# THE WRITING NEEDS OF OMANI EFL STUDENTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF GRADE 11 ENGLISH PROGRAM: A NEEDS ANALYSIS

**Said Al-Saadi**
Ministry of Education, Sultanate of Oman,
buabdullah5@hotmail.com
**Moses Samuel**
University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
um_moses@yahoo.com

*Abstract: This article gave a detailed description of a national large scale needs analysis in the reform of the grade 11 English language curriculum in Oman. It highlighted the needs analysis practises of using triangulation of multiple sources (students, teachers, supervisors, heads of department, and textbooks) and multiple methods (questionnaires, interviews, content analysis) in the data collection stage to validate the study findings. The actual grade 11 English Language textbooks (n=4) were first analyzed for writing skills content and then contrasted with the perceived needs of 982 students, 64 teachers, 4 supervisors, and 3 heads of department. The findings revealed that a gap existed between the content of the grade 11 curriculum and the perceived needs of the students. The Grade 11 EL curriculum provided little space for students to develop writing competence. The findings related to language innovation/reform were then discussed and implication were made for the grade 11 program aim, principles, teaching methodology, content and teacher training in Oman.*

## INTRODUCTION

Needs analysis (NA), by its very nature, is highly context-dependent and population-specific (West, 1994). Most NAs are concerned with needs specification at the level of individuals or, most often, learner type (long, 2005). Recent researchers like Nelson (2000) and Long (2005) stress that what is needed now is a serious effort by applied linguists to identify generalizations that can be made about how to conduct NA for certain populations in certain sectors. However, the findings about language tasks, genres, and so forth encountered in this or that context are detailed and insightful, they are often only of use to other context of same or similar students. Whereas the findings based on studies of far wider audiences are of great relevance, specially the methodological lessons arising from such studies. Long (2005) points that, "in an era of globalization and shrinking resources, however, language audits and needs analyses for whole societies are likely to become interestingly important." Adapting such broad analysis confronts the analyst with some methodological constraints, including scientific sampling, large sample size and the preference of certain methods such as questionnaires, surveys, studies of government publication or documents, and so forth. Furthermore, findings and

rationale for recommendation need to be explicit, empirically-supported (Waters & Vilches, 2001) and expressed in familiar terms since the primary audiences for findings from the public sector NAs include politicians, economists and other stakeholders. This study contributes to the literature of NA by conducting a large scale analysis of the writing needs of Omani EFL learners in the public schools, which will provide the framework for conducting NA on a national basis, putting in practice all the methodological issues and making the results of this NA available for public in empirically-supported recommendations. This article reports on the extent to which the current EL program at Omani grade 11 schools fulfil the writing needs of Omani students. The narrative of our journey is organized as follows. We first discuss some observation regarding the latest NA articles and relate them to the need for such study. Second, we briefly describe the setting and methods of the needs analysis in terms of the triangulation of source and methods. Third, we examine the findings for each of the three research questions. We conclude by discussing in detail some of the pedagogical implications of the findings for the reform of the grade 11 El curriculum in Oman.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The target populations of many NA studies are in the level of undergraduates students, for example, Patterson (2001), Al- Busaidi (2003) and Shuja'a (2004) study university students' language needs, whereas Al-Dugaily (1999) and Al-Husseini (2004) investigate the linguistic needs in college level students. The findings about the language genres, task, and so forth, are often applied to other contexts with the same or similar students. Recent researchers of NA, such as Coleman (1998), Long (2005), Brecht and Rivers (2005) and Cowling (2007), stress the notion of generalization of the NA findings in the societal level. Long (2005) argues that "what is needed now is a serious effort by applied linguists to identify generalization, that can be made about low best to conduct needs analysis for population A or B in sector C or D, given constraints E or F. (p. 5)" At the societal level, the needs for language are generally defined within very general social goals such as national security, social justice or the like (Brecht & Rivers, 2005). The rationale behind associating language with societal goal is to motivate policy and planning for language education at the national level. In light of this innovation in language Teaching and Needs Analysis, the present research is devoted to a methodology for laying out —to the best extent possible—the analysis of the Omani EFL students' learning needs in public schools. As to methodology, two observations can be made in relation to NA procedures. All studies used English students and English teachers as the main sources of information. This complements with current and previous studies finding, that learners and teachers have special right to, when it comes to deciding the content of the course they are to undergo (Brecht & Rivers, 2005; Hutchinson & Waters 1987; Holliday 1992, 1994; Long, 2005; Nunan, 2001).This conclusion is logical because it raises the level of awareness of both parties as to why they are doing what they are doing and leads them to reflect usefully on means and ends. It is also important to note, that, even when learners and teachers are able to provide useful and reliable insight about present or future needs, better and more readily accessible sources may be available

