

## **An Analysis of the Oral Communication Strategies Used by Omani Senior American Literature Students at the Tertiary Level: A Case Study at a Public University in Muscat, Oman**

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**Abstract :** During the past decade, an increasing number of higher education institutions in Oman have sought accreditation in an attempt to assure the quality of their programs. Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), the only public university in the country, has also been seeking accreditation. Hence, the university administration has been encouraging departments to evaluate their programs for development purposes. The Department of English, where 100% of the students are learners of English as a foreign language, already produced a self-study report that outlined the strength and weaknesses of the current program. The department came to the realization that due to a changing local and regional job market, transferrable communication skills are high in demand among stakeholders in the public and private sectors. Failure to equip English literature students, for example, with excellent verbal communicative skills in English may have detrimental effects for undergraduate job-seekers who have to compete for jobs in employment sectors with a predominantly English-speaking workforce. Ongoing extensive discussions about restructuring the current literature program by means of partially replacing literature courses with skills courses, hoping to produce higher quality graduates who are equipped with effective communication skills for local and regional markets, have sparked the idea for this research. The researcher, who is an American Literature specialist at SQU, has set out to investigate to what extent senior American literature students have been able to apply transferable communication skills in an advanced literature course. The study also attempts to unearth performance inhibitors and causes for communication breakdown. The primary data source for the study were audio-recordings of 6 in-class peer-group discussions in an advanced contemporary American literature course during the academic year 2016/2017. The significance of this research lies in the rarity of studies focusing on verbal communication skills in Omani higher education literature classrooms at a time when English programs are in the process of being re-visited and revamped both for accreditation purposes and for meeting job-market demands. The results showed a considerable variation in Omani students' verbal communicative abilities and English proficiency levels. The study also raises crucial questions and provides important recommendations for administrators and teachers alike who are in the process of restructuring English programs in the region and in non-English speaking countries worldwide.

**Keywords :** job-market, literature, Oman, tertiary education, oral communication skills

**Conference Title :** ICLLT 2018 : International Conference on Language and Linguistics Teaching

**Conference Location :** Venice, Italy

**Conference Dates :** June 21-22, 2018