INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF TEACHER EDUCATION RESEARCH STUDIES (IJTERS)
(Open Access, Double-Blind Peer Reviewed Journal)
ISSN Online: 3049-1614



Aligning General Foundation Programs with 21st Century Skills to Support Oman Vision 2040

Shabana Abdul Rasheed Al- Balushi

Oman

Article Information

Received: 16th September 2026
Received in revised form: 25th September 2026
Accepted: 3rd October 2026
Available online: 18th October 2026

Volume: 3
Issue: 6
DOI: https://doi.org/10.63090/IJTERS/3049.1614.0051

Abstract

This study investigates the alignment of General Foundation Programs (GFP) in Oman with 21st-century skills required to support the national education reforms outlined in Oman Vision 2040. As Oman transitions toward a knowledge-based economy, education must play a pivotal role in fostering students' critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. Through a critical review of current educational provisions, this research identifies a significant gap in the development of students' oral and written communication skills. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach involving surveys and interviews, the study suggests specific curricular and instructional enhancements to better equip foundation learners for the demands of higher education and the global workforce. The findings indicate that integrating pragmatic, skills-based learning models directly correlates with improved student performance in academic and professional contexts. By aligning GFP outcomes with national strategic needs, this research contributes a framework for instructional reform that ensures Omani graduates are effectively prepared for future employment and civic life.

Keywords:- General Foundation Program, Oman Vision, 21st-century skills, higher education

I. INTRODUCTION

The transition of the Sultanate of Oman into a knowledge-based economy, as outlined in Oman Vision 2040, necessitates a workforce equipped with advanced 21st-century skills. Central to this transformation are the "4Cs" Critical Thinking, Communication, Collaboration, and Creativity which are increasingly recognized in global educational literature as essential for employability. Within the Omani context, the General Foundation Program (GFP) serves as the primary academic bridge for students entering higher education. However, despite the structural integration of these skills, a gap persists between curriculum design and the actual communicative competence of graduates. Previous studies suggest that foundation programs often struggle to balance standardized testing requirements with the practical, oral, and written fluency required in professional spheres.

1.1. Research Problem and Objectives

The core problem addressed in this study is the insufficient development of student communication skills within the GFP, which limits their readiness for the demands of the modern workforce. While students may grasp theoretical concepts, their ability to apply them in complex, professional scenarios remain underdeveloped. To address this, the research pursues the following objectives:

- To evaluate the effectiveness of the current GFP curriculum in developing oral and written communication.
- To identify specific pedagogical strengths and instructional gaps within the program.
- To propose evidence-based curricular enhancements that align student outcomes with the strategic goals of Oman Vision 2040.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW:

2.1. Theoretical Framework: The "4Cs" and Communicative Competence

While Trilling and Fadel (2009) established the "4Cs" (Critical Thinking, Communication, Collaboration, and Creativity) as essential pillars for the 21st century, recent academic discourse has evolved to view these not as isolated skills, but as an integrated cognitive ecosystem. In the realm of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), the focus has shifted from mere grammatical accuracy toward "Communicative Competence." This goes beyond linguistic knowledge to include sociolinguistic and strategic competencies the ability to navigate complex social and professional nuances effectively. However, critics of the 4Cs framework argue that without a strong foundation in digital literacy, communication remains performative rather than functional in a modern workplace.

2.2. Oman Vision 2040 and the Human Capital Gap

Oman Vision 2040 (2021) outlines a strategic mandate to transition into a knowledge-based economy, specifically tasking the General Foundation Program (GFP) with producing "entrepreneurial and innovative" graduates. However, a critical tension exists between these high-level policy goals and classroom realities. While the National Strategy for Education 2040 calls for graduates ready for the private sector, there is significant debate in recent literature regarding the "readiness gap." Some researchers suggest that the current curriculum remains too tethered to academic silos, failing to foster the "soft skills" that private-sector employers prioritize, such as emotional intelligence and adaptive communication.

2.3. Critical Analysis of Communication Challenges

The Omani educational landscape presents unique challenges. Issa and Al-Bulushi (2022) highlight that while student motivation to engage in oral communication is high, written output is often hindered by a lack of "Information Literacy." This suggests that the struggle is not merely with "spelling and grammar," but with the ability to synthesize information and structure arguments logically.

Contrasting views in recent peer-reviewed studies (2023–2025) suggest that the "Confidence Gap" mentioned in earlier research may actually be a "Methodological Gap." While traditionalists argue for a return to rigorous grammar instruction, progressives advocate for Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), which emphasizes real-world application over rote memorization. This study builds on this debate by utilizing real-time student data to evaluate which instructional methods most effectively bridge the gap between student motivation and professional-grade written communication.

