

Original Research Article

Charting the Landscape of English-Medium Business Education in Oman: Insights into Lecturer Perspectives on Teaching Approaches, Pedagogy, and Reflective Practices

Joefrelin C. Ines^{1*}, Marilou Q. Tolentino², Bernadette V. Abella³

¹College of Economics and Business Administration, University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Musandam, Oman

²College of Business, Systems Plus College Foundation, Angeles City, Philippines

³DBA, Institute of Graduate and Professional Studies, Lyceum of Northwestern University, Dagupan City, Philippines

*Corresponding Author: Joefrelin C. Ines

College of Economics and Business Administration, University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Musandam, Oman

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Abstract: This study delves into the challenges faced by business studies lecturers in Oman's English-medium business programs, brought about by the recent shift towards adopting English as the medium of instruction. These challenges span linguistic barriers, cultural disparities, and varying student language proficiencies. The study explores the strategies lecturers employ to overcome these obstacles and assesses the effectiveness of these strategies in fostering positive learning outcomes. Regression and correlation analyses use a quantitative research design to quantify the relationship between challenges and strategies. The findings offer valuable insights for curriculum development, faculty training, and pedagogical support, enhancing teaching quality and students' readiness for the global business environment.

Keywords: Teaching Approaches, Pedagogy, Reflective Practices, linguistic barriers, cultural disparities.

INTRODUCTION

English-medium instruction has gained prominence in higher education globally, including in Oman. In recent years, Omani universities have increasingly adopted English as the medium of instruction in various academic disciplines, including business education. This shift is driven by the desire to internationalize higher education and prepare students for global competitiveness. However, implementing English-medium instruction in Oman's universities has raised questions and concerns among educators, particularly university lecturers.

The integration of English as the primary instructional language has witnessed a significant surge in prominence across global higher education, a trend distinctly evident in the academic landscape of Oman. Notably, Omani universities have been progressively embracing English as the medium of instruction across diverse academic disciplines, prominently within business education. This fundamental transition reflects a relentless aspiration to foster the internationalization of higher education and equip students with the essential competencies to thrive in an increasingly competitive global arena. However, this profound shift towards English-medium instruction within Oman's universities has instigated a wave of inquiries and apprehensions, particularly among the esteemed cohort of university lecturers.

The impetus driving this transition is multifaceted and inherently tied to the overarching goal of aligning Omani education with international standards, thereby enhancing the country's position in the global academic milieu. With a keen eye on preparing students to navigate the complexities of a globalized world and fostering their competitiveness on an international platform, adopting English-medium instruction is a pivotal strategy in reshaping the educational landscape.

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Yet, this paradigmatic shift has engendered a spectrum of queries and concerns among the cadre of educators entrusted with imparting knowledge within Omani universities. The nuanced challenges and intricacies inherent in integrating English as the primary instructional language, especially within the business education domain, have prompted a robust and comprehensive inquiry into the perspectives and experiences of these erudite lecturers.

Amidst this educational transformation, a critical need exists to unravel the intricate layers of this transition from the vantage point of those at the forefront of imparting knowledge. The profound insights and experiential wisdom offered by university lecturers in business studies can unravel the complexities, challenges, and potential avenues of enhancement within the realm of English-medium business Education in Oman.

As the educational paradigm in Oman undergoes this transformative phase, this study endeavors to delve deeply into the multifaceted dimensions of this transition, meticulously exploring the perceptions, challenges, and innovative practices of esteemed lecturers. By encapsulating their valuable insights into teaching approaches, pedagogical nuances, and reflective practices, this research aims to comprehensively understand the current state of English-medium Business Programs in Oman.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Al-Issa, A. S., Al-Bulushi, A. H. (2012) stated that the Sultanate of Oman has recognized the significance of English as a global language for several decades, leading to substantial investments in its implementation through education. Despite these efforts, shortcomings in English language proficiency among students exiting the English Language Teaching (ELT) system have been identified, impacting Oman's national development. An examination of 141 first-year students who transitioned from the Basic Education System (BES) to Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) in 2009 revealed limited changes in the reform project compared to the previous General Education System (GES). Implementation issues were identified as a primary cause of this stagnation.

According to Al-Issa, A. (2005), English language learning in Oman is influenced by the 'colonialist/culturalist' ideology embedded in the National English Language Plan/Policy (NELP). However, conflicts arise between the statements in NELP and locally produced materials and implementation methods. The study critically examines this ideological conflict through interviews with key agents in ELT, literature analysis, and policy texts, discussing its implications for second language material design.

