Chapter I

Background and Problem

1.0 Introduction
In this introductory chapter, an attempt is made to identify the rationale of the study. First, the context of the problem is described. After that, the problem of the study has been discussed in brief with an overview of the problem areas of Arab speakers in learning English with a special focus on the Omani students’ language learning problems. Thus, the justification or the objectives of the study are provided and then the research questions have been formulated.

Some light has been thrown on the significance of the study followed by its utility or scope. Furthermore, the limitations of the study have been pointed out. The terms used in the study are also defined. In addition to it, the research design of the study has also been provided. The chapter concludes with the description of the layout of the study and the organisation of its different chapters.

1.1 Background

Language is God’s special gift to mankind. Without language human civilization as we now know it, would have remained impossible. It is ubiquitous. It is present everywhere—in our thoughts and dreams, prayers and meditations, relations and communications. Besides being a means of communication, and a storehouse of knowledge, it is an instrument of thinking as well as a source of delight.

It dissipates superfluous nervous energy, directs motion in others, both men and animals, transfers knowledge from one person to another, from one generation to another. In a nutshell, language is an ‘organized noise’ used in social situations. It is also the flesh and blood of every culture. We cannot imagine a world without language. Everyone makes use of it, be he a beggar or a king. From birth to death we are surrounded by it. It’s a medium by which thoughts are conveyed from one person to another. There will be little communication possible without language among people except by signs and gestures. Most of the activities will stop and all teaching and learning will come to a halt.

The progress of mankind will be blocked. We shall be deprived of what was best in human civilization in the past. Ben Jonson rightly says, “Language most shows a man:
speak that I may see thee”. When we think of an intelligent being we think of someone like us, a creature that is able to think and communicate effectively. Communication or language is a process every child learns from birth, and we continue to use it until our death.

The structure of our language gives us the ability for abstract thinking. Because of this we are able to expand our knowledge and evolve as a society. We use language to hold ideas and important events in our mind as Langer had said that languages are not invented. They grow with our need for expression. With human evolution, a need for a language and communication is vital to man just as water or food.

When a person learns about history or mechanics or even reads the newspaper he or she begins formulating their own ideas. This causes a person to take action to improve a certain situation. Because of this we as humans have evolved as a highly intelligent society, we are able to use a language not only to communicate with each other but also to enlighten and educate ourselves.

We are not only able to share ideas but also to formulate our own helping the human race to continue evolving. Language and its use symbols have set us apart from the rest of the animal world. Through a language we can share ideas, educate ourselves and improve our lives. Language helps us as a society to keep evolving, without it we still would have been like apes pointing fingers at what we see.

Apart from the above mentioned reasons, studies have shown that learning languages stimulates the brain and even grows the so called grey matter. It can be used for social or academic purposes, for intellectual pleasure and basically the reason is to communicate. Innovation in language teaching began in the nineteenth century and became very rapid in the twentieth century. It led to a number of different and sometimes conflicting methods, each trying to be a major improvement over the previous or contemporary methods.

To conclude, though language varies historically, geographically, socially and from one situation to another, the basic function of language can be said to be communication. Throughout history, language – its origin, diversity, and dynamic nature-has fascinated
scholars. Indeed, their fascination has even been preserved - just as most historical records have been - thanks to language itself. Undoubtedly, in language humans have their ultimate means of communication (Whitehead 1996).

From the moment they are born; babies seem to want to communicate. This communication involves facial expressions, gestures and body language and verbal and sign language. Therefore, language is fundamental to everything we do. Although, language is much more than simply a means of communication - it is an entity which involves interpersonal communication, language within the individual and language and society.

The distinction between the words language and communication is not vividly evident at first look; however we can make it clear by stating that communication is the rubric of which language was eventually created under. Language is a systematic means of communicating by the use of sounds or conventional systems while communication is the exchange of thoughts, messages, or information, as by speech, signals, writing or behaviour.

What is a method? The word method means different things to different people. Some people consider only classroom techniques as method, whereas others like to include in this term the selection and gradation of material to be taught. According to W. F. Mackey as he quotes it as - a method determines what and how much is taught (selection), the order in which it is taught (gradation), how the meaning and form are conveyed (presentation) and what is done to make the use of the language unconscious (repetition).

Thus a method deals with four things: viz. selection, gradation, presentation and repetition. Several types of methodologies have been applied in language teaching. Some have fallen into relative obscurity and others are widely used; still others have a small following, but offer useful insights into the methods of teaching and learning. Most books on language teaching list the various methods that have been used in the past; often ending with the author's new method.
The educationists have worked out different methods of teaching. By acting upon them a teacher can make his work easy and more diverse. He becomes efficient in his job and work. There are many different ways in which the teacher or trainer can make the learning experience more interesting and memorable for learners. Enthusiasm, combined with interesting and diverse teaching methods, will motivate a student to learn more. One such technique is to use teaching aids. These are the things used in the classroom to aid teaching and training.

These are useful to reinforce what you are saying, to ensure that your point is understood, signal what is important or essential, enable students to visualize or experience something that is impractical to see or do in real life, engage students in the other senses learning process and facilitate for different learning styles. It is said that we learn and retain 10% of what we read, 20% of what we hear, 30% of what we see and 50% of what we hear and see.

Higher levels of retention can be achieved through being actively involved in learning. English has now been used by the world as a lingua franca of the world which means that it is a language that is far and wide which is used for communication between the speakers whose native languages are not the same to each other and where one or both the speakers use it as a second language. It has become a leading language as a result of globalization.

