

## **Developing a Digital Training Course for Enhancing the Professional Development of Omani Employees in the Workplace**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper is part of a bigger research project investigating the impact of developing a digital training course targeting the enhancement of professional development of Omani employees, trainees, and new staff in the oil and gas industry and academy. Furthermore, the paper aims to explore to what extent mastering English language proficiency meets the needs of professional development in accordance with the updates of globalization and marketization. The study is designed and shaped by the qualitative approach utilizing semi-structured interviews to explore and provide deeper insights into the investigated subject. The findings showed that English proficiency was perceived as an important factor contributing to enhancing professional development in the workplace setting.*

**KEY WORDS:** e-learning; professional development; training course, soft skills

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Professional development is considered a crucial factor for organizations worldwide that seek to follow up on updates on globalization and marketization and face increasing competition. Professional development means maintaining the knowledge and skills related to a particular

workplace or profession (Sonnenschein & Ferguson, 2020; Borko et al., 2002; Evers et al., 2011a). Any organization needs to enhance the professional development of its staff, develop their performance, and consider the overall efficiency of its staff. Human resources are the most important asset and investment in any workplace. Thus, organizations need to consider effective strategies for enhancing their human resources to align with modern life's requirements. To this effect, petroleum companies, the main concern of this study, need to develop their employees' professional development to perform successfully and competitively in their workplace, and petroleum companies in Oman are no exception.

Over the last few decades, Oman has witnessed considerable developments and reformations across all occupational and professional settings per the national development plan (Al-Issa, 2012, 2011). This is because Oman, as an Arabian Gulf country, has been influenced by globalization and marketization. In a globalized world, it is important to collaborate with professionals and experts from other countries to economically enhance and nourish vital sectors such as petroleum companies, trade, healthcare organizations, tourism, and the like. Based on its status as the modern international language, the government of Oman has paid considerable attention to enhancing English language education across all schools, institutions, and universities. Al-Issa (2012) confirms this fact on the role of English, pointing out that:

English in Oman receives political, economic, and legislative support from the elite as represented in the government, which determines its place on the social hierarchy ... English in Oman has institutionalized domains like the business, education, and media ... and is central to Oman's continued national development. (p.141)

In today's world, mastering English skills and knowledge of subject matter has become the most important employability criterion. However, mastering English does not mean having the ability to make grammatically correct sentences or speak fluently. More than that, mastering English means using English for effective communication through oral presentations, writing business letters and emails, attempts at convincing and negotiations, conflict resolutions, knowledge-sharing, and the like. The recent developments in the global market have increased the English language requirements and stimulated employees to build up adequate English language skills to grow professionally. However, one in this area may ask: "What type of English do the employees and professionals in particular sectors and workplaces need to achieve these outcomes?"

English, as an international language, serves multiple purposes in the workplace, particularly during the era of technology and globalization. Professional development is one of these purposes. In Oman, the government has allocated an annual budget for professional development across all sectors, recognizing its importance. The petroleum sector, a key player in the country's economy, must prioritize enhancing staff English language competency as part of its professional

development strategy. This can be achieved through the implementation of training courses that focus on English for workplace skills.

The Omani government has invested considerably in English language education, yet some Omani employees still need help with workplace communication and skills (Almahrooqi, 2016). Language barriers may impact the enhancement of employees' professional development in the workplace. Another serious issue is that some new employees in these sectors use general English that they previously learned during the secondary and postsecondary periods. Enhancing their English communication skills is an urgent need for employability and the workplace; some professionals and employees apply for courses and programs offered publicly and privately across all parts of Oman. Nevertheless, the English offered by these programs is either academic or general, which may not fit their workplace and qualify them to function professionally in line with the global economy and marketization.