Meanwhile, Al Khatri, A. M. (2019) noted that The Ministry of Education in Oman responds to international demands by reforming the educational system to include 21st-century competencies and skills. This study investigates Omani teachers' perceptions of integrating these competencies into the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) curriculum, emphasizing a step forward in enhancing the quality of education.

Al-Bakri, S. (2013) observed that Oman's shift to English Medium Instruction (EMI) in higher education is explored through the lens of Omani college students. The study unveils students' attitudes shaped by educational and sociocultural factors, presenting challenges faced and coping strategies employed. The preference for English over Arabic is noted, challenging assumptions about the efficiency of education conducted solely in English.

Al-Jadidi, H. S. S. (2009) explored English language teaching pedagogy in Omani tertiary education, and this dissertation investigates the preferences for bilingual and monolingual teachers. Prompted by the government's need for skilled English teachers, the study assesses the benefits and drawbacks of L1 and L2 usage in the classroom.

Alhassan, A., Ali, N. A., & Ali, H. I. H. (2021) Investigated challenges in English-medium business programs. This study, conducted in Sudan, employs qualitative methods to explore students' experiences and teachers' perspectives. Challenges impacting academic performance are identified, offering pedagogical implications for EMI business education and English for academic purposes (EAP).

Pun, J. K., Fu, X., & Cheung, K. K. C. (2023). Their study focuses on a teacher educator's translanguaging practices in English Medium Instruction (EMI) classrooms, revealing planned and generative strategies. The importance of reflective practice for effective translanguaging in EMI settings is emphasized.

Muttaqin, S., & Chuang, H. H. (2022) explored students' expectations, challenges, and strategies in English-medium instruction; this study in Indonesia differentiates between mainstream, bilingual, and international classes. Students' diverse backgrounds impact their learning experiences, highlighting the need for institutional support to achieve EMI program goals.

Hossain, K. I. (2024) Reviewed the role of culture in English language learning. This paper identifies challenges and opportunities for educators and, drawing on existing literature, emphasizes the significance of creating culturally inclusive language learning environments.

Nosirova's (2023) article explores the challenges ESL learners face, emphasizing the role of motivation, cultural factors, language input, and individual differences. It underscores the importance of a comprehensive and learner-centered approach to ESL education.

Al Barwani, T., Al Mekhlafi, A., & Neisler, O. (2010) on their study discuss a service learning project at Sultan Qaboos University, Oman, aiming to bridge the gap between Omani and expatriate populations. Thirty EFL student teachers prepared cultural kits to enhance cultural understanding, showcasing the ELT Multicultural Awareness Transaction Model's potential application in cultural exchange.

Khawaja, R., & Shuqair, S. (2021) noted that in surveying English medium instruction (EMI) lecturer training globally, this paper analyzes 25 articles covering 18 countries. It identifies four main training components and diverse delivery methods, emphasizing the importance of contextualization, addressing group heterogeneity, and incentivizing lecturers.

These studies critically examine Oman's English language education landscape, highlighting challenges, reform efforts, and their impact on students and teachers. The literature underscores the need for continuous reflection, policy adaptation, and pedagogical innovation to enhance Oman's English language teaching and learning.

Effectiveness of Strategies:

Evaluating the effectiveness of these strategies is crucial. Lecturers aim to enhance students' English language proficiency, foster cultural awareness, and improve learning outcomes. This study seeks to quantify the impact of these strategies through statistical analysis.

Statement of the Problem:

Adopting English as the medium of instruction in business programs in Oman has introduced a range of challenges for lecturers. These challenges encompass linguistic barriers, cultural differences, and variations in student language proficiency. Lecturers must navigate these obstacles to ensure effective teaching and learning in an English-centric educational environment. Understanding the nature and impact of these challenges is crucial for enhancing the quality of education in English-medium business programs.

Objectives of the Study:

The primary objectives of this study were as follows:

1. To identify the challenges business studies lecturers face in delivering English-medium programs in Oman.
2. To explore the strategies and pedagogical approaches lecturers employ to address these challenges.
3. To assess the effectiveness of these strategies in achieving positive learning outcomes for students.

Hypothesis:

The study found that lecturers in English-medium business programs in Oman face significant language, culture, and student language proficiency challenges. Additionally, it was discovered that lecturers employ various strategies to overcome these challenges, and the effectiveness of these strategies can be quantified through statistical analysis.