With the revolution in the IT sector and most of the software operating systems in IT being in English language, a new utility in the form of web based teaching and learning for written and oral communication has emerged. Researchers have drawn attention to a number of factors that could make the internet a very important tool for English language teaching and learning and the educationists have supported this view. They want to experiment with it and propagate it among the officials in Higher education of many countries.
Godwin-Jones (2003) and Salaberry (2001) argue that the internet provides the potential for a huge rise in the learner-learner interactions. According to Luan et al. (2005), teachers’ and learners’ who use the internet are not bound by the traditional modes of learning; their interactions with one another are immediate, prompt and widely shared. The internet is assuming an increasingly greater importance than ever in education worldwide in the present scenario.

Therefore, this study in particular seeks to investigate English as a Foreign Language (hereafter EFL) teachers’ and learners’ perceptions of web-based activities. Adding on to it, it also aims to find out the extent to which the use of web-based activities is influenced by factors such as gender, nationality, qualification and the teaching experience in case of EFL teachers’ and by factors such as gender, language efficiency and computer efficiency in case of the EFL learners’.

Understanding teachers’ and learners’ perceptions as well as, the extent to which the various factors highlighted above influence the use of web based activities is very important for the success of the education system and EFL programme in particular. It will also highlight the obstacles that come in using these activities both by EFL teachers’ and learners’. It aims to identify, highlight and explore the most popular web-based activities among both EFL teachers’ and learners’.

Apart from that, the study also aims to find the best ways of using computers in the English class. This study is therefore very significant and momentous for the Arab world. The incorporation of technology into teaching and learning has become a very challenging arena today. Therefore, it is time to wake up and move beyond the walls of the classroom to join forces with other institutions and societies to revitalize education.

Integration of technology in the teaching and learning process has become a requisite to meet the needs of the students in this growing highly technological cyber world where language teaching and learning process have also not been left behind. To become
globally competent even for jobs and for higher studies, we need to think of integrating technology into the language classrooms. This should be taken in a positive way by the language educators and language learners’ as well.

For that reason, in this introductory chapter, an attempt is made to identify the rationale of the study. First, the context of the problem is described. Then, the justification for study is provided and then the research questions have been formulated. Furthermore, the limitations of the study have been pointed out. The terms used in the study are also defined. In addition to it, the research design of the study has also been provided. The chapter concludes with the description of the layout of the study and the organisation of its different chapters.

1.2 Context of the problem

ELT is a global affair now and it has undergone many changes from time to time. The tremendous growth of internet technology and multimedia expression has gained a rapid momentum in the field of education especially in ELT as teaching and learning tools. The latest technological methods which are used today in the teaching of language are changing significantly our methods of communication with each other, our style of work, our style of trading, our methods of entertainment and even the way we learn things and this is more commonly seen by the Asians rather than the native speakers of English.

Similarly, the Arabian Gulf has become conscious of the role that the technology can play in enriching the universal wealth of the world where knowledge has been a source of immense augmentation and progress. The technology has influenced all sectors of life and if you are not at pace with it, you will stand in isolation in every field. It a perceived fact that computer has established itself sturdily in the commercial industry and the IT sector, now it has also turned out to play a very successful role in the process of linguistic education.
When we talk about the English language teaching which we have been doing since a long time, it has been changing its vitality by the use of the internet. We will not be wrong to say that the internet has helped vitally in the augmentation of the English language teaching and learning processes as now many people are into the use of computers for both teaching and learning English. It remains no longer a sphere of the few people but rather extensively available to many.

The use of technology has increasingly been the object of many studies in recent years (Wiske, et al., 2001; Muir-Herzig, 2004; Ruthven, et al., 2004; Hennesy, et al., 2007). The impact of instructional technology has also been perceived in foreign language teaching (Stoller, 1994; Frizler, 1995; Shetzer, 1997; Warschauer & Healey, 1998). With the rise of the internet, much research has been conducted to confirm the effectiveness of this technology in the classroom and the efficacy of Internet use in learning English (Grauss, 1999; Leu, 2001).

Many writers and researchers like (Milton & Garby, 2000; Wible, et al., 2001; Young, 2003) have also scrutinized the different features of the internet that can be used in the EFL/ESL classrooms. The internet which is worldwide network of the computer networks has given the access to many resources for language teachers as well as learners which are beyond measure. It has given the language teachers an environment through which they can create different tasks on their own and use those materials for their students while teaching English.

The World Wide Web has to the highest degree lengthened the influence of CALL which means the Computer Assisted Language Learning. It has allowed the language learners to survey and determine their own learning methods as found suitable for them by themselves and providing them with an easy access to a complete range of on-line database of resources. Son, 2007 & Warschauer, 2001 also assert that the web can help the language teachers to mingle the web resources into their teaching to support them in their teaching.
It can also be seen as a library of virtual resources which are priceless to the students as well as teachers which could be helpful to teach English to the first or second language learners. On top of it, Web-based Language Learning which means WBLL has the potential to increase the motivation of the learners’ and engage them in a proper cultural and genuine type of experience as mentioned by various writers.

Web-based Language Learning is a style of language learning that includes the use of web-based resources, materials and various web based tools to maximize language learning. The use of English language has increased rapidly after 1960. At present the role and status of English is that; it is the language of social context, political, socio-cultural, business, education, industries, media, library, communication across borders, and key subject in curriculum and language of imparting education.