including experienced language supervisors, graduates of the program concerned, employers, administrators, and so forth. This is achieved by Al-Husseini (2004), who approached 6 groups of sources and Shuja'a (2004) who also approached employers in addition to students and teachers to make the data obtained more reliable and meaningful. Others, such as Al-Dugily (1999), Patterson (2001) and Al-Busaidi (2003) depend on students and teachers as the main and the only source for their data collection; the reliability of their findings is in question, since involving other relevant sources would have provided more insight into the language involved in functioning successfully in their target discourse.The second observation, in relation to the methodological aspect, is that questionnaires and interviews are the most dominant tools used in all studies (see Table 2.3). Al-Dugily (1999) uses them as the only tools for data collection in his study. It is commonly noticed that many of NA studies in teaching English as a second language (TESL) researches are carried out via semi structural interviews, or more commonly questionnaires, for instance, Aguilar (2005), Choo (1999), Abdul Aziz (2004), Keen (2006), Davies (2006), Vadirelu, (2007), Taillefer (2007), Cowling (2007) Cid, Granena and Traght (2009) and Spada, Barkoui, Peters, So and Valeo (2009). Yet, they are not the only resources in most of NA researches. Recently, NA studies such as Al-Husseini (2004), Shuja'a (2004) and Patterson (2001), focused their NA by using multi method approach "Triangulation" to, as Patterson (2001) puts it, "both clarify the meaning and increase the validity" of the research findings. Triangulation is a procedure used by NA researchers to enhance the readability of their interpretation of their data (Long, 2005). It involves the use of multiple-data-collection methods and may also involve the incorporation of multiple data sources, investigators and theoretical perspectives (Aguilar, 2005). The rationale behind the notion of applying triangulation techniques is to contribute to the trustworthiness of the data and increase confidence in research findings. Based on this assumption, the present study considers triangulation of methods and sources as a main research principle that is going to be practically carried to gain a clearer picture of students' English language learning needs. Based on the understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the former studies, the present study tries to take advantage of the development in NA theories by expanding the focus to consider different approaches of NA and by focusing on a national level needs analyses and implementation needs. It also triangulates theories, methods and sources in order to sustain a more meaningful, valid and reliable information. It is hoped that the present study will help in understanding and developing the state of English language teaching in this part of the world and to put in practice the innovations in the era of NA as suggested by Long (2005) and Cowling (2007).

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
The following research questions guide this study:
1. What are the writing skills developed in the current English language coursebook in grade 11 of Omani schools?
2. What are the English language writing needs of Omani students in grade 11 as perceived by students, teachers, supervisors and heads of department?

3. To what extent are the students EL writing needs met by the content of English language course book in grade 11 of Omani schools?

## METHODOLOGY

Triangulation of data collection techniques and source of information are considered crucial factors in needs analysis (Brecht & Rivers, 2005; Coleman, 1998; Cowling 2007; Long 2005; Richards, 2001). Therefore, multiple sources, such as, students, teachers, supervisors, heads of departments and the grade 11 textbooks were approached for the purpose of data collection. In addition, varieties of data were gathered and compared using multiple methods such as questionnaires, interviews, and content analysis.

*Participants*

A stratified sampling technique was used to select 982 EFL students and 46 EL teachers teaching English in grade 11 schools. Also 4 EL supervisors and 3 heads of department (supervision and curriculum department) were purposely selected due to their limited number from the Ministry of Education in Oman. The random students' and teachers' sample was withdrawn from four out of eleven educational regions of the whole Sultanate. These four regions were Muscat, Al-Sahrqyah South, Al- Batenah South and Al- Batenah North. According to the current study, the Omani students are divided into regions, and each region is divided into schools, the schools are sub divided into male and female schools. A stratified sampling technique was used to randomly select the study samples as in Table 1, which shows that 982 students participated in this study; divided into 524 male students and 458 female students studying English in grade 11 of Omani schools, whereas teachers were divided into 34 male and 30 female teachers teaching grade 11 EL program.

Table 1

*Students' Profile in Terms of Gender and Regions*

| | | Region | | | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Muscat | AL-Batyneh North | Al-Batyneh South | Al-Sharqyeh | |
| Gender | Male | 119 | 103 | 124 | 178 | 524 |
| | Female | 43 | 126 | 121 | 168 | 458 |
| Total | | 162 | 229 | 245 | 346 | 982 |

It is important to understand that all regions adopt the same language program. In other words, they have the same course books, assessment style, resources, and so forth. The students in all Omani regions share the same background characteristics. They are for example, Omani, boys and girl, aged between 16 to 18 years, in grade 11. Each of the eleven regions can represent the others in terms of philosophy, contents, objectives, needs, students and teachers.