III. METHODOLOGY:

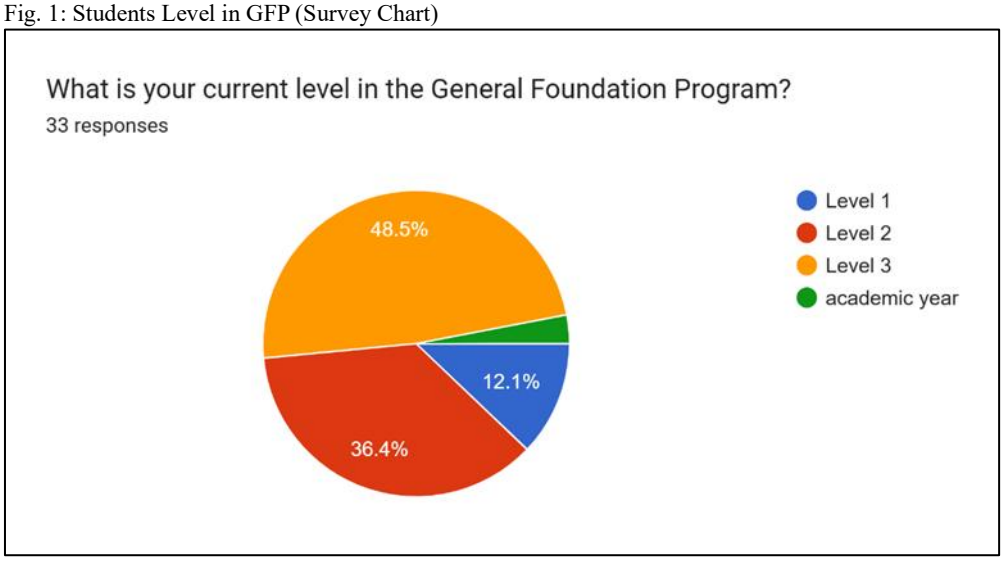
3.1. This research employed a Mixed-Methods Research (MMR) design to ensure data triangulation:

- Quantitative: A Google Forms questionnaire was distributed to GFP. As the response were collected from different levels of students, with 48.5% of participants from Level 3.
- Qualitative: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three students Muayed, Mohammad, and Anwaar to gain deeper insights into their personal journeys with communication and confidence.

3.2. Quantitative Data Analysis (Questionnaire)

The questionnaire was distributed to General Foundation Program (GFP) students across different levels, with the majority (48.5%) currently in Level 3. The data reveals a strong correlation between student-centered activities and the development of communication confidence.

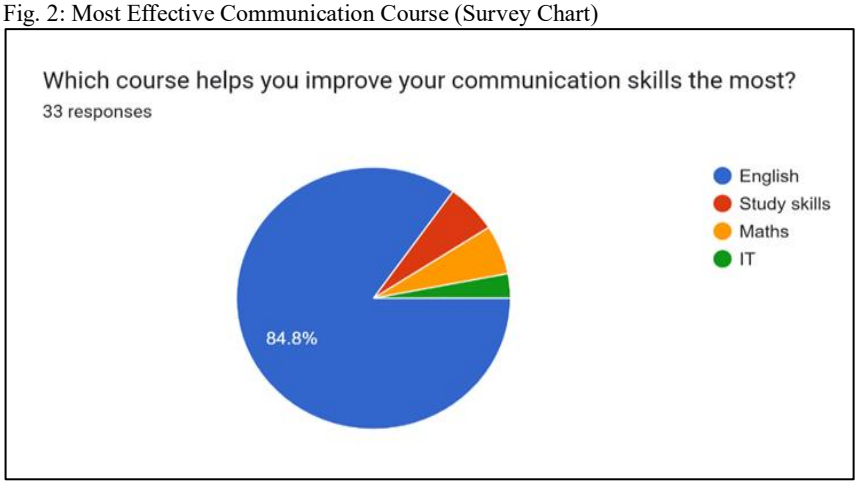
Fig. 1: Students Level in GFP (Survey Chart)



3.3. The Role of English and Oral Communication

The English course was overwhelmingly identified as the primary source of communication improvement, cited by 84.8% of respondents.

