should "continue to make significant investment in English to enable full involvement in global academic networks that function in English" (p.3). In this regard, their investment will depend on how the English language is currently perceived. For example, English is considered as the language of choice for science, scholarship, and the global participation of academic and business communities in the foreseeable future. Now, more than ever, English teaching in Oman could be described as entering a new and crucial phase, while the nation seeks to integrate into global communities and benefit from access to international markets, as well as from the academic and professional mobility afforded by globalization. At the same time, efforts have been made to integrate technology into English language teaching in Omani schools.

It is to be expected that if teachers have inadequate technology skills, they will favour traditional rather than electronic means, even where those means are available. Furthermore, educators' attitudes to the use of technology in language lessons has proven to be a determining factor in the degree of technology integration in Oman's educational development programme (Albirini, 2006; Al-Senaidi et al., 2009). Likewise, students require the right disposition and

attitude to use online learning, including when studying remotely. However, the results of the above studies indicate that the adoption of technology to teach English is attractive to learners, because most students are now digital natives. Furthermore, since technology shifts the focus from the teacher, it can reduce students' anxiety about language learning, because it offers them an opportunity to practice their language skills in a safe environment, with no risk of embarrassment about making mistakes. This can minimize students' 'affective filter' (Krashen, 1982; Krashen & Terrell, 1983; McLaughlin, 1990).

Educators who have already implemented ICT in their language teaching know how hard it can be to operate and benefit from the available applications and sources where not all these tools are present. ICT integration is therefore beset with frustration in such circumstances (Becta, 2004), and the difficulties involved in integrating technology into education can make it seem less favorable. Educators may feel reluctant to integrate digital devices into their strategies, because they do not understand how they function in the classroom. In turn, this could prevent them from applying certain strategies. Furthermore, the possible effects of technology on learners' target language communication skills, when depending on e-books; copy, cut and paste skills, and voice recording, could likewise be harmful to their English language learning. Glance (2015) claims that historically, this is nothing new, but "certainly the increase in the pace of change has resulted in our language changing equally rapidly, and with it, our thoughts". Educators and institutions should consequently be mindful of the ethical aspects of technology adoption among current and upcoming generations of students, paying special attention to phenomena such as cyber-bullying, technology addiction and plagiarism.

In Oman, no public or shared blended learning policy has been drafted to date. However, the Ministry of Education began promoting the concept this year (2020), due to the circumstances arising from the COVID-19 virus. Students have been unable to maintain effective learning since March 2020, due to an inefficient infrastructure. Thus, a new system of education is required, which will be appropriate for today's students. His Majesty Sultan Haitham al-Tariq of Oman has earmarked the academic year 2020/2021 for the development and introduction of blended learning, in acknowledgement of its importance in education (Nair, 2020). For example, the Oman Ministry of Education has been forced to apply e-learning via Google Classroom for Cycle Two students, and the Mandhara platform for Cycle One students. The Google Classroom platform is a Google Drive management tool, enabling teachers to create and deliver content, monitor students' participation, and assess students' performance and achievement. Both the above-mentioned platforms offer students an opportunity to utilize interactive features such as document-sharing and live learning. The Mandhara platform is linked with Microsoft Drive, functioning as per Google Drive (Nair, 2020).

Oman's English Language Curriculum

In Oman, the philosophy behind language teaching has become an important feature of the country's future. After 1970, Oman formed strong business relations with other non-English-speaking nations worldwide, for example, Portugal, Germany, Cyprus, Austria, Russia, Belgium, Greece, Sweden, France, Turkey and Italy. Consequently, English tends to be adopted as a familiar language to sustain communication between these countries and with other non-native English speakers (Al-Jadidi, 2009). This can be seen as the main factor driving English language learning in Oman. In addition, there are two further factors motivating the introduction of English into the Omani school curriculum. The first of these is globalization, because in the past, Oman faced challenges in preparing its population for future access to the international labor force, as created by the contemporary global economy. Therefore, it became necessary to equip the nation with the relevant abilities and skills, including language skills. The Omani government recognizes that the ability to communicate in English is fundamental to the modern world economy. Moreover, English has become the international language of science and technology, which are rapidly extending global computerized telecommunications and database networks. These networks are likewise a progressively important aspect of business and academic life (Al Abrawi, 2017). The second factor contributing to the importance of English language learning in Oman is 'Omanisation', given that the number of expatriate employees in Oman has been reduced (MoE, 2006).