## Instrument

The current study used questionnaires to collect information from students and teachers in the Omani public schools. The EL teachers' survey was written in English, while the students' survey was in Arabic for two reasons. First, it was easier for students to understand in their native language. Second, the statements included were difficult and responding to them in English might make it more complex for students to fully grasp the intent of the survey. The questionnaires were first written in English and then translated into Arabic. Two procedures were taken to ensure the accuracy of the translation. First, the source version of the questionnaires was translated into Arabic and then the Arabic version was translated back into English by the researcher and other people who were familiar with English and Arabic. The back translation was for two purposes, to ensure that the original intent of the source questionnaire was perceived and to make a comparison between the Arabic and English versions. The students' and teachers' questionnaires consisted of three sections. Section one collected the demographic information about teachers and students. It is worth saying that the personal information like gender, school type were not considered as study variables rather they provided information about whether the questionnaires were distributed to a sufficiently varied sample to represent the study population. Section two included the language writing needs. These data were based on self-reports on the type and frequency of writing skills and sub-skills that the students practice. The writing skills were chosen for their documented importance in the skill literature. This included 23 items (refer to the appendix) representing skills and sub-skills, which students were asked to indicate on a scale of frequency, how often they face difficulty doing each one during their study. In developing this test, I consulted the following studies in needs analysis, e.g. Graves, (2001), Al-Busaidi (2003), Al-Husseini (2004), ASyabi (1995) and from my own experience as an English teacher and supervisor.

## Piloting the questionnaire

Before piloting the questionnaire, it had gone through a pre-piloting stage where it was distributed among five ELT specialists from Sultan Qaboos University and Ministry of Education. Other copies were distributed among PhD students studying in University of Malaya. Their contribution was to comment on the language of the students' questionnaire and its suitability for the language competence of grade 11 of Omani post-basic education students. They were also requested to comment on the design and its fitness. They advised to simplify the language and explain some of the terms used in the questionnaire. The overall outcome of this pre-piloting step was more simplification of the items involved in the questionnaire. The pilot study was carried out in Al-Sharqyeh South region. The piloting was to find out the general legibility of the study. It provided information about the extent to which participants were co-operative and keen to help in finishing the questionnaire. It has also helped in testing the study's trustworthiness in terms of the validity and reliability of the study instrument. Almost 100 students were randomly selected for piloting the questionnaire from four different schools consisting of 50 male students and 50 female students. Students were given the Arabic version of the

questionnaire. The researcher himself administered the pilot run to the piloting sample to gather information regarding the time it took the students to complete the questions, the clarity of the instruction, the ambiguity of the questionnaire items, requirement to include new topics, and the difficulties encountered in questionnaire adaptation. The pilot questionnaires were collected back immediately. The pilot run gave the research useful hints and clues to discover loopholes and inaccuracies in the questionnaire. Only 80 copies of the questionnaires were found suitable to be analyzed and 20 were rejected due to incomplete answers. These 80 copies were divided into 30 male students and 50 female students. This step was followed by an analysis of the subjects' responses to the questionnaire to ensure more reliability and validity of the scale as explained below.

## The Questionnaire Reliability

An indicator of the trustworthiness in the quantitative research tools is the instrument's reliability. It indicates that the developed questionnaire would give the same results if it measures the same thing (Neuman, 2001). The proposed questionnaire's reliability was estimated by the Internal Constancy Approach. This approach was based on calculation of the correlation coefficient between each item score and the score of the whole scale. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used, and the reliability statistic was .939 which was considered as significant and indicated that the all items included were reliable. Educators like Likert and others (1934) agreed that a reliability coefficient between .62 and .93 can be trusted.

## The Questionnaire Validity

Before being able to conclude that this study was trustworthy and ethical, however, some more detailed aspects of the issue must be considered. A qualitative study cannot accomplish its most basic functions if the researcher has not established trust and reciprocity in the field. Therefore, to examine whether the developed instrument would report valid scores, the validity of the instrument was studied (Neuman, 2001). The validity of the current study was assured using content validity, which is the extent to which the questions on the instrument were representative of all the possible questions that a researcher could ask about the study content¬ (Creswell, 2005). The main rationale behind using this form of validity was that the possibility of that expert would know and can comment about the investigated topic was high since students' linguistic needs were familiar to the involved experts. It could have been of less usefulness if the research theme related to assessing personalities or attitudes scores. In order to make use of the panel of judges' or experts' feedback regarding the extent to which the new scale measure the writing competences needed by Omani students, the questionnaires were handed to 12 arbitrators from Oman, Yemen and the UK. They were addressed formally in a letter asking them to read the items and determine the suitability of each item to measure students' linguistic needs and provide their comments regarding the clarity of the items, thoughts and presentation and to comment on the translation (if included). This step resulted in changing some of the terms in the questionnaire to more simplified language to facilitate understanding. It also has resulted in limiting the scope of this study to analyze the writing competence needed by Omani students to enhance their

academic standard, so some of the items, which were classified as irrelevant skills were deleted.