Fig. 2: Most Effective Communication Course (Survey Chart)



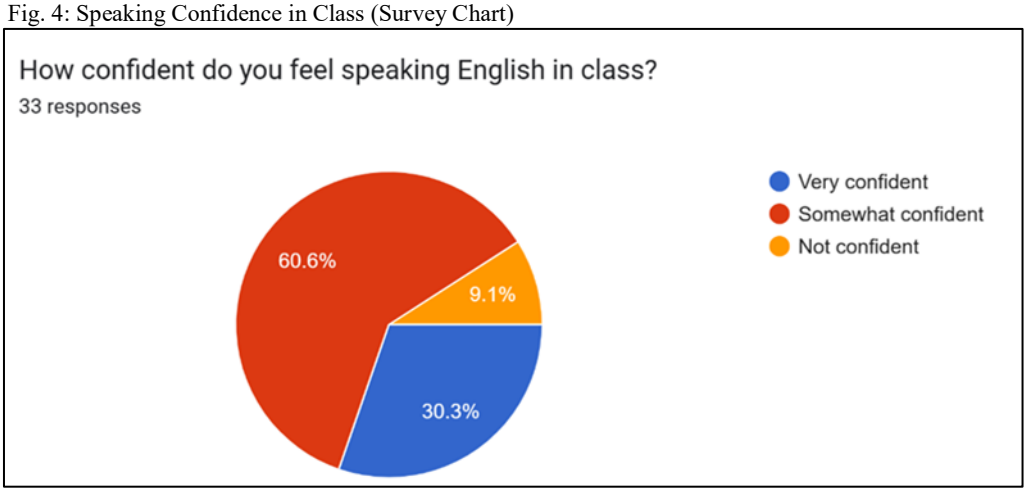
- Classroom Activities: When asked which activities improve speaking skills the most, 48.5% chose Group Discussions, while 30.3% chose Class Participation. This aligns with the "Collaboration" element of 21st-century skills.

Fig. 3: Best Classroom Activities for Speaking Skills (Survey Chart)



- Confidence Levels: While 30.3% of students feel "Very confident" speaking English in class, the largest group (60.6%) feels "Somewhat confident." This indicates a positive trend toward the Oman Vision 2040 goal of a communicative workforce but suggests a need for further support to move students from "somewhat" to "very" confident.

Fig. 4: Speaking Confidence in Class (Survey Chart)

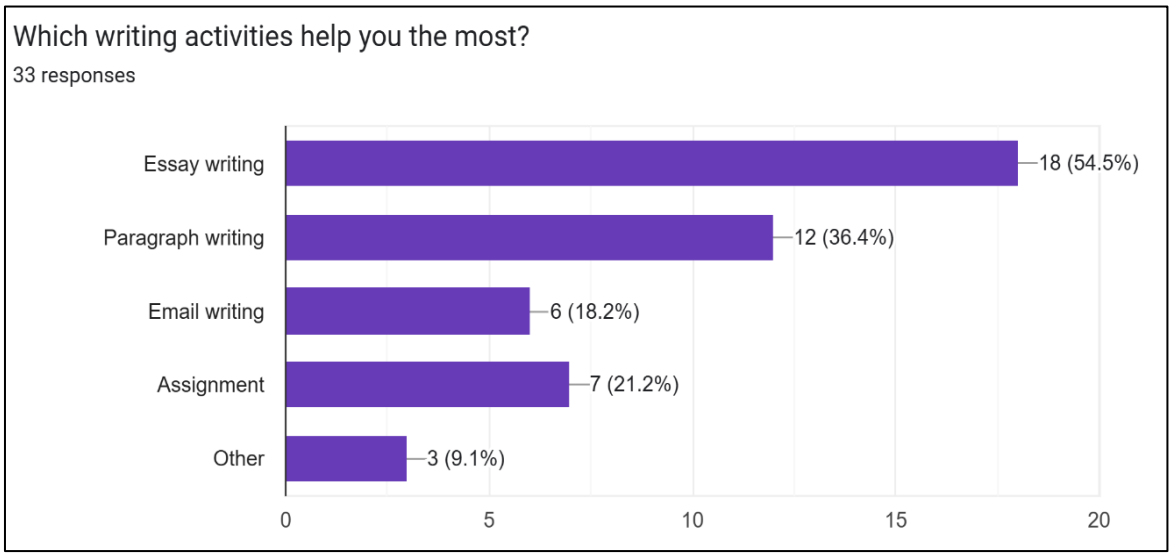


3.4. Written Communication and Challenges

The data regarding written communication shows that academic writing is highly valued by learners.

- Activity Preference: 54.5% of students found Essay Writing to be the most helpful activity for improving their skills, followed by paragraph writing (36.4%).
- Perceived Impact: 57.6% of the students definitively stated that writing assignments help improve their skills.
- Key Challenges: In the open-ended responses, students identified "choosing the right words," "pronouncing words well," and "feeling nervous in front of others" as their main obstacles.