In truth, it should be noted that Oman has never been under British rule, and so there is no real historical basis for English being one of its official languages, or for English-medium schools in Oman. Neither has there been any British educational provision of extraordinary quality on the territory (Al-Busaidi, 1995). Nevertheless, since the 1970s, English has seamlessly established itself as an official foreign language taught in schools, and a recognised formal medium of communication in both government and private organizations. It has therefore received economic, legislative and political support from the Omani government, finding a place in the social hierarchy. As a result, it has penetrated domains such as education, mass media, and business (English Proficiency Index, 2019). Hence, Omanis

learn English for many different reasons, such as education; communication; research and development; trade and commerce; employment; inter-lingual communication at home and abroad; accessing English-language culture; working in science and technology fields, and performing various analytical tasks. English communication skills are important for communicating with non-Arabic English speakers in Oman, and for many contexts within the nation; meaning that the ability to communicate in English is often a criterion for success in education and the workplace. More broadly, the ability to communicate in English enhances overall linguistic competence, giving an individual confidence and earning the respect of others. In contrast, it can lead to misunderstandings or even be considered impolite to revert to one's mother tongue when speaking English (Umale, 2011). In sum, English is seen as the gateway to new horizons of knowledge and opportunity, since English communication skills are perceived as having a positive impact on one's character, education, future opportunities, social relationships, interaction with other nationalities, and integration with the world (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012).

In Oman, the Ministry of Education has realized the importance of making dramatic improvements to English language education (Al-Jadidi, 2009). Omani policy emphasizes that English should only be used for official purposes in the country. Therefore, English is taught for general and specific goals in institutes, for example, the College of Banking and Financial Studies, the College of Law, the Colleges of Education, Sultan Qaboos University, the Health Sciences Institutes, Higher Colleges of Technology, and the Royal Air Force of Oman Academy. English is also the language of all fields of science in government organizations. Furthermore, English is the medium of instruction for all academic purposes at the Institutes of Health Sciences and Sultan Qaboos University, in order to equip learners with the core skills to complete their assignments and research papers in English. It should be mentioned here that each establishment has brought in ELT sources from the UK and US, with just a few internally produced materials (ibid.). The establishments concerned also employ large numbers of English-speaking teaching staff, as well as many educators who do not speak English (ibid.). At the time of conducting this current study, namely the academic year 2019/2020, there are 1166 schools distributed across Oman with 634,770 students. These public-sector schools are supported by 834 private schools and attended by 126,003 learners. Learning content in private schools is usually in English or a mixture of Arabic and English. These days, middle class parents are likely to enrol their children in these private schools, which are becoming increasingly popular (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018). This is because English plays a crucial role in Omani society and is seen as an important aspect of children's education, careers, and social life.

In addition to the public-sector and private school system, which covers almost every corner of Oman, Sultan Qaboos University was opened to the public in 1986. Here, the language of instruction for all sciences and humanities is English (ibid.). Since the founding of the University, around 40 universities and institutes of higher education have received students across Oman, most of which use English to teach many of their major subjects. While English is adopted in these educational establishments as a means of improving graduate employability, the progression from mainstream Arabic-medium public-sector schools to higher education is reported as an obstacle for Omani students (ibid.). This, Omani graduates have purportedly left school with poor English language communication skills, but have later graduated from university, successfully meeting the requirements of the labor market (Al-Issa, 2014; Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2016).

Over half a century ago, three educational reforms were implemented in relation to English language teaching, initially under the umbrella of 'General Education' in the 1970s. The second curricular reform involved the institution of 'Basic Education' in 1998, while the latest reform took place in 2006, under the heading 'Integrated Curriculum' (Al Abrawi, 2017). The General Education curriculum was old-fashioned in its outlook; concentrated in a teacher-centred strategy with English language instruction beginning in Grade 4. Change then took place regarding the age at which English instruction began in Omani schools, starting from Grade 1, when Basic Education was introduced (Al Abrawi, 2017). The rationale behind introducing English in Grade 1 was to build a firmer linguistic foundation and shape positive attitudes to language learning for the learners' future schooling (MoE, 1999). These reforms to English language teaching in Oman have helped encourage students in various ways. For example, students have acquired study skills and learning approaches that enable them to study both independently and in groups. Omani students have also developed thinking skills by communicating with native English speakers. In addition, English language skills facilitate the cross-curricular connections via which students access information and new concepts; developing their knowledge in various domains such as working with numbers, describing animals, telling stories with anticipated outcomes, life skills (where students may learn about other children's languages and skills), and gender – in activities found to support both genders learning from one another (MoE, 2012).