## Data Analysis

As to the questionnaires, descriptive and inferential statistical were used to answer the research questions by implementing the SPSS software. The descriptive statistics were used to indicate the percentage and the frequency distribution of the respondents' answers. Measures of central tendencies (mean and median) and independent sample t- test were used to analyze the data for the research questions 2-3. Interviews' data were analyzed by close study of the transcripts to identify what interviewees say about their attitudes and perceptions about the current English curriculum, the needed writing skills and sub-skills to improve students' linguistic competencies in English. After conducting the interviews, the analysis started with their transcription from the audio cassettes. Finally content analysis as a systematic and objective research method was used in collecting data for research question one. A textbook analysis was used in this section to analyze the English language tasks, skills and sub-skills embedded in the grade 11 English language teaching materials.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Actual Writing Skills Included In The Current Grade 11 EL Textbooks

The first research question analyzes the present learning situation (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) by identifying the writing skills and the sub-skills found in the English Language textbook through the use of content analysis. Perhaps the most important source of present situation data in designing an EL syllabus is the analysis of authentic texts (Richards, 2004). Content analysis enhances the readers' and the researcher's understanding of what is the exact content of the grade 11 coursebook by making explicit the patterns of writing skills choices found in the current textbooks. Grade 11 EL textbooks were titled 'Engage with English', which aimed at teaching English as a foreign language to Omani students in the public schools. The coursebook and workbooks were divided into two books for two semesters. Each book was divided into five themes and each theme was classified into five different units. Each unit of the five focuses on particular language skills- reading, grammar, vocabulary, listening & speaking and writing. At the end, there were two optional pages on 'Across culture' and 'Reading for pleasure'. They were designed as stand alone units which can be used in class or for self study. The workbook mirrored the framework of the coursebook. It was also divided into two books for two semesters. The activities involved in the workbook were those which include writing and further language practice activities. By the end of each theme, there were review ages which provided revision activities for grammar and vocabulary included in the theme as well as wordlist activities and personalization activity. A grammar reference section and wordlist and a function language review were also provided at the back of the workbooks. In addition, the workbook contained a writing section, where students complete free writing assignments and extended writing tasks. New approaches to second and foreign language teaching instructions require NAs to be conducted using unit of analysis. The unit of analysis in the

current analysis was task based analysis. Long and Norris (2000), Long (2005) and Ferch (2005) advocated that task based needs analysis allows coherence in course design. The rationale for doing task based analysis rather than linguistic analysis was because the task analysis usually offers more insights about the students' needs compared to 'usages' modelled in grammar based language teaching materials. It revealed more than the text based analysis about the dynamic qualities of target discourse (Long, 2005). Task based NA readily lend themselves as input for the design of language syllabus or course. The findings of the textbooks analysis identified the main writing skills and sub skills included in ten themes found in grade 11 English language textbooks. The skills and sub skills are listed in appendix 1, which presents a summary of the finding of the writing skills and sub-skills included in grade 11 EL textbooks in both semesters. Unit five of each theme emphasized development of students' writing skills. Almost all included writing tasks requiring students to write for a purpose rather than writing for the sake of writing. Repeatedly, students were referred to the process involved in writing before starting to accomplish any writing task. Different genres of writing were highlighted in every theme, such as vocational and academic genres, which provided the space for practicing different genres that can build solid foundation of writing skills. Students were exposed to the stage of writing from reading a model text to free writing. Examples of the writing purposes found in grade 11 EL textbooks were to write an email, holiday postcard, description of a tourist resort, letter of complaint, short profile or biography, film review, application letter, and a festival report.

During the analysis, it was noticed that writing tasks were separated at the back of the workbook and students had to refer to that section whenever they want to perform any writing tasks. This created the feeling with teachers and students that writing was not an essential task to be mastered because what was kept at the back of the book was supplementary material or glossaries. It also impressed upon the teachers that writing was not given sufficient attention in the new textbooks as found out during the teacher interviews. Although the analyzed material provided chance to practise different writing genres, they should be more creative and have stimulating activities to focus students' attention on the things to be learned. Hobelman and Wiriyachitra (1995) stressed that writing material should be interesting, related to students' interests, practical and related to real world tasks. The findings of research question one can be fed back into the grade 11 EL program and can also work as a foundation for material developers, for two reasons. First, the analytical methodology applied here provided real world or real life task analysis, which offered more insights about the students' needs through comparing what is presented to them and their perceived priority as in research question two. Second, the task based NA findings are the bases for Task Based Language Teaching TBLT, which as described by Long 2005, is radically learner-centered and cater for the learners' internal developmental syllabus. The findings of the task based NA complemented those of the other instruments, providing first hand information about the writing uses reported as in the questionnaire and interviews findings discussed in the next sections.

*The Perceived English Language Writing Needs of Omani Students in Grade 11*
In what follows, the findings presentation is organized according to the research participants so, the students findings are presented separately followed by the findings related to the teachers and finally supervisors and heads of department. This is helpful to show the different perceptions and priorities according to each group. It is also helpful to achieve cross group and within group comparison, to draw on the similarity and diversity of language use in post basic education schools.

### a) Finding related to the students
Students' perceptions about their writing skills and sub skills needs are displayed in Table 2 in descending order. This step is important for making priorities in skills presentation in the curriculum. Students (n = 982) responded to 23 items representing writing micro-skills. It is worth indicating that the frequencies provided next to each item of the questionnaire were given scores (e.g., never=1, rarely=2, sometimes=3, often=4, and always=5), which helped in coding the subjects responses as well as in calculating the means values.