Another issue worth raising is the need to develop and employ modern technologies and apps in learning and teaching languages. During COVID-19 and probably after it, online learning will continue to dominate academic and vocational education. The field of ESP/EOP for technical professionals and staff is no exception. Accordingly, professionals and trainers in petroleum organizations need to be aware of this learning mode. The development of a digital software training program that meets the needs of modern digital education has become highly demanded. Besides, the software program will be of value for future graduates and employees, especially those looking for flexibility and freedom of learning to juggle their careers and school, as they are not committed to a fixed schedule.

This study aims to investigate the role of developing a digital training course offering workplace soft skills to develop Omani employees' professional development in the workplace setting. It is considered a unique study that combines theoretical and practical perspectives to develop the proposed course. After investigating the literature, it has been found that a plethora of studies have been carried out to investigate the nature and characteristics of ESP or EOP programs. However, a lack of studies has attempted to investigate the role of integrating English language proficiency in professional development programs in the workplace, especially in Oman. Accordingly, this study aims to fill in the gap in the literature. More specifically, the study aims to:

1. explore the impact of developing a digital course offering workplace skills in English on the professional development of employees in Oman oil and gas industry and academy,
2. explore the role of English in enhancing professional development in the petroleum context from the perceptions of Omani employees,
3. Develop a framework of professional development based on the needs and perceptions of Omani employees in the oil and gas industry and academy,

This study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. How does developing a digital training course impact the professional development of Omani employees in the petroleum industry and the academy?
2. To what extent does English language competency meet professional development needs from the perspectives of Omani staff in petroleum organizations?
3. What components and concepts of professional development must be included when designing a framework for the proposed digital training course?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This study aims to explore the importance of integrating soft skills into training programs in petroleum industrial and academic institutions and organizations. Accordingly, this section outlines three areas: professional development, soft skills, and the role of English in career growth training. Thus, the section is organized into three sub-sections regarding these areas.

### **Professional Development for Career Growth**

The term professional development refers to gaining new skills or competencies related to the workplace in the chosen field (Aguilar & Cohen, 2022; Al-Khalidi, 2014; Cooper & Brooker, 2018). Professional development also means “staying up to date on new trends within your field and applying new practices to your current methods” (Jarret, 2023). Some organizations offer training programs for enhancing their employees’ professional development such as workshops, seminars, conferencing, training programs, and the like.

Professional development is important in many worldwide organizations and institutions due to the constant developments and transformations (Al-Khalidi, 2014). Professional development offers employees many benefits, not only for their professional lives but also for personal ones. Accordingly, employees are required to remain competent and increase their awareness of the latest innovations within the field. In the field of education and training, for example, Richards and Rodgers (2001) point out that professional development is an ongoing process for instructors that requires certain techniques to learn (Irgatoglu, 2017).

The concept of professional development is often intertwined with employability, suggesting that professional development is a key component of employability. Knight and York (2004) offer a comprehensive definition of employability as:

A set of achievements - skills, understandings and personal attributes - that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy (p. 4).

### **Soft Skills for Professional Development**

This section sheds light on the concept of soft skills and how it contributes to professional development. The concept of soft skills refers to certain interpersonal abilities and attributes that an individual possesses. In other words, they are the subtle behaviors and communication styles that help make a work environment or interaction with another person easier to manage” (Vasanthakumari, 2021, p. 66). A comprehensive definition of soft skills is provided by Claus (2009), stating that:

Soft skills encompass personal, social, communication, and self-management behaviors. They cover a wide spectrum of abilities and traits: being self-aware, trustworthiness, conscientiousness, adaptability, critical thinking, attitude, initiative, empathy, confidence, integrity, self-control, organizational awareness, likability, influence, risk taking, problem solving, leadership, time management, and then some. (p.2).

It is important to distinguish between soft skills and hard skills. Hard skills refer to a person’s technical or functional skills related to job-specific knowledge, such as machine operation, IT procedures, safety standards, etc. In contrast, soft skills are interpersonal and related to an individual’s emotional intelligence (Jairath & Khanna, 2015). It is said that hard skills may earn you an interview, but your soft skills will get you the job. Soft skills include a person’s ability for persuasion, active listening, delegation, evaluating information critically, and so on. In the workplace, it is not enough to possess only technical or hard skills that are related to knowledge or competencies. Rather, the workplace environment requires soft skills, particularly effective communication, to achieve efficiency and success. Thus, soft skills complement hard skills to maintain a person’s relationships, job performance, and career expectations (Nagy, 2019).