The objective of Basic Education was to develop students' Islamic values, while encouraging them to interact with the world. The reform was also intended to promote equal educational opportunities for the entire nation (Al Abrawi, 2017). Furthermore, the curriculum was designed to improve attitudes to language learning by using engaging materials such as games and songs to develop students' English listening, reading, writing and speaking skills. The development of teaching and learning was anticipated to increase technology use. Thus, television, computers and audio-equipment were used to listen to songs and stories recorded by native English speakers (MoE, 2010). Over the course of the school week, students have seven 40-minuute periods of English language instruction. The Integrated Curriculum was designed as a component of Basic Education for the Cycle One stage, with the goal of teaching Mathematics and Science through the medium of English. This reform was introduced into four schools in the Muscat region during the 2006/07 academic year. By 2010/11, 42 schools in different states across Oman were using this system. The reasons behind this reform consisted of trying to attain a balance between the four English language skills; modifying the methodology for teaching reading, so that fun phonics and shared reading were included; engaging in shared writing activities (teachers and students writing together) and integrating topics and activities to promote contextualized learning (MoE, 2009, p.3). In the Integrated Curriculum, learners receive two classes of English per day, which means up to five hours weekly. However, in 2011/12, the Curriculum was abandoned, due to complaints from educators in Integrated Curriculum schools, due to an overloaded curriculum, where teachers were facing challenges in using English to teach Mathematics and Science (Al Abrawi, 2017). Thus, the Ministry abolished the Integrated Curriculum and ordered all Primary Schools to revert to the Basic Curriculum.

Blended Learning

In the education sector, the evolution of learning depends on incorporating new instructional approaches to develop pedagogy and enhance resilience. A number of studies have been conducted to identify teaching techniques that can accommodate e-learning, while also retaining the positive results of traditional instruction (as represented in 'blended learning'). Rooney (2003) states that in the US, blended learning has been indicated as one of the top 10 training and development approaches that are most likely to emerge in the scope of the ICT industry. A common definition of blended learning is the combination of online modes and the traditional classroom. Internationally, there has been a significant increase in the practice of merging traditional and online classes to create blended learning over recent years. For example, Sharpe et al. (2006) highlight that blended learning is widespread in the UK and could become more common in North America (Bonk et al., 2006) and Australia (Eklund et al., 2003). The current study found that on 80% of online learning courses in higher education institutes in the US, blended learning activities were included (Arabasz Boggs & Baker, 2003). Lecturers and educators apply blended learning on their courses to take advantage of the best pedagogical techniques for online and face-to-face learning (Godambe et al., 2004), using various types of instruction and modes of delivery. The literature reveals that blended learning has been explored across all disciplines in higher education to discover its strengths and weaknesses. In particular, blended learning should be adopted after identifying stakeholders' perceptions and opinions, i.e. those of the administrators, lecturers and students.

Bonk and Graham (2006) assert that the potential shown by blended learning is extensive, and that additional research and innovation in practice will help distinguish its main contributions, develop it appropriately, and impact on the field. Meanwhile, Cao (2018) considers that blended learning has not only produced positive learning outcomes but has also been successful in training Primary School teachers. The findings from the literature are intended to help teachers solve the problem of building a sound knowledge structure, develop a deeper understanding of the knowledge framework, and construct educational content as a triangulated mechanism to deliver training to English language teachers in Primary Schools.