It is also a crucial determinant for university entrance and processing well-paid jobs in the commercial sector. Since there are more and more English learners in the Asian countries like India and Oman different teaching methods have been implemented to test the effectiveness of the teaching process. One of the methods involves web based activities in ELT in order to create English context. This helps students to get involved and learn according to their interests.

It has been tested effectively and is widely accepted for teaching English in the modern world. The use of internet both as tool for the classroom and as a source of written and oral authentic material, has spread in the last few years and will continue to do so to the point that it will irreversibly affect the existing learning theories. Technology is utilized to uplift the modern styles; it satisfies both visual and auditory senses of the students. With the spread and development of English around the world, English has been learned and used by more and more speakers.

The 21st century is the age of globalization and is important to grasp on various foreign languages and English language comes first. In the survey carried out almost fifteen-twenty years back- there were only a few billions of English learners but now we can the
numbers have increased dramatically. This leads to a prediction that there has been a rapid rise in the English language learning via the internet and indicates that 80% of the information on the internet is available in English.

For the first time in history, there are more non-native than native users of the language and diversity in terms of learners' age, nationality, learning background et cetera has become a defining characteristic of ELT today. English is a valuable source of ELT instructors. Warschauer has compared the overwhelming spread of technology to a vociferous blaze that might be difficult to control. It is believed by many teachers and learners that the linguistic nature of online communication is desirable for language learning.

The internet provides optimal conditions for the learners who are learning to write. It can increase students' motivation also. It has a great potential for improving the quality of education, enabling learners to access powerful information sources previously beyond reach and supporting and facilitating learning, by encouraging exploration and providing collaborative learning environments (Bell, 2005, Oliver et.al., 1998).

However, to use the internet as a teaching and learning tool, teachers need to be content experts, technology specialists, motivators, cooperative and collaborative learning advocates and monitors of students' progress (Luan, 2005). Challenged in these ways, teachers need positive attitudes towards the internet as they will constantly face unfamiliar formats and need innovative teaching strategies (Duggan et.al. 2001).

Moreover, students' can use the internet to acquire information from as large number of sources as possible for a variety of purposes (Shetzer & Warschauer, 2000, Hill, et.al. 2005, Singhal, 1997). Knowing how to navigate internet sources, searching for information, and critically evaluating and interpreting the results, represent the crucial skills of electronic literacy. Searching the internet enhances higher thinking abilities and enables judgements to be made about the source, validity, reliability and accuracy of information.
Using skills such as skimming, scanning and higher order thinking skills transforms reading on-line into critical literacy, because those who cannot make critical transferring evaluations cannot possibly find what they need to read (Shetzer & Warschauer, 2000). Indeed, unsupervised and indiscriminate use of internet-sourced material can lead to plagiarism.

Finally, technology is a strong catalyst for educational innovation, especially when the internet is involved (Venezky, 2004). Coppola (2004) argues that technology is vital to the educational reform process. Such advances are the most visible signs of progress in a profession which, thank goodness, refuses to stand still.

The teaching of English is in a constant state of flux, with new theories and practices, and materials erupting all over the world on an almost daily basis. We are constantly challenged by new researches, provoked by the questioning of long-held beliefs, and amazed by the sheer balance and creativity of a diverse population of teachers, methodologies, material designers and, of course, students- from all over the globe.

In the world where certain values are irretrievable, and where the qualities that make a good teacher may well be universal, change is nevertheless the lifeblood of our profession. David Crystal rightly speaks about language teaching in another context that we know something is alive when we see it move. Attitudes to language study both in and outside the classroom have been modified too, with serious attempts to put at least one model of language teaching (Presentation, Practice and Production) securely in its place.

The role of English in our modern world has been the subject of much debate, as has been a growing awareness that language teaching methodology is often as culturally-specific as the culture it springs from and cannot therefore be exported without taking into account where it is headed. At the same time our profession has realized that
developing teachers themselves is a part of the way they can offer more to their learners whilst at the same time enriching their own lives.

Language learning is a complex and challenging endeavour. For students to achieve the desired proficiency in a foreign language, their institutions need to invest time, effort and huge resources in order to cater to the needs of the different learning styles. To be cost-effective, language teaching institutions strive to provide intensive foreign language (FL) instruction to reduce the time period needed to learn the target language.

That’s why EFL teachers are keen to combine and adopt different technologies that motivate learners’ and help them to respond effectively to their needs. Thus, not only leaving alone its utility restricted to EFL teachers’ and learners’. Computers were introduced to the language learning field in the 1960s as CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) and many enthusiasts strongly advocated their use, espousing the plentiful advantages they could bring to both language learners and teachers.

More recently, information and communication technology (ICT) in the form of e-learning and the internet have presented additional benefits to the learning environment as they enable the integration of virtually unlimited multimedia learning materials from external sources into the curriculum and make them available to students at any location in the world where there is a computer, mobile phone or tablet device with internet access.

The application of computer technologies in language instruction enables course administrators and teachers to vary lesson presentation styles, provides learning opportunities outside the classroom (thus increased amount of learners interaction with the language), and are perceived to cater more for the individual differences. According to Yaverbaum Kulkami and Wood (1997), integrating multimedia into the traditional
learning environment not only enriches the styles of presentation, but also has the advantage of increasing language retention.

Hulstin (2003) found that CALL appears to improve the learners’ attitudes. CALL offers an efficient medium whereby listening skills such as word recognition, sentence parsing and eventually processing of information at higher levels of meaning can be taught and improved. As stated earlier, listening is a complex skill that comprises of an intense interplay of many micro and macro- skills such as bottom-up, top-down processing, and an interaction of many other skills.