Table 2
*The Writing Uses Preferred in Grade 11 Schools as Reported by the Students*

| N | Never | Rarely | Sometime | Often | Always | Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Scale | | | | | |
| 2 | 17 | 18.7 | 24.7 | 20.9 | 18.6 | 3.05 |
| 6 | 17 | 18.7 | 24.7 | 20.9 | 18.6 | 3.04 |
| 11 | 16.4 | 22 | 21.1 | 23.9 | 16.6 | 3.02 |
| 4 | 16.7 | 22.8 | 21.6 | 22.1 | 16.8 | 2.99 |
| 10 | 17.3 | 22.5 | 23.2 | 22.5 | 14.5 | 2.94 |
| 8 | 16.4 | 25.5 | 20.1 | 24.2 | 13.8 | 2.94 |
| 9 | 17.9 | 23.6 | 22.7 | 23.5 | 12.2 | 2.88 |
| 19 | 17.8 | 22.2 | 28.4 | 17.4 | 14.2 | 2.88 |
| 13 | 17 | 18.7 | 24.7 | 20.9 | 18.6 | 2.87 |
| 23 | 18.5 | 20.1 | 20.1 | 22 | 19.3 | 2.84 |
| 1 | 16.4 | 22 | 21.1 | 23.9 | 16.6 | 2.83 |
| 3 | 16.7 | 22.8 | 21.6 | 22.1 | 16.8 | 2.82 |
| 7 | 18.6 | 23.2 | 27.2 | 20 | 11 | 2.81 |
| 14 | 22.6 | 22.4 | 21.4 | 19.7 | 14.1 | 2.80 |
| 16 | 25.3 | 23.4 | 16.2 | 18.9 | 16.2 | 2.77 |
| 5 | 23.1 | 24.2 | 19.2 | 19.1 | 14.3 | 2.77 |
| 18 | 20.6 | 26.4 | 23.2 | 17.4 | 12.4 | 2.75 |
| 12 | 20.6 | 25.7 | 23.8 | 19.3 | 10.6 | 2.74 |
| 22 | 21.6 | 27.1 | 21.7 | 18.8 | 10.8 | 2.70 |
| 20 | 29.7 | 20.3 | 17 | 18 | 15 | 2.68 |
| 17 | 23.4 | 26.1 | 22.2 | 17 | 11.3 | 2.67 |
| 15 | 30 | 22.3 | 16.7 | 16.4 | 14.6 | 2.63 |
| 21 | 32.9 | 20.1 | 16.2 | 15.7 | 15.2 | 2.60 |

As can be noticed from Table 2, the mean values of all the items in the difficulty scale are high and ranging from 3.05 to 2.60. High means values in the difficulty scale means more difficulty, which is related to less ability. Where students have

difficulty in achieving any skill, their ability in the same skill is low. On the other hand, where they have little difficulty in a skill, their ability in that skill is high. The above means values therefore reveal that according to the students' perception they have less ability with English writing or overall face difficulty dealing with any writing task. The shared pattern about the highest first five items is that they all have communicative and academic purpose. Item number 2, as an example, is the highest scoring item with mean value of 3.05. This indicates that students' most perceived difficult task, of the included writing tasks, was to organize their writing, so that the reader can understand their main ideas. This is also true for items 6, 11, 4, and 10, which deal with the same phenomena: making themselves clear when writing any text in English or to how best they can express themselves while writing any argument in English. On the other hand, the last items with the lowest mean values in Table 3 (i.e., items 17, 15, and 21) share a scientific purpose. This however does not mean that grade 11 students have no problem explaining in English writing the content of graphs, tables, charts and diagrams, or writing a report on scientific projects done in a laboratory. This finding is justified by the fact that the Omani grade 11 students are not learning science in school through the use of English instruction and also there is a very little or no exposure to English during their science lesson. Therefore, according to students, writing English for scientific purposes is not very required because they are not using it during their grade 11 study.

## b) Findings Related to the Teachers

Teachers' perceptions about their students' writing skills and sub skills needs are displayed in Table 3 in descending order. This step is important for making priorities in skills presentation in the curriculum. Teachers (n = 64) responded to 23 items representing writing micro-skills.

Table 3
The Language Writing Uses Preferred in Grade 11 Schools as Reported by the Teachers

