CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.0 INTRODUCTION

A skill refers to the various types of knowledge and strategies that individuals learn and that all individuals can acquire throughout their lives. It could be changeable and it may be learnable by all. Skills also refer to the collection of learning and thinking strategies that you have at your disposal for tackling various academic tasks.

No doubt, English has become a world language rather than the language of only the English Speaking countries such as the USA and the UK because the number of the people who use English as a mean of communication exceeds much more than the number of the people who speak it as their mother language.

Non-native speakers face many difficulties in studying the English language but at the same time they don’t recognize the importance of acquiring the study skills as an essential part of their study. Lecturers try to find some ways to let the students enjoy their learning as the researcher can see and experience the carelessness of the students.

Students have various learning styles, some of them learn by observing, role playing, and making mistakes, relaxing, playing and trying things out. Even they don’t care if they fail to submit anything or even answering some questions. Senses are very useful factors in learning. Some students in Gulf College prefer to use these senses in studying. Hearing, touching and sight can support the brain in making connections and associations which assist the memory and learning. It is interesting for the students to use the senses in studying especially in speaking writing, typing, drawing or even moving the body. The researcher thinks that it is better to go with items which identify what attracts the students. There are some aspects which are less attractive to the students e.g. writing essays or sitting exams or having to meet a deadline.
A significant part of study skills is learning styles. Students in the first year can recognize their own learning preferences because each one of the students or even people in general can learn in an individual way although we have things in common.

Theorists have divided people into different learning styles e.g. visual, auditory and kinesthetic. What is important here for any student is not to discover which type he/she is related to but the importance is how to recognize the different elements which could be supportive to how the students learn best.

Being aware of how the students learn best, helps the students to get or adapt new learning strategy to check where the students are now. It helps the students to discover why he/she did badly in the College. They might discover later that the teaching style of the lecturer doesn’t match the learning style of the student.

Moreover, independent study is a vital skill in the learning process. By independent study we mean a feature of all university programmes. The amount and the kind vary from one programme to another.

There are some programmes at the universities on individual basis. Students can work most of their times with resources. Students in Gulf college can do better with these study skills if they acquire some of many important study skills e.g. time management, reading comprehension, essay writing, reflection, etc. The students in independent learning process need supervision from the lecturers and supervisors.

A fully English proficient student is capable to understand and use English to ask and answer questions. Also, understand teachers, reading materials to test ideas and to challenge what is being asked in the classroom.
Independent study means” working on your own between taught sessions”. Moreover, the students are given a specific amount of this study and gradually increases till the students write their dissertation and as a result it should be completely by independent study skills. (Wedemeyer, 1971).

When students get better study skills at the beginning of the university, they will find that they can manage their study freedom and as a result they can enjoy themselves while undertaking independent study successfully. In most cases, it is up to the students to manage this process well because what is expected from students in Higher Education level is that they have acceptable maturity to work on their own for a long time without a lecturer in the classroom to guide them.

Lecturers in Gulf College usually seek out different ways to encourage the students to be involved in the learning process and make their study enjoyable. Students spend several years study in the Sultanate of Oman, yet they don’t know how to study correctly or at least follow the right steps of studying. The lecturers have the power to attract the students to participate in some of the study aspects by using e.g. later rewards or even by putting the material on a full cinema screen to let the students enjoy their study, knowing your strengths and weaknesses will help you set goals you can accomplish. (Williams, 2003)

Gulf College provides its students with the basics of English language. Maths and IT Skills, Business English, Academic English, Communication Skills and Integrated Project. These modules support the students a lot in building good and useful study academic skills. However, study skills benefit the students by encouraging them to do better regarding their study.
1.1 Background of the Study

It is very important that the students must learn skills which help them in the learning process. Students should acquire good techniques of learning or study skills. It is vital for each student to get equal opportunity to practice his study skills in all subject area. There are a lot of useful skills such as cooperation and team work. We all manage ourselves with varying degrees of success as we conduct our daily lives. We are constantly making decisions about our direction (where we want to go or what we want to do), our plan (how we will get somewhere or do something), our implementation (the acting out of the plan), and our evaluation (judgments about how well we have performed or if the activity was worthwhile. (www.ci.maryville.tn.us)

Lecturers consider that EFL learners should get the skills and it is a prerequisite for the university level. All English language learners must be tested at least once a year using an English proficiency test (Haynes, 2007).

There is a fact that some of the EFL learning reach to university level with a minimum proficiency level in these skills and as a result which allows them to understand and interact with the lectures. Students in general, especially in the academic work need a lot of knowledge and skills to perform academic assignments. Learners can develop these skills in the college by practicing them. It is a long journey to perform higher level requirements such as Writing a report, writing a research paper, giving presentation, etc.