Warschauer in the year 1996 has also suggested in one of his works that with the incorporation of multimedia into CALL; the language learners are now able to converse directly, inexpensively, and conveniently with other learners or speakers of the target language (TL) 24 hours a day, from school, work, or home. This has definitely helped them to improve themselves in their language learning.

Integrating multimedia into the traditional learning environment not only enriches the styles of presentation, but also has the advantage of increasing language retention. The new era assigns new challenges and duties on the modern teacher. The tradition of English-teaching has been changed drastically with the remarkable entry of technology. Technology provides us with so many options like making teaching interesting and also making it more productive in terms of improvements.

Technology is one of the most significant drivers of both social and linguistic change. Graddol: (1997:16) states that “technology lies at the heart of the globalization process; affecting education work and culture”; as can be seen from the various researches and their successful outcomes. With the tremendous success of using Information technology in all fields of life currently, there is a continuous regular trend of using the computers throughout the span of life by everyone and hence education is not an exception.
Arab world has also realized the importance of communication technology and information in the global economy. Technology impacts many facets of our lives, but its potential in the educational realm has yet to be fully realized. Bringing technology to the classroom is a priority now. Computers are now, for teachers and students, the gateways to a wealth of information, contacts and activities. The use of the internet has mushroomed - indeed, some countries have wired up their entire public education systems- and the technology for self-study, language laboratories and computer corpora has developed far beyond what has been anticipated.

A long standing debate in foreign language teaching instruction is the extent to which the instructions should focus on teaching discrete language skills (grammar, vocabulary, translation) as opposed to providing students with a more contextualized approach to learning the language( Robyler, 2004).The contextualized approach is based on the proposition that people learn more effectively when they learn something in which they are already interested or they already know something about it and that affords them the opportunity to use what they know in advance to figure out novel things.

The focus is on the application rather than on the possession of basic skills and knowledge (Merrifield, 2000). According to Li and Hart (1996), the web’s multimedia capabilities and interactive functions have made it an attractive medium to conduct instruction. Among the reasons for using the web based activities in teaching and learning processes are increased student motivation, authentic language, and global awareness.

However there are still many problems with the application of the internet in the classroom including the reliability of the materials available on the net, the cost of equipment needed to connect to the internet, inability of access between the haves and have not’s, and frustrating slow connections(Lyman, 1998; Sussex & White, 1996; Warschauer , 2000).
Literature on instructional technology shows that the use of internet in language teaching has the potential to motivate students and teachers’ as was mentioned by Carrier, 1997; Frizler, 1995; Warschauer, 1996 & Whittaker, 1997); increase their participation (Ortega, 1997; Kasper, 1999); help to facilitate cross-curricular work (Ames, 2001; Windeatt et al., 2000); among other advantages. Yet, with this alarming potential, not only of the internet but also of the instruction technology in general, the overall positive impact for which the educators had hoped has not totally occurred (Jacobsen, 1998; Surry, 1997).

In actual classroom situation, there is more of teacher talk and less of active student participation. The students don’t get many opportunities to express themselves. There is an overdose of literature in most of the classes and the language part is not given much consideration. English language in India is taught as a second language and its purpose is to enable the students to communicate with each other at the national and international levels for various purposes. Hence the teaching should aim at developing the various skills of the students.

But the pathetic state is that in our colleges it is taught as content subject like History and Political Science and not as a skill subject. As a result, students understand the subject matter but do not have the ability to handle language in different social and cultural contexts. Sivin-Kachala et al. (2000) analysed 219 research studies to assess the effect of computer technology on learning and achievement across all learning domains and on all ages.

In addition to the positive effects on achievement in major subject areas, they found effective use of technology fostered the development of more positive student attitudes towards themselves and towards learning. Kulik (cited in Kosakowski 1998) presented evidence that using educational technology for drill and practice of basic skills could be highly effective, and Becker (cited in Mergendoller 2000) concluded that students using computer-based integrated learning systems generally did somewhat better than expected.
The teachers’ feel that the use of educational technology in their classes is of immense benefit to the learners’ and they have felt that rapid changes have come in the teaching-learning progression as a result of it. Few writers like Milliken & Barnes believe that the long-established concepts of teaching are not constantly triumphant and effective. The novel and the latest technologies give chances to the people for keeping a track of their abilities and personal concerns.

The studies done recently also portray that if the educational technology is used effectively, it can definitely assist in the betterment of the education system. When Halderman conducted a survey in 1992; the greater part among the surveyors which were the teachers’ indicated that the use of technology is a good alternative method for teaching purposes and should be used frequently by the teachers’.

Most of them indicated that by involving technology in the language classes, the students can learn at a faster pace and the effect on the learners’ is long lasting. Similar to this was another survey done by Wang & Li & Tsou in the year 2002; where it was noticed that the students scored higher grades when they were provided a computer mediated environment. All these instances demonstrate the positive outcomes that technology can provided as effective teaching substitutes.

Researchers are also making progress on the more complicated task of technology use on higher order thinking skills as measured through means other than other than standardized tests. They are examining students’ ability to understand complex phenomenon, analyze and synthesize multiple sources of information, and build representations of their own knowledge.