| N | Scale | | | | | |
| | Never | Rarely | Sometime | Often | Always | Mean |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 21 | 9.4 | 14.1 | 18.8 | 20.3 | 37.5 | 3.63 |
| 11 | 3.1 | 7.8 | 32.8 | 24.2 | 14.1 | 3.56 |
| 7 | 4.7 | 14.1 | 25 | 35.9 | 20.3 | 3.53 |
| 1 | 3.1 | 15.6 | 31.3 | 26.6 | 23.4 | 3.52 |
| 8 | 0 | 18.8 | 35.9 | 21.9 | 23.4 | 3.50 |
| 16 | 10.9 | 17.2 | 14.1 | 28.1 | 29.7 | 3.48 |
| 10 | 0 | 18.8 | 32.8 | 29.7 | 18.8 | 3.48 |
| 19 | 3.1 | 17.2 | 28.1 | 32.8 | 18.8 | 3.47 |
| 5 | 3.1 | 15.6 | 28.1 | 39.1 | 14.1 | 3.45 |
| 3 | 4.7 | 9.4 | 40.6 | 28.1 | 17.2 | 3.44 |
| 6 | 4.7 | 15.6 | 28.1 | 35.9 | 15.6 | 3.42 |
| 12 | 4.7 | 9.4 | 34.8 | 25 | 17.2 | 3.41 |
| 15 | 10.9 | 14.1 | 28.1 | 17.2 | 29.7 | 3.41 |
| 19 | 6.3 | 12.5 | 32.8 | 34.4 | 14.1 | 3.38 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 14 | 1.6 | 20.3 | 37.5 | 25 | 15.6 | 3.33 |
| 9 | 3.1 | 12.5 | 46.9 | 28.1 | 9.4 | 3.28 |
| 4 | 4.7 | 23.4 | 28.1 | 28.1 | 15.6 | 3.27 |
| 17 | 4.7 | 21.9 | 28.1 | 34.4 | 10.9 | 3.25 |
| 13 | 4.7 | 18.8 | 42.2 | 25 | 9.4 | 3.16 |
| 23 | 3.1 | 20.3 | 51.6 | 18.8 | 6.3 | 3.05 |
| 20 | 7.8 | 21.9 | 40.8 | 18.8 | 10.9 | 3.03 |
| 18 | 4.7 | 23.4 | 42.2 | 26.6 | 3.1 | 3.00 |
| 22 | 4.7 | 25 | 42.2 | 26.6 | 1.6 | 2.95 |

As can be noticed from Table 3, the mean values of all the items in the teachers' difficulty scale are high and ranging from 3.63 to 2.95, which is higher than for the students' self-reported difficulties. High means values in the difficulty scale means more difficulty, which is related to less ability. The above means values therefore reveal that according to the teachers' perception, students have less ability with English writing or overall face challenges while dealing with any writing task. Another interesting point is the difference found between teachers and students on the priorities among writing sub-skill. Students' first five most needed writing sub-skills shared communicative and academic purpose, such as items 2, 6, 11, 4, and 10. On the other hand, teachers' first five priorities were scientific and academic oriented writing tasks as in item number 21 to write a report on scientific projects done in a laboratory, item number 11 to translating some concepts and ideas from Arabic to English, item 1 to write a summary of information they have read or listened to, and item 8 to use correct grammar, vocabulary, punctuation and spelling. Scientific oriented writing tasks were the least needed skills according to students whereas teachers perceived them as the most challenging task to be mastered. This finding can be justified by the fact that the teachers are more aware of the future coming EL related challenges that would face students while trying to carry on their further study whereas students' judgment of the most needed writing skills were based on their current classroom needs. The needs analysis literature has documented instance of discrepancy between the perceptions of different stakeholders groups with regard to the students language needs (e.g., Al-Husseini, 2004; Kakai & Kikuchi, 2009; Krohn, 2008; Purpura, & Graziano-king, 2004; Taillefer, 2007). To learn whether the current study participants differed in their perceptions of the Omani EFL students EL needs, a comparison was performed as in Table 5 between students and teachers. Therefore, Independent Samples t test was used to deduce the differences and to decide on the significance of the deduced differences. A difference is statistically significant if it is less than .05 (Muijs, 2004).

Table 4

*Teacher' and students' Independent Samples Test results*

| | t-test for Equality of Means | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | $t$ | Df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
| Writing scale | -5.730 | 1044 | .000 |

Students and teachers seemed to perceive their English-language needs in grade 11 English courses in almost a different way. There were significant differences between students and teachers in the perceived EL needs in writing. The writing perceived needs difference was significant (t = -5.730, df = 1044, p < .05). This indicates that students and teachers perceived writing needs differently. This finding, similar to other studies in previous research in need analysis in some other contexts (Ferri, 1998; Robinson, 1991) which revealed that there are discrepancies among the perceptions of instructors and students. The results show that instructors may not always be the best judges of students' needs and challenges.