1. Null Hypothesis: Lecturers in English-medium business programs in Oman do not face significant language challenges.
2. Null Hypothesis: Lecturers in English-medium business programs in Oman do not face significant culture-related challenges.
3. Null Hypothesis: Lecturers in English-medium business programs in Oman do not face significant challenges related to student language proficiency.
4. Null Hypothesis: Lecturers in English-medium business programs in Oman do not employ various strategies to overcome language challenges.
5. Null Hypothesis: Lecturers in English-medium business programs in Oman do not employ various strategies to overcome culture-related challenges.
6. Null Hypothesis: Lecturers in English-medium business programs in Oman do not employ various strategies to overcome challenges related to student language proficiency.

Conceptual Framework:

The conceptual framework for this study was built upon three main pillars: Challenges, Strategies, and Learning Outcomes. Challenges encompassed linguistic barriers, cultural differences, and student language proficiency. Strategies

consisted of pedagogical approaches, instructional methods, and support mechanisms employed by lecturers to address these challenges. Learning Outcomes refer to the impact of lecturers' strategies on student performance and preparedness for a global business landscape. The framework established that effective strategy can mitigate challenges and improve learning outcomes.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a pure quantitative research design, utilizing regression and correlation analysis as statistical tools for data analysis. The research involved the following steps:

Data Collection: Lecturers in English-medium business programs in Oman were surveyed using a structured questionnaire designed to measure the extent of challenges faced and the effectiveness of strategies employed.

Data Analysis: Regression analysis assessed the relationship between challenges (independent variables) and strategies (dependent variables). Correlation analysis examined the strength and direction of relationships between variables.

Interpretation of Results: The study interpreted regression coefficients to determine the impact of challenges on the effectiveness of strategies. Correlation coefficients indicated the strength and nature of associations.

Reliability Statistics (Cronbach Alpha) = .842, which means the data is reliable and has internal consistency

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.767	13

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.842	9

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study involved 37 lecturers in Oman, and several key findings emerged from the data collected. The study, encompassing 37 lecturers in Oman, unearthed critical insights into the challenges confronted by educators in teaching business-related subjects to students with diverse language proficiency and cultural backgrounds. Simultaneously, the study critically evaluated the efficacy of strategies implemented to tackle these challenges, providing a comprehensive overview of the teaching landscape.

Demographic Information:

In exploring the demographic landscape, it was observed that most respondents were male, constituting 28 participants, compared to 9 females. The age spectrum was notably diverse, with lecturers spanning 30 to 58 years and a significant portion, comprising 23 individuals, falling within the 41 to 50 age group. Educational qualifications varied, with most respondents holding a Master's degree (27) and a notable representation of 10 respondents possessing a Doctorate. Regarding teaching experience in Oman, 15 lecturers reported 6 to 10 years, 14 reported 11 to 15 years, and 3 reported more than 15 years, reflecting a range of professional backgrounds.

Language Proficiency of Students:

Students' language proficiency emerged as a significant aspect, with a substantial number of respondents either agreeing (13) or strongly agreeing (10) that their students demonstrated strong language proficiency. However, ten respondents remained neutral on this aspect, indicating a diversity of perspectives within the sample.

Challenges Faced:

Lecturers encountered diverse challenges when imparting complex business concepts. A considerable proportion agreed (12) or strongly agreed (7) that such difficulties existed, while a smaller cohort disagreed (7). Language-related challenges were also prevalent, with a majority agreeing (13) and a significant number strongly agreeing (11) that they

encountered such issues. Cultural challenges, including misunderstandings and sensitivity, were reported by some lecturers. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that a segment of respondents disagreed, suggesting a variety of experiences within the group.

Strategies Implemented:

Various strategies were employed to address these challenges. Linguistic strategies, such as language enhancement activities and exercises, were viewed as effective, with 14 respondents in agreement and 13 strongly agreeing on their efficacy. Language tutorials were widely utilized, garnering strong agreement from 17 respondents. Cultural strategies encompassing cross-cultural content and discussions on cultural differences evoked mixed responses, with some finding them effective and others expressing neutrality or agreement. Language proficiency strategies, particularly peer-to-peer collaboration activities, received positive perceptions, with 11 strongly agreeing and 12 agreeing on their effectiveness.

Regression Analysis:

A thorough regression analysis was conducted to delve into the relationships between various demographic factors (years in teaching, age, gender, educational qualification) and the challenges and strategies encountered by lecturers in Oman. The reported p-values, scrutinized against a chosen significance level of 0.05, revealed insufficient evidence to establish significant relationships between these demographic factors and the challenges or strategies. In simpler terms, the study did not uncover robust statistical support for these relationships.