At the same time, some researchers are calling for newer standardized assessments that emphasize the ability to access, interpret and synthesize information. Research indicates that computer technology can help support learning and is especially useful in developing the higher- order skills of critical thinking, analysis and scientific inquiry ‘by engaging students in authentic, complex tasks with collaborative learning contexts’ (Means, et.al. 2000, Rochelle, et.al. 2000).
According to Dupaggne and Krendl (1992) and Pelgrum (1993) most teachers have positive attitude towards using computers. Pelgrum (1993) indicated that the teachers with positive attitude for using computers were more likely to use computers frequently and intensively in their teaching subjects. Pelgrum and Plomp (1991a) pointed out that attitude was the key of success for the implementation of computers for instructional purposes.

In most cases, it is the teacher who goes through the various texts as an annual ritual every year. The students don’t bother to read the prescribed texts. They prefer to read notes from the help books to get through the examination. A number of studies have shown that teachers’ and learners’ perceptions and attitudes towards computers are major factors related to both the initial acceptance of the computer technology as well as future behaviour regarding computer usage (Koohang, 1989).

The theory of perceived attributes of an innovation (Rogers, 1995) offers an exceptional way of analysing how the internet is adopted or rejected by the potential users. Rogers has acknowledged five main attributes of technology that affects its acceptance and subsequent adoption: relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, observability and triability.

Thus, a new technology will be increasingly diffused if potential adaptors perceive that the innovation (1) has an advantage over pervious innovations; (2) is compatible with existing practices (3) is not complex to understand and use(4) shows observable results (5) can be experimented on a limited basis before adoption. Teachers’ should become effective agents to be able to make use of technology in the classroom. This suggests that studies at the early stages of a new technology implementation should focus on the end-users perceptions towards that technology.
In another study conducted by (Galvis, 2011), which looks at the behaviour and attitudes of learners’ upon switching from a traditional type of communicative language instruction to one using computer technology and the internet, the major findings revealed a positive outcome. The students' were willing to use such tools, even when English served as medium of communication.

This is the evidence that students’ like the idea of using a new technology as their learning medium. Real communicative using ICT (especially computer technology and the internet) provide learners’ with a more communicative way of learning through authentic interaction in the target language.

With reference to the concept of visual aids, Dolati discusses the Paivio’s dual coding theory (1986) as it is a theory which has multiplications for learning. As a general overview, it suggests that an effective use of visual aids and tools will have a positive enhancement on learning. This is how the concept of visual literacy of learners has emerged as an influential concept. (eg. Galda, 1993).

For language instructors, the use of visual-verbal aids will hopefully help teachers seeking to improve student motivation and interaction in class as well as of particular language skills and knowledge (Danan, 1992). The use of different variety of visual aids can help teachers to reflect on the educational importance of visual literacy (Horn, 1998a).

‘Visual- aids’ can provide practical solutions to the problems of a language teacher whose equipment, as a rule, consists of nothing than a verbal textbook. Student learning is positively affected by presenting visual and verbal aids together (Mayer & Sims, 1994). That makes us reminded of a particular saying: ‘a picture is worth a thousand words’.

Thereupon, an understanding of visual and verbal language enables better structures and efficiencies of communication. The writer also discusses the different types of visual aids that teachers can make of in their language classes. Some of these can be used very effectively and produce better results in all aspects especially for the language learners.
1.3 Problem of the study

With respect to the regional and international educational standards, the situation in the Arab world with special reference to Oman has changed and improved quite significantly over the years (EFA, 2000; MOE, 2004). Now-a-days, even schools and most of the educational institutions are equipped with computer labs and Learning Resource Centres (LRCs).

The Ministry of Higher Education in the GCC countries is involved in many international projects that will enable teachers’ and learners’ to use the internet and other new technologies in order to enhance learning and make a difference in the world (IERN, 2007). The advent and the use of the internet and the World Wide Web for educational purposes have made a massive change in the past few years. Research in the area of EFL teachers’ and learners’ perceptions towards the internet highlight the importance of the issue.

Although the area of EFL teachers’ and learners’ perceptions is crucially important, to the best knowledge of the researchers; it has neither been investigated by the ministries nor by individuals at a very large scale in the Arab world or in the Arabian context. Therefore, there is a need to investigate the extent to which the EFL teachers’ and learners’ use the web resources in their English language teaching and learning respectively, and to identify their perceptions towards it and the hurdles they face in doing so.

The demographic characteristics of teachers’ such as gender, nationality, teaching experience and the qualifications were also found to be significant in explaining teaching and learning perceptions towards the use of technology. Similar to it in the case of EFL their demographic characteristics like gender, computer efficiency and the level of English were found to play significant roles in finding the perceptions of the EFL learners’ towards the use of technology. Proficiency in speaking English language in
Arab world is regarded as a mark of good education and its user enjoys a high social status.

They are also given a chance of getting higher education scholarships borne by the company expenses. If English speaking environment is created in the classrooms, campuses, friend circles etc, the learners will definitely become comfortable with this language and they may show makeable improvements in the same.

1.3.1 Problem areas of Arab Speakers in learning English

The phonological system of Arabic and English are very different from each other which poses a problem for the Arab learners’. English has 22 vowels and diphthongs with 24 consonants morphologically when we look into the phonetic structures whereas Arabic has only eight vowels and diphthongs with 32 consonants as proclaimed by (Smith, 1987:143). The emphasis on the meaning is also very different as well, the meaning being carried by consonants and long vowels; the short vowels are not even written in the script.