In this regard, Ken Kay, president of the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, argues for integrating soft skills into education. He points out that in a globalized world, it has become crucial to consider soft skills development in companies and organizations, particularly those that compete with the new world.

A study conducted with Fortune 500 CEOs by the Stanford Research Institute International, and the Carnegie Mellon Foundation found that 75 percent of long-term job success depends on people skills, while only 25 percent on technical knowledge. Another study of head-hunters hiring CEOs ranked the ability to communicate and motivate as necessary attributes for positively affecting the bottom line (Claus, 2009, p.3). Likewise, Ferguson (2017) states that in an increasingly globalized world, along with the increasing competition among organizations, the workplace setting requires effective employee performance.

One important aspect of soft skills in the workplace is communication skills or interpersonal communication skills. The concept of interpersonal communication is complex as it is concerned

with the way an individual feels, behaves, and thinks (Berger, 2016). In other words, interpersonal communication is not merely viewed as a means of verbal or non-verbal communication, but rather it is a complex concept that is further concerned with the internal side of the person, such as emotions, feelings, attitude, beliefs, perceptions, and the like (Berger, 2016; Larson, 2018; Macnamara, 2015; Turner & West, 2018). Thus, intrapersonal communication focuses on what goes on ‘inside’ individuals and the way in which they process and generate communication messages.

### **English and Professional Development**

English as a Global Language Remains the Medium Language Across Many Sectors in native-speaking as well as non-native-speaking countries. As Colman (2010) stated, English is necessary for “countries’ successful participation in the global economy since it provides “individuals with access to crucial knowledge, skills and employment opportunities and enables organizations to create and sustain international links” (p.3). However, the important question is how learning English helps build professional development in the workplace. Searching the literature, the researchers have found a plethora of studies that have been conducted examining the role of English in the sector of higher education. Also, it has been found that many previous studies have been carried out to examine English for specific (ESP) or occupational purposes (EOP). However, there has been a lack of research studies regarding the role of English in the workplace and employability.

Al-Khalidi et al. (2023a) conducted an interesting research study in which they investigated the proposed idea of designing a digital training course offering English for the workplace. The study sample included a good number of participants who were employees and academics in the oil and gas industry and an academy in Oman. The study came up with certain important findings revealing that most of the participants were in favor of the idea of developing a digital course to be used as a training course for enhancing the professional development of the staff in this field (for further information, read Al-Khalid et al., 2023). Another important study was conducted by Al-Khalidi et al. (2023b) to investigate developing a training course offering workplace soft skills for undergraduates at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Oman. The participants were students in different majors: IT, Business, and engineering. Most of the obtained findings indicated the undergraduates’ need and interest in using this course as supplementary material to prepare them for the workplace.

In the Arabian Gulf region, the literature shows that several studies (Almahroqi, 2016; Al-Issa, 2014; Trilling & Fadel, 2009; Kassim & Ali, 2010; Al-Khalidi, 2023a, 2-23b; Al-Hunai & Al-Khalidi, 2023) have been carried out to investigate the role of English in enhancing the professional development of the graduates and employees in the workplace. For example, Hansen-Thomas et al. (2015) conducted a mixed-method study to investigate the role of English in fostering workplace communication skills and employability. The study “concluded that English language



training in higher education programs needs to move from purely linguistic and degree-related content areas to a broader remit of English for communication purposes that covers both specialized discourse fields and broader generic employability skills and competencies” (p.1). A similar study that was guided by Almahroqi and Denman (2006), in the context where the entire study takes place, reported that some new graduates from technical and vocational institutions lack the English communication skills required in the workplace.