## c) Findings Related to the Supervisors and Heads of Departments

The supervisors and heads of department were interviewed by the researcher to provide more in-depth insight into the actual needs of the grade 11 students. The interviewees were unable to recall within the time limit of the interview all the language uses that take place in grade 11 schools. This raised questions about the suitability of the interviews to find out about detailed needs. The interviewees were asked to specify the priorities among the four language skills (listening, speaking reading and writing). Despite their post, the informants gave different kinds of responses. One head of department perceived that all the four skills carried equal importance because they are very essential to carry out the students' study. Two supervisors stated that 'the priority should be directed first to productive skills then to receptive skills.' They thought that during grade 11 students should be prepared to produce the language according to their demands. This claim agreed with Kittidhaworn's (2001) finding which showed that all the four sub-skills of Language Skills were perceived to be equally important for their second-year English courses. While the needs analysis yielded a lucid picture of the needs of students, supervisors' skill priorities are less clear and therefore more difficult to define precisely. The inconsistency of priorities chosen by the supervisors and heads of department reflects the diversity of professional practices which affects not only the extent of their attitudes but also their skill priorities of the four skills. Writing was in the middle ranks. A head of department commented that 'our students in grade 11 all of them without exceptions should be able to read and to write at least should be taking about an ILTS (band 4.5 level)'. They should not be all of them because there must be strugglers, but again facilities and places for the strugglers are not available. The system also does not provide the resources either in terms of materials or training, because that everybody is stocked to the one book. The students at grade 11 clearly need a bit of advanced writing, skills in a variety of extended contexts. They need writing because they are taught to write newspaper reports and articles, formal and informal letters, essays and so forth. They also need to be skilful in some important sub skills of writing such as 'brainstorming, organization of ideas, paragraphing, using signposts, using topic sentences and supporting sentences.'The students, according to another supervisor, also need to 'develop critical thinking and lateral thinking skills' accompanied with study skills and research skills as a preparatory kit for their following higher studies at the tertiary level.

*Students' perceived needs vs. actual content of the grade 11 EL textbooks*

A shared pattern that emerged from analyzing questionnaires and interviews was that writing was placed in the third rank according to all participants. The five most difficult writing tasks according to teachers are scientific and academic oriented writing tasks such as writing a report on scientific projects done in a laboratory, translating some concepts and ideas from Arabic to English, expressing ideas and arguments effectively, writing a summary of information they read or listened to, using correct grammar, vocabulary, punctuation and spelling. With regard to grade 11 EL textbooks, they did not shed the light on scientific oriented tasks. In addition students were asked not to make use of mother tongue language during their English classes as an approach, which meant to increase students' dependency on English. It would have resulted in better learning conditions if students' first language was strategically used to facilitate their learning. However students were repeatedly referred to the process involved in writing before starting to accomplish any writing task; the textbooks did give the students the chance to redraft their writing. As many EL textbook students were asked to perform the writing tasks and submit the final draft or write it down in their workbook. Strategies should be developed and included in the course book to give the student the chance to write the first draft and get written feedback and based on that rewrite the second or the final draft again in their workbook, so that by the end students can have the chance to compare the progress in their writing competency. Writing is a very difficult skill, but it can be mastered only by continuous writing (Al-Saadi, 2008). There is no short cut to it. Thus it becomes obligatory to involve our students in exclusive writing sessions. It is, in this context, recommended to have at least one full session per week devoted to writing, so that students should have plenty of opportunities to practice a variety of different writing skills.

Although the analyzed material provided the chance to practise different writing genres, they should be more creative and have stimulating activities to focus students' attention on the things to be learned. Hobelman and Wiriyachitra (1995) stressed that writing material should be interesting, related to students' interests, practical and related to real world tasks. In sum, grade 11 EL provided little space for students to develop writing competence. The new Grade 11 EL syllabus should acknowledge that the skills involved in learning to write include the ability to draft, revise, conference, edit, proofread, and publish, and to form well-structured, effective texts (Richards, 2004). As been advocated by many researcher such as Kaewpet (2009) and Shuja'a (2004), training in writing skills is being emphasized for EFL students in the present international community. For the Omani grade 11 context, training in writing communicative events should be further promoted, as they have been determined to be the most frequently needed skills (Kaewpet, 2009). All previous aspects should be included and dealt with to gradually develop students' abilities to write. In addition, (Richards, 2004) advocated that learning English writing opportunities should be through readings, discussions, and controlled exercises as well as independent writing.

# IMPLICATIONS FOR THE REFORM OF THE GRADE 11 EL PROGRAM

Recent writings on the needs analysis literature; e.g. Al-Husseini (2004), Orafi and Borg (2009), Wang (2006), and Waters and Viches (2001) concluded that needs analysts have to consider from the early starts the implementation needs. This can be achieved by seriously involving the different bodies (e.g., teachers, managers, students, administrators…) form early stages and during the planning stage. Non - implementation supported NA throws into question the relevance of conducting NA and the validity of its outcomes (Long, 2005). Therefore, many researches on innovation in ELT have appeared in the last two decades, such as Holiday and Cooke (1982); Holiday (1994, 2001); Graves (2001); Orafi and Borg (2009); Waters and Vilches (2001), provided language specialists, teachers and material developer with a coherent set of guiding principle for the implementation of language teaching innovation/reform. EL writing teaching and learning in the grade 11 Omani schools should aim at raising the writing competency of all pupils while ensuring our most able achieve the best international standards. Based on that, the majority of grade 11 pupils should attain a good level of competence in English, in both writing and reading. All our pupils should be able to use English to express themselves and should attain foundational skills. They should be able to use English in everyday situations and for functional purposes, such as giving directions, information or instructions and making requests. The underlying principles of EL writing teaching and learning should be based on the following principles, adapted from the previous Omani syllabus and other EL Syllabus, namely, the Singaporean EL Syllabus 2010 Primary (Foundation) & Secondary (Normal [Technical]).