Arabic like English is a stress timed language, but the word stress is predictable and students have problems dealing with the unpredictable nature of English word stress. Words are therefore, pronounced with heavy staccato rhythm when students read in English. It follows then that the students need a lot of practice on pronunciation work and practice in listening. All aspects of written English also cause major problems for Arab learners’, and they should not be expected to cope with reading and writing at the same level as the European or Asian learners’ of English language.

Their written proficiency is much weaker than the other student groups in part because of their different orthography. Spellings in English language are a major setback for them even at the level of advanced learners’ of English usage. As the spellings in the Arabic language are more or less written in the same way as heard, it is simple and
virtually phonetic; therefore Arab English language learners face severe difficulties in dealing with non-phonetic spelling system of English language.

Grammatical differences also raise a lot of first language (L1) inference errors. For instance, Arabic has one Present Tense, which covers the simple and progressive forms, as well as the aspects of Present Perfect, and it has no Present Tense of the verb ‘to be’. It has no distinction between the simple Past and the Present Perfect as in the case of English language. There is also no Future Tense form, no Model verbs, Gerunds or Infinitive forms or indefinite articles. Unlike English language, the passive and active forms are almost the same and are never used in the normal speech.

1.3.2 Omani students and English language learning difficulties

The teaching methodology in Omani schools, though changing, still tends to be very formal and emphasizes a largely passive role for students with an emphasis on rote learning. As a consequence, students who are generally receptive to a more communicative methodology will not easily get used to pair and group work; the new techniques of teaching languages.

Their level of English is generally very low, partly as a result of the way English is being taught in the government schools. They also in a general sense lack exposure and familiarity with the English language. For instance, they will rarely try to read anything in English on their own unless compelled by the teacher.

Basically, the multiple problems of Omani students learning English as a foreign language have impaired the rate of achieving a high level of proficiency in English language. There are basically four common types of problems faced by the Omani English language learners.’

Two of these are the ‘linguistic’ problems, i.e. they are related either to the English language itself or the differences between the two languages viz English and Arabic.
The other problems are ‘non-linguistic’- meaning that they feel they have nothing to do with English or with the students' native language.

**Linguistic problems**

Linguistic problems are the aspects of English that by their very nature present difficulties to all students, irrespective to their language background, and to the native speakers of English as well. These aspects include:

a. Spelling, this is because of the phonetic nature of Arabic spelling system, as mentioned before.

b. Differences between ‘national’ varieties of English (eg: British, American, Indian, Australian…… etc.)

c. Highly specialized or technical vocabulary

Other linguistic aspects that particular difficulties to Arab students also include things about grammar, word formation/ vocabulary, styles of discourse and so on, which are significantly different from Arabic. They give rise to what are commonly called ‘inference errors’, it is so called the knowledge of Arabic interferes with their learning of English. In these cases the students incorrectly, and usually unconsciously, assume that the rules or norms of the Arabic language and English language are the same. He applies a rule or a norm of the Arabic language to something that he wants to say or write in English, and it results into a committed mistake.

**Non- Linguistic problems**

Linguistic barriers are not the only barriers that the Omani students are facing. Two types of non-linguistic problems may also impede the learning of English language in the Omani English language learners:

a. Problems related to students’ (and sometimes teachers’ perceptions or attitudes towards language learning. Students are not getting adequate practice in English
and the English subject is perceived as a subject (like History or Chemistry) to be memorized rather considering it as a set of skills to be acquired.

b. Systematic problems like large classes (often over 30), inadequate number of hours of instruction, inadequate use of educational technology (no or insufficient number of computers in colleges, no language labs in schools), lack of resources in the library, few political considerations overriding educational ones and others.

However, many studies of language learning have shown that the most effective language learners are those who experiment with the language and are not afraid to take risks, especially in speaking. Eventually, most Omani learners’ incorrectly equate making mistakes with learning disappointingly. They are too concerned about not making mistakes in the classroom, perhaps fearing that they will embarrass themselves in front of their teacher or peers when they make an error.

The solution to these problems as suggested by some Omani teachers should be a long-term and gradual process, to change the student’s ideas about language learning. Firstly, the language should be taught as acquiring a skill, not as a school subject. Secondly, students should be told that making mistakes help them to improve, especially in speaking and writing.

In addition, old-fashioned teachers must also change their attitudes and perceptions towards language learning without making mistakes. Yet, this research is going to suggest some ways that may, and hopefully will assist in overcoming these problems, especially ‘linguistic’ ones, using more advanced technology of the internet and its teaching and learning utilities.

1.4 Objectives of the study

ELT all over the world has undergone many changes since time immemorial. Researchers and academicians have been trying new methods and techniques from
time to time with a view to make improvements in the standards of English teaching. Several experiments have been done and new teaching and learning environments have been created. So, ‘where does internet into fit into the picture?’ is the question.

In order to understand the factors pertaining to the perceptions on the use of web-based activities in both EFL teachers’ and EFL learners’ a lot of exploratory research methodology was used by the researcher. The researcher had read critically various research journals, papers, articles, dissertation and theses etc. and then ended up with the following major conclusions which are that the use of web-based activities among the EFL teachers ‘depends on various factors like teaching experience, gender, qualification, and nationality.

On the other hand, the use of web-based activities depends on various factors like gender, computer efficiency and level of EFL learners’ use of various web-based activities for learning. Some web-based activities in both EFL teachers’ and EFL learners’ seem to be more popular than the others.

Some EFL teachers’ and EFL learners’ use the web based activities for some skills while some use it for some other skills. All teachers and learners use web based activities but the level of usage differs. Therefore, the use of web based activities in the EFL classes’ needs to be analysed and hence this study will help in finding the answers to the same.