Fig. 5: Best Writing Activity (Survey Chart)



3.5. Synthesis of Mixed Methods (Combining Results)

By combining the survey numbers with the student interviews, several key conclusions can be drawn:

3.5.1. Triangulation of Confidence:

The survey showed 60.6% are "Somewhat confident." This explains why Mohammed and Muayed both mentioned feeling nervous in the past but becoming more capable through practice.

Muayed: "I feel more confident speaking English now because I practice speaking every day in class and I am not afraid of making mistakes anymore."

Mohammed: "In the past I don can't talk infont my class mate but now I can... to talk in classes first to get the confident and then in front of crowds."

3.5.2. Dominance of Group Work:

Both the survey (48.5% preference for group discussions) and all three interviewees identified collaboration as the most effective teaching tool.

Mohammed: "In seeking class we work in groups... Work more in groups helps very match."
Muayed: "Group discussions, and presentations help me communicate more confidently because they give me opportunities to practice speaking with my classmates."
Anwaar: "I suggest having more speaking activities, group discussions, and presentations so students can practice English more and build confidence."

3.5.3. The "Basics" Gap:

While the survey highlights Essay Writing as helpful, the interview data and open-ended survey comments (e.g., "spelling and grammar" and "choosing the right words") suggest that students need more support with the fundamental mechanics of the English language.

IV. DISCUSSION: BRIDGING THE GAP

While the "4Cs" (Critical Thinking, Communication, Collaboration, and Creativity) are integrated into the current GFP framework, the data reveals they are not yet fully optimized to meet the demands of a knowledge-based economy. A significant "Confidence Gap" exists; while students like Muayed and Anwaar demonstrate self-correction and professional awareness in small-group settings, they remain only "somewhat" prepared for large-scale professional contexts.

Critically, the current heavy emphasis on traditional academic essays found helpful by only 54.5% of the cohort fails to provide a comprehensive solution for the persistent "Spelling and Grammar" struggles noted in students like Mohammed. This suggests that academic writing alone does not sufficiently reinforce the mechanics of language for all learners. To align with 21st-century needs, the writing curriculum must transition toward Digital and Professional Writing. Utilizing technological tools can support language mechanics while allowing students to focus on high-level communication.

Furthermore, a critical evaluation suggests that the current curriculum may be too narrow. Workplace communication requires practical skills such as concise email drafting and team-based negotiation that essay writing does not simulate. These findings align with previous studies in the region which suggest that foundation programs often prioritize academic theory over vocational readiness.

4.1. Limitations and Future Direction

A notable limitation of this study is the small sample size, which may not represent the diverse student body across all Omani colleges. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data regarding "confidence" can be subjective. Future research should include longitudinal performance data to measure the long-term impact of integrating professional writing tools into

the GFP. Combining essay writing with diverse communication practices will ensure students are truly prepared for the complex, real-world situations envisioned in Oman Vision 2040.

Table 1. Student Analysis:

Name	level	Key Strength
Muayed	GFP	Self- Correction and group work
Mohammed	GFP	Public speaking and presentation
Anwaar	GFP	Goal – setting and Professional Awareness

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Based on the findings, the following "Pragmatic Approaches" are recommended:

- Tiered Speaking Scaffolds: Introduce more "Low-Stakes" speaking circles before moving to graded presentations to help 60.6% of "somewhat confident" students reach full proficiency.
- Integration of Educational Technology: Use digital platforms for writing to help students "see their mistakes" (as suggested by Muayed) and improve spelling and vocabulary through interactive tools.
- Task-Based Collaboration: Design assignments that simulate real-world Omani labor market challenges (e.g., business proposals or community reports) to align with Vision 2040's economic diversification goals.

5.2. Based on Appendix A: The "Questioner"

5.2.1. Shift Toward Active & Interactive Pedagogy

The survey results indicate a strong student preference for practical application over theoretical instruction. The curriculum should incorporate more "language games" and "group discussions" to foster engagement.

- Student Quote: "Increase interactive activities in class such as group discussions and language games to encourage speaking."
- Student Quote: "Debating is a great idea."

5.2.2. Prioritization of Oral Fluency and Confidence

A recurring theme in the responses was the need for a dedicated space to practice speaking without the pressure of formal grading or the fear of making mistakes.

- Student Quote: "I suggest having more speaking activities such as presentations, group discussions... This will help them build confidence."
- Student Quote: "The goal is to teach the student the basics without pressuring or embarrassing them."

5.2.3. Curriculum Rebalancing & Workload Management

Several students suggested that the cognitive load of balancing English with Math and IT simultaneously can be counterproductive. They recommended a more focused immersion approach.