Over the past few years, the substantial presence of Web-based instruction has led to the adoption of the term 'blended learning', also referred to as hybrid learning, mixed-mode learning, and technology-mediated or enhanced learning. However, no single definition of blended learning exists internationally (Sharpe et al., 2006), although a combination of traditional face-to-face learning and online learning is generally held to be an adequate description, as mentioned earlier (Bonk & Graham, 2006). The above author explains that because of differences in methods and user needs, online and face-to-face (traditional) learning have tended to be kept separate. He points out that all Web-based or distance learning largely depends on the ability to learn independently and interact with others by remote means, whereas in traditional learning, human interaction takes precedence. However, in the case of technological innovation, the interaction that takes place in e-learning, whether synchronous or asynchronous, helps integrate the face-to-face environment with the online environment.

Suggestions for Ways of Using Blended Learning in English-language Teaching in Oman

Because of rapid technological development, technology is profoundly integrated into the learning process among Cycle One students in Oman. Technological strategies and methods are applied in the curriculum, based on the desired aim of enriching young learners' educational experience. It was observed that students' academic achievement increased when suitable technologies were utilized, highlighting technology as a primary factor of enhanced learning (MoE, 2019). One of the benefits of using technology in the classroom is its ability to manage the vast quantity of information and content that is now available. It also helps accommodate the boom in educational demand (higher student numbers), without affecting the quality of educational provision (Al Musawi, 2019). This is evident from virtual classroom applications, and e-learning and distance learning programmes, where technology is pivotal to the instructional and learning process. Furthermore, technology is helping to improve Oman's education system in general, with Omani teachers describing the benefits of technology implementation in the classroom as follows: it can save time and effort, helps develop skills and teaching ability, keeps practitioners up to date with the latest teaching strategies, enhances overall knowledge, and facilitates teaching practice (Al-Musawi et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, despite the many study findings that demonstrate the advantages of using blended learning to teach English, there are certain challenges associated with this model. To address these, it is recommended to resolve any technical issues, provide appropriate training, increase the number of e-learning labs, and recognize better performance from teachers and learners. These recommendations should in turn be translated into an action plan and road map to render blended learning more effective for supporting English language learning opportunities. Moreover, it is proposed that the use of computerized teaching with face-to-face instruction to teach English can contribute to improved student performance (Oweis, 2018).

Conclusion

The importance of English as an international language worldwide cannot be denied, since today, it is the means by which science, information technology, technological progress, politics, communication, international relations, and many other areas operate (Crystal, 1992; Phillipson, 1992; Bisong, 1995; Graddol, 2006; Altbach, 2010). Due to its importance, Omani stakeholders have linked the modernization and development of their country with the English language proficiency of its inhabitants. Therefore, although spoken English is not so important for moderating technology and science in Omani culture, it is considered as a means of communicating with non-Arabic speakers around the world. However, it is also seen as a crucial springboard with which the country can propel itself to the height of global development. Hence, English is taught from Grade 1 in Basic Education schools, while many private schools teach it from Kindergarten onwards. Significantly, more than 80% of High School graduates are required to take a Foundation English programme before they can complete their higher education (Carroll et al., 2009; Al-Mamari, 2011).

There is clearly a great deal of ongoing innovation in the field of educational technologies. Numerous research studies have identified the effect of these technologies and computer systems on the learning experience in all aspects of education, including language teaching and learning (Schacter & Fagnano, 1999). However, most of these studies have concentrated on the effect of e-learning on achievement, without the incorporation of any face-to-face instruction. There has been a widespread dispute among Omani English language teachers, concerning the effectiveness of combining online learning and the traditional classroom. Many English language teachers prefer to use online content no more than twice a week with their English language students, while others regard the use of electronic content as futile and therefore a waste of time and energy. Nevertheless, some English language teachers are in favour of merging conventional content with electronic computerized material to produce optimal outcomes in English language lessons. This current study recommends examining the impact of blended learning on the achievement of Grade 4 learners in Oman, specifically with regard to the English language, and in light of the generally conflicting opinions and convictions surrounding the feasibility of using online learning alongside conventional classroom activities in Omani schools. The rationale for selecting Grade 4 students for this research was (1) to develop an understanding of how the blended learning model can be successfully embraced and managed in Oman's Basic Education, (2) because children in this age group need more attention, as they are very young (Waters, 2011), (3) because Omani children have no access to an English-speaking environment outside of the classroom, as they are rarely formally exposed to native English speakers, and very few have the chance to listen to their parents speaking English at home (Al-Jardani, 2013), and (4) because learning a foreign language is known to be easier and more effective in early childhood.

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