Stating the importance of EFL teachers’ and learners’ perceptions and the relationship of teachers’ and learners’ perceptions to the use of web based activities in the EFL classes and to the variables such as gender, nationality, level taught and the teaching experience in case of EFL teachers’ and the gender, computer efficiency and language efficiency in case of EFL learners’.

This study is done to firstly, ascertain the Arabian teachers' and learners' perceptions and use of web-based activities for teaching and learning English with a special
reference to Oman. Secondly, to highlight the difficulties those are encountered by the teachers’ and learners’ from using web as an educational resource and tool in the classrooms.

Teachers’ and learners’ personal characteristics, status of the institutions’, instruction level, region, computer and internet availability and teachers’ and learners’ computer training background are included to ensure maximum possible control of extraneous variables by including them into the design of the study.

1.5 Research questions

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are EFL teachers’ and learners’ perceptions of using web-based activities in teaching and learning?
2. Are these perceptions influenced by factors such as gender, nationality, qualification and the teaching experience in case of EFL teachers’ and by factors such as gender, language efficiency and computer efficiency in case of EFL learners’?
3. To what extent teachers’ and learners’ of EFL use web-based activities in the Arab world?
4. Are there any differences in EFL teachers’ and learners’ use of different web-based activities due to gender, nationality, qualification and the teaching experience in case of EFL teachers’ and gender, language efficiency and computer efficiency in case of EFL learners’?
5. What are the obstacles faced in using these activities by the EFL teachers’ and learners’?

1.6 Importance of the study
ELT is a global affair now and it has undergone many changes from time to time. The tremendous growth of internet technology and multimedia expression has gained a rapid momentum in the field of education especially in ELT as teaching and learning tools. There has been a remarkable growth in language teaching innovations everywhere around the globe. Similarly, the Arabian Gulf has become conscious of the role that the technology can play in enriching the universal wealth of the world where knowledge has been a source of immense augmentation and progress.

The technology has influenced all sectors of life and if you are not at pace with it; you will stand in isolation in every field. It is a perceived fact that computer has established itself sturdily in the commercial industry and the IT sector, now it has also turned out to play a very successful role in the process of linguistic education. Therefore, when we talk about the teaching of English language it has made leaps and bounds with the powerful insertion of the internet or the World Wide Web into the teaching and learning world of the EFL teachers’ and learners’. It has made an attractive entry into the hearts and works of the EFL teachers’ and learners’.

The use of technology has increasingly been the object of many studies in recent years (Wiske, et al., 2001; Muir-Herzig, 2004; Ruthven, et al., 2004; Hennesy, et al., 2007). The impact of instructional technology has also been perceived in foreign language teaching (Stoller, 1994; Frizler, 1995.; Shetzer, 1997; Warschauer & Healey, 1998). With the rise of the internet, much research has been conducted to confirm the effectiveness of this technology in the classroom and the efficacy of Internet use in learning English (Grauss, 1999; Leu, 2001).

The methods of how the various features of the internet can be used in the EFL/ESL classrooms for language teaching and learning have also been examined by various authors like (Milton & Garby, 2000; Wible, et al., 2001; Young, 2003). In the world where certain values are irretrievable, and where the qualities that make a good teacher may well be universal, change is nevertheless the lifeblood of our profession. David Crystal
rightly speaks about language teaching in another context that we know something is alive when we see it move.

Attitudes to language study both in and outside the classroom have been modified too, with serious attempts to put at least one model of language teaching (Presentation, Practice and Production) securely in its place. The role of English in our modern world has been the subject of much debate, as has been a growing awareness that language teaching methodology is often as culturally-specific as the culture it springs from and cannot therefore be exported without taking into account where it is headed.

At the same time our profession has realized that developing teachers themselves is a part of the way they can offer more to their learners whilst at the same time enriching their own lives. Language learning is a complex and challenging endeavour. For students to achieve the desired proficiency in a foreign language, their institutions need to invest time, effort and huge resources in order to cater to the needs of the different learning styles.

To be cost-effective, language teaching institutions strive to provide intensive foreign language (FL) instruction to reduce the time period needed to learn the target language. That’s why EFL teachers’ are keen to combine and adopt different technologies that motivate learners’ and help them to respond effectively to their needs. Thus, not only leaving alone its utility restricted to EFL teachers’ and learners’.

Integrating multimedia into the traditional learning environment not only enriches the styles of presentation, but also has the advantage of increasing language retention. The computer thus promotes the acquisition of knowledge, develops the learner’s critical faculties, demands active participation and encourages vigilance. Computer mediated instruction can provide a very valuable language learning experience and communication as acclaimed by Sperling in his works.
With the tremendous success of using Information technology in all fields of life currently, there is a continuous regular trend of using the computers throughout the span of life by everyone and hence education is not an exception. Arab world has also realized the importance of communication technology and information now. Technology impacts many facets of our lives, but its potential in the educational realm has yet to be fully realized.

Bringing technology to the classroom is a priority now. Computers are now, for teachers and students, the gateways to a wealth of information, contacts and activities. According to Li and Hart (1996), the web’s multimedia capabilities and interactive functions have made it an attractive medium to carry out instructions. Among the reasons for using the web based activities in teaching and learning processes are increased student motivation, authentic language, and global awareness.

However there are still many problems with the application of the internet in the classroom including the reliability of the materials available on the net, the cost of equipment needed to connect to the internet, inability of access between the haves and have not’s, and frustrating slow connections (Lyman, 1998; Sussex & White, 1996; Warschauer, 2000).