- Student Quote: "If you teach only English in the foundation without mathematics and IT, the students' development will be much greater... It is possible to teach (mathematics 1+2) in one semester and teach them only English in the other semesters."
- Student Quote: "Less online homework."

5.2.4. Integration of Social & Extracurricular Learning

The feedback highlights that communication skills are best developed through community and social interaction rather than just classroom attendance.

- Student Quote: "Join student activities and clubs, such as the English Club or the Debate Club."
- Student Quote: "Please don’t focus in attendance."

5.2.5. Environmental and Structural Adjustments

Students identified physical and structural barriers to their learning, specifically noting that smaller groups allow for better interaction.

- Student Quote: "Reducing the number of students in the classroom."
- Student Quote: "Improve their teaching ways."

5.3. Classroom Observation:

5.3.1. Moving Beyond Traditional Vocabulary Instruction

Reflecting on my teaching experience at Bayan College, it was observed that foundation students often struggle with "rote memorization" or traditional list-based vocabulary learning. Instead, students show a high level of engagement when new words are introduced through non-traditional, structural, or visual methods.

- Recommendation: Shift away from static vocabulary lists. Students respond better to "breaking the rules" of traditional lecturing by using active construction methods, such as the CELTA techniques, which allows them to build and visualize language rather than just memorizing it.
- “Foundation students often resist traditional, repetitive methods. They show significantly more enthusiasm and retention when they can engage with vocabulary in a different, more dynamic way that moves beyond the standard classroom routine.”

5.3.2. Active Language Construction vs. Passive Learning

The survey results align with my classroom observations: students do not just want to "hear" the language; they want to "build" it.

- Survey Evidence: Students requested to "Introduce more activity and skills for us" and suggested "Improve their teaching ways."
- Synthesis: By integrating methods that prioritize active construction like the building-block approach used in the CELTA methods instructors can meet the students' desire for more interactive, hands-on learning.

VI. CONCLUSION

The General Foundation Program (GFP) serves as a critical engine for achieving the objectives of Oman Vision 2040. This research demonstrates a clear shift in student needs: while traditional foundations are present, data from surveys and interviews indicate that learners prioritize collaborative and public-facing communication over rote linguistic acquisition. Specifically, the evidence suggests that incorporating interactive, real-world tasks significantly increases student engagement and readiness for higher education. By integrating these evidence-based instructional improvements, Omani higher education institutions can bridge the gap between classroom learning and the demands of a knowledge-based economy. Ultimately, refining the GFP curriculum ensures that graduates emerge as "Future-Ready Talent," possessing the practical communication skills essential for the Sultanate’s national development and global competitiveness.

REFERENCES

Al-Bakri, S. (2023). The 4Cs in the Omani classroom. Journal of Middle Eastern Education.

Issa, A. T., & Al-Bulushi, A. (2022). English language teaching in Oman. Routledge. https://squ.elsevierpure.com/en/publications/english-language-teaching-reform-in-sultanate-of-oman-the-case-of/ https://manahelalkhwairinternational.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Ali-4-1.pdf

MOHERI. (2023). Standards for the general foundation program.

Oman Vision 2040. (2021). Vision document. Official Portal of the Sultanate of Oman. https://fm-oman.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/reports/Oman2040-en.pdf

Trilling, B., & Fadel, C. (2009). 21st century skills: Learning for life in our times. https://ardian.id/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/21st_Century_Skills_Learning_for_Life_in_Our_Times____2009-3.pdf

APPENDIX

Appendix A: The "Questioner" (Survey Questions)

1. Which course helped you improve communication the most?
2. Which activity helps you communicate more confidently?
3. What challenges do you face when writing?
4. How confident do you feel speaking English in class?

Link: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1t-IciYCRiz98zRdXgqYoqZVkWa-0DSEphgDrw4f03Ko/edit#responses

Appendix B: Interview Participants

- Muayed Aziz Al Mamri, Mohammed Reda El Said, and Anwaar Saleh Al Rahbi (GFP Students).

Section 1: General Communication

* How has the General Foundation Program helped you improve your communication skills in English?
* Which courses or activities in the foundation program help you communicate more confidently?

Section 2: Oral Communication (Speaking)

* What classroom activities help you improve your speaking skills the most? (For example: presentations, discussions, group work)
* Do you feel more confident speaking English now compared to before joining the foundation program? Why?

Section 3: Written Communication

* How have writing tasks such as essays, paragraphs, or assignments helped you improve your writing skills?
* What challenges do you face when writing in English?

Section 4: Learning and Future Skills

* Do you think communication skills learned in the foundation program will help you in university studies or future jobs? Why?
* What suggestions do you have to improve communication learning in the foundation program?