Students in the college level need the language study skills (L.S.R.W) during this academic journey, if the lecturers ask them to give an oral report, organize information or write a search paper which could be higher than high school level.
Study skills evaluations improve the academic performance. It clarifies the individual differences among the students. When students acquire study skills and practice these skills in and outside the classroom, they will acquire it as a habit to be useful after graduation. Most of the countries do enormous investments especially in higher education but the painful results appear that the number of failure students is big. Most of the students don’t follow the right steps to begin their higher study. Lots of students show different of study characteristics according to the varies regarding their different academic differences.
Students can experiment with their strategies and skills they use; however, they usually learn better when they actively and personally engaged in learning or practicing process because of the outcome.

At university stage, the student expected to be ready to study on his own with a simple assistance or support especially for basics e.g. spelling errors or grammatical mistakes. Moreover, as college students, they have to be very possible for their own or independent learning.

There is a very important factor to be sure of before students join the study; they should be ready for study in a specific stage because many students enter Gulf College without adequate preparation.

However, many students do well in secondary school and their level is high but when they join the college, their level starts delays because of the less effectiveness of study skills. The students with the support of their lecturers can assess the effectiveness of their study skill progress. It is very important to get to know them and as a result they can make good decisions about how they can let their study skills be effective. The researcher will talk about this point into details in the next chapter.

Some students make better use of their study skills than others. If students preserve right academic study skills they will get benefit for the whole general and practical life.

Before student join Gulf College, they have to prepare themselves and what to expect from university. This step will help the students whether they are ready for the university stages and it is better for them to prepare themselves for the first semester. They have to identify their current academic skills. Also, they have to know how they will be motivated. It is essential that the students develop their self confidence.
Most of the colleges don’t expect that the students are not ready for the college stage. In general, the colleges in the Sultanate of Oman have foundation programmes. These programmes usually prepare the students and train them for specific study skills.

There are some universities which provide good opportunities to let their students improve their study skills, but each one of them has its tasks which have different approaches. Gulf College usually offers modules within the foundation programme which develop specific study or academic skills. Moreover, it applies specific modules to deliver such skills sessions and also assesses the skills as a part of foundation programme. The benefits of these skills don’t stop when the students finish their higher education study but also they need them for graduate jobs. In particular, they have to develop:

- Creative thinking skills as a part of study skills
- Personal management skills, people skills and problem solving skills.
- As a student in a University, the students are expected to have the following:
  1. Self motivation, i.e. the student should be able to work by his own a lot of time.
  2. Independence, i.e. the student is expected to stand on his feet. Moreover, he can ask for some help from others.
  3. Team work, i.e. the student has to be able to work or study some sessions with classmates or friends.
  4. Ability to set goals to improve the work, i.e. the student has to be able to set goals for himself within his skills and abilities. Knowing his strengths and weaknesses will help him set goals he can accomplish (www.how-to-study.com).
  5. Ability to organize the time, i.e. the student should be able to organize his time and should know when and where before scheduled classes, workshops and exams.
  6. Ability to work things out for himself, i.e. the student is expected to be reasonably good at how to adapt the new environment and how to deal with people and being flexible in his learning style.
7. Capable to work outside the classroom in which he can learn how, when and where to learn best. Here, the students are expected to study outside their classroom and choosing the best ways and time to learn, to improve their study.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Most students need study skills to improve their levels and abilities in order to cope with demands of the subjects of university level.

All study skills needed in higher education should be gained by practicing them, trial and error, through students’ reflection and feedback from lecturers and peers.

However, the skill is the competencies and strategies needed to do things well. Skill cognition (Cognitive ability)

As lecturers, the goal is to let students become better learners. Sometimes lecturers hear from students that their memories are not good to something but the skills can be developed by practicing them. In fact, such kinds of students have to practice their cognitive performance without acquiring study skills. Students won’t do well in the college. Students can work very hard and be high motivated to succeed by setting goals for themselves.

Also, they may spend a lot of time just to study and prepare for their classes and at the same time they have the strong desire to be successful in their study. Academic success requires a willingness to refine analytical thinking skills. Successful relationships may require a willingness not to work very long hours outside of the home, but are still likely to require a willingness to do what it takes to achieve a Successful outcome for the relationship. (www.how-to-study.com).

In Gulf College, lecturers sometimes meet some students who have a lack of study skills. Maybe they are not very good at writing, they have no answers to essay
questions, or they have hard time in remembering what they read in the textbooks. In this case, they need to concentrate on the skill components such as effective learning strategies and acquiring the study skills to improve their memory, problem solving and critical thinking.