### 1.7 Utility or Scope

The findings related to this research will help us to establish an overall picture of EFL teachers’ and learners’ perceptions towards the web as an educational resource. This in turn may be of value for the authorities in the Higher Education, for those who are into consideration of putting web-based-resources as a tool for EFL teachers’ and learners’ and to enhance positive perceptions and also to avoid the factors that affect EFL teachers’ and learners’ negatively.

The present study will help in identifying how often EFL teachers’ and learners’ use the web resources in the English language classrooms. The findings of this study could be
of help to provide special trainings to the teachers on job and similarly an in-house training programme could be created for EFL learners’. Furthermore, this study will help to add to the literature on the topic and specifically to fill the research gap in the Arabian scenario of ELT with special reference to Oman. The domain of EFL on computer aided technology has to be made understood to all those into EFL teaching and learning fields.

1.8 Limitations of the study

As with all the studies performed or research performed till now, this study also has its own limitations.

The study was limited to only three Higher Education institutes of Oman in Muscat namely: Petroleum Development Oman- Human Resources Learning and Development Centre, College of Banking & Financial Studies and Arab Open University. A total of 520 participants were chosen for the purpose which included 60 English language teachers and 480 learners making it a total of 520 participants in all. It could not be spread to the whole population of the EFL teachers’ and EFL students’ of Oman.

The results of this study are based on the self reporting of the EFL teachers’ perceptions and EFL students’ perceptions of using web based activities in EFL teaching and learning purposes. The researcher does not have any way to check whether the responses they have ticked in the questionnaire are really followed by them. Apart from that, the perceptions are not always stagnant and it may vary with the passage of time, knowledge and experience.

So, a study of this kind may not take into custody the whole picture, due to which its findings could be viewed as exploratory and preliminary also. Besides this, the results of this study was confined to certain levels of students only as only those EFL learners’ were involved who were efficient or at least the basic users of computers and already had a certain level of efficiency in language.
1.9 Definition of terms

The following are the key terms that are used in the present study:

**Perception**: It is defined as the participants' responses to each of the questionnaire which measures the participants' general feelings towards the usefulness of the web based activities in the English classroom (Woo 1996).

Here in this study, it refers to an individual's recognitions of the events, his ways of seeing and understanding things, knowledge and information which are drawn from their personal experiences in both the cases of EFL teachers' and learners'.

**Internet**: It is a non commercial, self-governing collection of computer networks devoted mostly to communication and research. It is not an on-line service and has no central computer (Offutt, 1996).

**World Wide Web (WWW)**: It is a network-wide, menu-based programme providing hypertext and hypermedia links to all the other information sources throughout the internet.

**Web-based activities**: These are the resources that provide or make us available educational materials in the web either freely or by subscription to a target group.

**Learning Resource Centre (LRC)**: It is a term used for a room in the colleges or institutes where there are multimedia devices such as TV, videos, tape recorders, computers, headphones, books and audio/video tapes. It is another name for a kind of library.
**English as a foreign language (EFL):** This term indicates the teaching and learning of English in a non-English speaking region.

**Computer mediated communication (CMC):** There are many forms of computer-mediated communication. It can include anything that is text-based, uses ICT as a technological basis and can be used for two-way transmission of ideas. It can include: emails, mailboxes, shared network folders etc.

**Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL):** This term specifies a wide range of search for and the study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning”. It embraces a wide range of information and communications technology applications and approaches to teaching and learning foreign languages.

### 1.10 Layout of the study

The present study is basically organised in eight chapters with each chapter outlining a different criteria.

**Chapter One** deals with the context of the problem, problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the significance of the study, the limitations of the study, the procedure, and the definitions of the terms and finally the layout of the study.

The **Second Chapter** deals with the review of literature on the concerned topic. An extensive study has been presented in this chapter for the purpose by discussing the value and uses of web based resources for teaching and learning English.

Then, **Chapter Three** discusses the methodology used for EFL teachers’. It also includes the description of the sample, the research instruments and the approaches used in data collection for the EFL teachers’.

After that, **Chapter Four** discusses the main findings of the study related to EFL teachers’ perceptions. It is supported by the analyzed data of statistics received through the survey and interviews employed for the EFL teachers’.
Followed by it, Chapter Five discusses the methodology used for EFL learners’. It also includes the description of the sample, the research instruments and the approaches used in data collection for the EFL learners’.

Then, Chapter Six discusses the main findings of the study related to EFL learners’ perceptions. It is supported by the analyzed data of statistics received through the survey and interviews employed for the EFL learners’.

Chapter Seven summarizes the results of this study and includes the recommendations and suggestions for further research. It also includes how we should look forward towards the future of English in a positive way.

The last chapter i.e Chapter Eight finally covers the References & Bibliography.

Appendices have also been added in the end that includes the survey questionnaires used for the EFL teachers’ and learners’. The interview questionnaires also for both EFL teachers’ and learners’ have been provided in the end.

1.11 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has briefly outlined an overview of the research by giving a background of the research problem thereby stating the purpose, objectives and research questions. It has also given a brief overview of the Omani context in which the study is going to be conducted. It discusses briefly the linguistic problems faced by the language learners due to influence of their native tongue.

It also sheds light on the significance, limitations, utility of the study and the terms used in the study. The chapter concludes with the layout of the study and the organisation of
its different chapters. The following chapter will present a literature review of the earlier studies done on the related topics.