- Contextualization, writing tasks and activities should be designed for pupils to learn the language in familiar, authentic and meaningful contexts of use.
- Learner-Centeredness, Learners are at the centre of the teaching-learning process. Teaching will be differentiated according to pupils' needs, abilities and interests.
- Process Orientation, the development of writing skills and knowledge involves the teaching of processes. The teacher should model and scaffold such processes for pupils, while guiding them to put together their final written and/ or multimodal products.

As the content and to develop the current EL program in grade 11, it is believed that the language uses identified by this empirical study should be regarded as learners' target language needs on which the grade 11 EL curriculums should be based. The fulfillment of the learners' needs by English for general purposes EGP requires consideration of methodology. With a major focus on developing learner ability to use language appropriately, the student-centered approach is suggested for teaching EGP for grade 11 Omani EFL learners. The findings of this study suggest that, teachers and other ELT specialists in Oman need to think about the teaching-learning process in terms of their students, rather than the kind of essentialist and static terms that are dictated by theory-based methods and approaches. The student-centered approach is being welcomed, resulting in positive learning experiences in EFL contexts. For example, Nunan (2001) identifies the involvement of learners in making meaning with both their teacher and their peers as a key factor in

determining success. For its principles and other reasons, which are given presently, the students-centred approach is recommended for the design, implementation and teaching of the grade 11 Omani EL program. It is a response to the suggestions made by the interviewees, who suggested that 'we have to look at the way English is taught how it is taught? What resources are there to support it? And to get the students feedback not only to the curriculum, so we need everyone to be involved in the process.' Region-wide, ambitious educational innovations can only succeed if the teachers, who can potentially act as supportive agent, operate along agreed principled and have the means and the competence to intensively coach and teach. Borg (2003) described teachers as 'active, thinking decision makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex, practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive network of knowledge, thoughts and beliefs' (p. 81). This can be achieved according to Al-Husseini (2004) by involvement and training. To make the most of the training program, the ministry should conduct a nationwide training needs analysis for the Omani EL teachers in schools. The training priorities for these teachers should be based on an empirical investigation of their urgent wants, lacks and necessities. Training therefore has to keep up with the teachers as refresher courses; especially for those teachers who are resistant to change. The Ministry of education should also implement national or international intensive English language proficiency upgrading courses for teachers with poor or weak English. These programs should be focused and accompanied with teaching methodology sessions. Ministry of Higher Education and the Omani universities should collaborate to implement an effective and up-to-date BA program for preparing undergraduates to teach EFL using the most appropriate teaching methodology that matches with the principles and philosophy of the Omani EFL curriculum. In addition, it is essential that the Ministry of Higher Education, which certifies any English language BA program in the country, liaise closely with the English language section.

## CONCLUSION

This article presented a framework for analyzing students' language learning needs in a nationwide context for the purpose of establishing better learning objectives, and designing content, material and methodology for English language courses. Recent needs analysts namely Al-Husseini (2004), Long (2005) and Nelson (2000) reported that until now, few -if no- studies have been conducted to analyze the learning needs of a whole society or a nation. The societal approach of NA adopted by this study, particularly with regard to sampling, data collection and analysis, may be applicable to further studies in similar context around the world. In order to put needs analysis on a theoretical and empirical base Long (2005) calls for "replication with different population in different sectors" (p.12) as well as new methodological approach (Krohn, 2008). The present study provided an example of new unexplored population or context in two ways. Firstly, no attempt has been carried out to systematically study the language needs of school students in the Arab world (Kandil, 2009), or more specifically in the Omani context to the best knowledge of the researcher. Secondly, it investigated the learning needs at the school level or pre-university students, which has not been tackled yet. Most of NA studies

investigate the learners' needs at university or college level, such as Al Busaidi (2003), Shuja'a (2004), Al-Husseini, (2004) and Keen (2006). The current study also replicated the mixed-methods methodology, where data were collected from several sources (informants and documents) and via different methods of data collections procedures and instruments (structured interviews, questionnaires and textbooks analysis). This methodology, which allowed for the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data, was found effective for obtaining a comprehensive and triangulated picture of language needs. Triangulation of data collection techniques and source of information were considered crucial factors in needs analysis (Brecht & Rivers, 2005; Coleman, 1998; Cowling, 2007; Long, 2005; Richards, 2001). Therefore, one particular innovation of this study was its utilization of two types of triangulations; methodological triangulation and data triangulation (Krohn, 2008). Multiple sources, such as, students, teachers, supervisors, and heads of the departments were approached during data collection. In addition, varieties of data were gathered and compared using multiple methods, such as questionnaires, interviews, and content analysis. The current study also provided a methodological empirical example of an assertion made by Waters and Vilches (2001) and Richards (2001) that involving decision makers, such as, language specialists, supervisors, heads of the departments, administrators, employers, and so forth, is very fundamental to be initially familiarized at the foundation building stage. It is also important for the success of implementation of any study, since they decide whether to accept, reject or modify the implementation of the study findings.

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