The regression models were examined with the dependent variables encompassing linguistic challenges, cultural challenges, student language challenges, linguistic strategies, cultural strategies, and language proficiency strategies. The predictors in these models included a constant, years in teaching, age, gender, and educational qualification. However, the p-values derived from these models exceeded the standard significance level of 0.05. This implies that there is inadequate evidence to reject the null hypothesis based on the available data and the chosen significance level. In essence, the results of the ANOVA test associated with these regression models do not offer compelling statistical support for the presence of significant differences among the group means being compared.

Further breakdown of the regression analysis into specific outcomes revealed that the overall model assessing the quality of English-medium business Programs did not attain statistical significance ($p = 0.438$). This indicates that the provided predictors, namely gender, age, years of experience, and qualification, did not significantly predict the overall program quality.

Conversely, the model was statistically significant ($p = 0.001$) in the assessment of support for language development. Gender emerged as a significant predictor, elucidating that males tended to rate support lower than their female counterparts. A similar pattern was observed in the model for the perceived effectiveness of teaching methods, which was statistically significant ($p = 0.000$). Gender played a pivotal role, with males consistently rating teaching methods lower than females.

Conversely, models related to limited English language proficiency ($p = 0.765$), difficulty in understanding business concepts in English ($p = 0.839$), insufficient support for language development ($p = 0.888$), lack of resources for business English learning ($p = 0.817$), inadequate integration of business and language instruction ($p = 0.750$), and cultural and contextual adaptation challenges ($p = 0.888$) did not attain statistical significance. This suggests that the provided predictors in these models did not significantly contribute to predicting the respective outcomes.

In sum, the study did not uncover statistically significant associations despite the regression analysis aiming to unearth relationships between demographic factors and challenges or strategies. The findings underscore the intricate nature of the teaching environment, indicating that the provided predictors might not serve as robust indicators of the challenges and strategies lecturers face in Oman.

Correlation Analysis:

Correlation analysis revealed several strong correlations, including those between gender and age, age and education, and years of teaching and cultural strategies. Noteworthy correlations were found between challenges in the language proficiency of students and cultural challenges, as well as difficulties in conveying complex business concepts. Positive correlations were observed between language-related challenges and students' language proficiency and cultural challenges. Other strong correlations emphasized the interconnectedness of challenges and strategies implemented.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study sheds light on the multifaceted challenges lecturers face in Oman when teaching business-related subjects in a diverse educational setting. The findings highlight prevalent difficulties in conveying complex concepts and language-related issues, with cultural challenges exhibiting varying experiences among lecturers. The

effectiveness of strategies employed showed a nuanced landscape, where linguistic strategies, encompassing language enhancement activities and tutorials, were generally viewed positively, while cultural strategies evoked mixed responses. Additionally, most respondents perceived language proficiency strategies, particularly peer-to-peer collaboration activities, as effective.

Furthermore, the study explored correlations between demographic variables and perceptions, revealing that not all variables significantly predicted the outcomes. The lack of significance in some regression models, specifically with predictors like Gender, Age, Years of Experience, and Qualification, suggests that these factors might not serve as robust indicators of the respective outcomes. This underscores the complex interplay of various factors influencing perceptions of English-Medium Business Programs.

The overall findings suggest that lecturers in Oman are navigating the complexities of teaching in a diverse educational context by employing a range of strategies. The positive reception of linguistic strategies indicates their potential to address challenges, while the mixed responses to cultural strategies emphasize the need for a tailored approach. The study's recommendations aim to enhance teaching quality and student readiness for a global business environment. However, the call for further research underscores the necessity of delving deeper into the factors influencing the effectiveness of these strategies, striving to identify best practices for elevating the quality of education in this unique context.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings, recommendations were proposed to enhance teaching quality and student readiness for a global business environment. However, recognizing the diversity in lecturers' experiences and perceptions, further research is suggested to delve deeper into the factors influencing strategies' effectiveness and identify best practices for improving the quality of education in this context.

The study's comprehensive examination of lecturers in Oman provides a nuanced understanding of the challenges they face in teaching business-related subjects to students with diverse language proficiency and cultural backgrounds. By exploring demographic information, challenges, and strategies and conducting regression and correlation analyses, the study contributes valuable insights for educational practitioners and policymakers. The findings underscore the need for tailored strategies to address the unique complexities of this teaching environment and suggest avenues for future research to deepen our understanding of effective pedagogical approaches in similar contexts.

The study provided valuable insights into the demographic composition, perceptions, and predictors related to English-Medium Business Programs. The findings suggest areas for improvement in program quality, support for language development, and integration of business and language instruction. The nuanced correlations and non-significant regression models highlight the need for a more comprehensive exploration of factors influencing these perceptions in future research.

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