An interesting study was conducted by an Australian team, including Sophie Arkoudis et al. (2014), to develop a framework for English language proficiency and employability. The researchers stated that “Linking ELP and employability together in the Framework was supported by the general agreement in the literature and that communication skills are highly valued as a graduate attribute for employability, both in Australia and internationally.” (p.6). Likewise, a survey that was conducted by the Katz Business School at the University of Pittsburgh explored that communication skills were given the highest rank in evaluating the management staff (cited in MTD Training, p.10).

As has been stated in the previous sections, soft skills are considered a key factor in professional development in the workplace. However, the question is, how can soft skills be integrated into the workplace? In other words, how do we teach employees in global companies soft skills to boost their professional development? The literature review on the English language proves that it could be taught or introduced via offering what is called English for the workplace (Al-Khalidi et al., 2023 a, 2023b).

In the modern world, enhancing professional development, whether on a personal or organizational level, is determined by certain factors and strategies. English as a lingua franca is one of them. In non-native-speaking countries, English language proficiency is essential in enhancing professional development, which is considered a critical factor in the workplace for certain reasons. In the era of globalization, English has become the dominant language of the “global marketplace, regardless of geographic, social, political, or religious distinctions” (Akther, 2022, p.195). As a result, English language proficiency has become crucial in the workplace setting, and as such, employees and new trainees need to enhance their English language skills to meet the demands of the employment market. Stephen (2014) refers to the role of English as a means of communication “across a wide range of professions, from politics to science to the media to the arts” (cited in Akther, 2022, p.195).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This qualitative study employed semi-structured interviews, both individual and focus groups, to collect qualitative data. The purpose of selecting the semi-structured interviews is to elicit thick and deep information from the participants, professionals, and employees in oil and gas

organizations and academic institutions. In addition, the semi-structured interview method was chosen because of the flexibility and ‘incredible richness’ (Kvale, 2006; Merriam, 2002) of interactions between the interviewer and the interviewee.

For validity, accuracy, and relevance to research objectives, three sources contributed to the development of the interview guide:

1. A literature review on professional development
2. Professionals and employees in Omani oil and gas companies and institutions
3. The researchers’ teaching experiences in the English language teaching field

### **Sample**

The sampling method in this study was representative as it included participants who have expertise in the context being investigated. The population of the study includes professionals, employees, and professors working in the oil and gas industry and academies across Oman. Around 111 males and females have participated in the current study with no limit to their degrees, qualifications, and age. The importance of choosing experienced persons will no doubt contribute to supporting the purpose of presenting comprehensive and meaningful findings (Dornyei, 2012; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

### **Instruments for Data Analysis**

To analyze the data qualitatively, the researchers adopted Miles and Huberman’s approach (1994; 2013). The software NVIVO also helped in the analysis of the data. The analysis process includes several stages. Firstly, the collected data was transformed into written texts and phrases focusing on meaningful segments and quotes, excluding irrelevant segments. Secondly, the written texts and segments were categorized according to the main research questions. In this step, the thematic analysis technique was utilized to analyze and identify the information and ideas relevant to the questions and objectives of the study (Marks & Yardley, 2004). Thirdly, the segmented data were coded using the coding method proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994; 2013). The transcribed data were reviewed word by word and line by line according to each interview answer. Several themes were generated after coding and listed under the main findings.

## **FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

The obtained findings are grouped under the dimensions emerging from the data-gathering phase. Based on the research questions, they are outlined in terms of three findings: One, Two, and Three.

**Part One Findings:** The impact of developing a digital training course on employees’ professional development



Within the scope of the first research question, the aim was to explore the impact of developing a digital training course offering workplace skills in English that targets the professional development of employees in the Oman oil and gas industry and academy. Overall, the participants showed a positive attitude regarding the impacts of the proposed course, considering it a training mode that contributes to improving their professional development. They also expressed the need for the proposed course, especially for the new staff and workers who lack employability skills in the workplace. The participants referred to certain impacts of the proposed training course that can be considered emerging themes. The discussion that follows outlines these impacts.