Individual difficulties are very important and it should be taken care of by lecturers. Sometimes, they meet some students with slow comprehension or weak in acquiring study skills. In this case it is better for lecturers to encourage the students to seek extra academic support to improve their comprehension. The lecturers usually can realize the weaknesses of their students and as a part of their jobs they have to direct these students to the correct way to improve these skills. Teachers are obliged to ensure that teaching strategies in their classrooms are aligned with English language proficiency standards. These standards make it imperatives for mainstream teachers to learn about the theories and teaching strategies that have been used successful to teach ELLs. (Haynes, 2007)

1.3 Purpose and Objectives of the Study

When students comply with these requirements in an effective way, they will improve their study skills. If a student takes notes from lecturers in the classroom, it is a study skill because it is a kind of listening skills and note taking. “Good note takers not only listen to lectures and take accurate and reliable notes, but they also incorporate their note taking skills while practicing active reading (Carder, 2007).

If the student is giving an oral presentation in front of the class it is a study skill because it is made of speaking skill and oral presentation. If lecturers ask the learners to an outline, it is a study skill because it is made of reading skill and outlining. If the lecturer asks the student to write a book review, it is a study skill because it is made of
writing and reviewing comprehension of the book. “It helps you to remember the content of the lecture it gives you a framework for your revision it helps you to stay alert in the lecture” (Klein, 1993).

These examples show the importance of some of the study skills. If secondary schools in Sultanate of Oman pay more attention to the English language study skills, students will find it easier to study and show high performance at college level because they have mastered the basics of the English language skills.

If the students lack these language skills, there will be no studying e.g. without reading comprehension (with understanding), the students can’t study. What is meant here is that the student should understand the material and then he can study it. Also, if the student is taking notes he has to listen first and then he can take notes. Without listening comprehension, they can’t write any note. English language learners, as Carder (2007) claim, need opportunities to practice language at their level of competency. When ELLs are able to refine their English skills with their English–speaking peers, this process is called comprehensible output. Many researchers assert that comprehensible output is nearly as important as comprehensible input.

The research in Gulf College has showed that students who study English as a foreign language (EFL) really have deep problems in secondary schools. The learning system in Oman was based on spoon feeding style and memorization. Also, the learning system has failed to prepare the students to what will be expected of the students to do at university level. Students face problems in the first year at University which is the critical stage in the transition from school level to university level. Most of the students in Gulf College have not acquired the necessary English language skills. Others use ineffective study skills in the English language for performing tasks.

Finally, the researcher assumes that the students in the first year at the college need basic learning and study skills different from those that they have learned (or maybe
haven’t in high school). Study skills principles and practice on how to be a successful learner

Figure. 1.2 Student who practice the study skills

1.4 Research Questions

The related research questions to be considered are:

1. How do students acquire study skills in Gulf College?

2. What are the effects on student’s performance in Gulf College in terms of speaking, listening, reading and writing?

3. How can we evaluate the development of student’s skills in English Language in Gulf College?
1.5 Significance of the Study

Lecturers need to identify the strengths and weaknesses points each student by checking the skills of students, what they have learned in the class applies to everyday life. We, lecturers can recognize the acquisition of study skills by asking the students submitting presentation or writing a piece of paper or even when we hear arguments in class or ask the students to read a book.

Figure 1.3 Students’ strengths & Weaknesses

Sometimes, lecturers ask the students some questions which are related to their study skills, e.g. do you have confidence in yourself as a learner? Do you think you can achieve better in the college classroom if you improve your study skills? Do you lack confidence in yourself?

Positive thinking is essential at the first stage of the college because it encourages the students to do the performance with high confident in their abilities. If they believe in themselves and are confident in their abilities, they can success.

However, there are some studies skills which the students ignore e.g. time management and study environment. Both evaluate how student manages his/her time and how to choose a good place for study.
Moreover, students may be able to improve by spending less time in studying. The important this is how and where to study. Lecturers can push the students to work effectively in groups.” A small group setting allows ELLs to have more comprehensible input because classmates modify or adapt the message to the listener’s needs. Students conversation in a small group in centered on what is actually happening at the moment as the task is completed” (Haynes, 2007).

Lecturers and students can control this skill. However, whether students choose towards with other people or not, lecturers can direct and organize the groups of the sessions taking in the account the level of the students and try to make balance in each session and as a result the weak students get a high benefit and improve some academic skills which are related to each student. Although, most of the students need to do most of the tasks alone but sharing the others and practicing abilities and getting benefits from others is skilled personality and also, students get several advantages. Indeed, the learning process of the students can be facilitated by the group. At the same time researcher doesn’t recommend that students rely too much on the kind relationships of friends. The researcher will talk in details about these points in the next chapter.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

This research is limited to the students of foundation level at Gulf College, Oman.