- Adjustment to changes
- Updating knowledge and competencies
- Catching up with the innovations
- Developing attitude toward professional development
- Developing self-readiness

Adjustment to changes- The first impact is the adjustment to the changes that are taking place across all areas of human life, especially in the workplace setting. Due to the rapid changes in the workplace that have taken place worldwide, the employees, trainees, and workers in the petroleum industry need to adjust to the latest changes to achieve growth in professional development. For example, one of the participants described the development of the training courses as a refreshment, stating that “the staff need to continuously refresh themselves”. Below are several illustrative excerpts:

#### Excerpt 1

Considering the rapid changes in the field of oil and gas, I think that the companies and institutions in this field must offer continuous programs to help employees catch up with the latest developments in the region and worldwide.

#### Excerpt 2

Employees need to update their knowledge and competencies with the new techniques and approaches to remain up to date and competent in their field.

The term "innovation" is another theme emerging from the data analysis. Several participants viewed the term 'innovations' as a crucial component of professional development. They argued that the old and new staff need to pay attention to the ongoing innovations in technology, skills of communication, presentation, meetings, and other soft skills required in the workplace. For instance, one of the participants said that "to catch up with the innovations, continuous professional development programs are needed."

Self-readiness is among the important themes that must be taken into consideration. A considerable number of the participants confirmed the positive impact of the training course on developing the self-readiness feature for the employees, considering it a crucial aspect in professional development. One focus group member attributed self-readiness to the conditions of COVID-19, saying that:

Excerpt 3

The training course is important for developing our self-readiness to learn on our own. In the era of post COVID-19, plus the increasing demands of the workplace, it has become difficult for the staff to get involved in or attend professional development programs. I believe that we must take advantage of developing such digital training modes.

Increasing productivity and contribution is an important theme. One focus group supported the positive impact of the training course on employees via stimulating them to improve their capabilities to do their duties as wanted.

When the participants were asked whether the training course contributes to improving the organizational performance, most of the participants indicated their agreement on the basis that offering continuous training provides employees with the new and updated skills necessary in the workplace. One of the participants stated that

Excerpt 4

As companies change, employees must get continuous training to meet the latest global development. For example, employees need training in mastering new technologies and digital tools.

### **Part Two Findings: The role of English in the workplace**

To what extent does English language competency meet the needs of professional development from the perspectives of Omani staff in petroleum organizations?

Question Two above aims to explore the relationship between mastering English language proficiency and professional development in the workplace. For this purpose, several questions were asked, as stated in the Interview Guide (Appendix 1). It was interesting to get views from the participants regarding the importance of English from the perspective of employment and work success in their profession. The discussion that follows outlines the role of English in terms of key themes.

- English proficiency for communication
- English proficiency and workplace engagement

In terms of the role of English in the workplace, most of the interviewees reported that although Arabic is the main language in the workplace, especially when dealing with local clients, English is considered an important channel of communication. However, one focus group didn't consider

the lack of English proficiency as an impediment to career advancement or as a factor determining progression. One member said, “The important thing to consider is the technical skills in the workplace.” Another focus group, on the other hand, confirmed the need to gain English language skills, particularly for the workers who demonstrate a lack of English proficiency due to their poor education or training. One interviewee stated that:

Excerpt 1

Some workers are not able to read or understand the basic phrases about health safety, labels, directions, or signals, and this may cause risks in the workplace environment.

Excerpt 2

In our context, there is a critical need for sufficient training in English skills to be able to meet the workplace requirements and enhance their professional development.

English proficiency and communication-Communication is viewed by the participants as the most important application of the English language proficiency in the workplace. One focus group participant reported that through communication “employees will demonstrate for example effective skills of persuasion, negotiation, teamwork, network, and the like”. When the participants were further asked about the types of communication tasks that they need to perform in the workplace, they mentioned various tasks as outlined below:

- Communication through emails with external and internal individuals,
- Oral presentations when participating in conferences, workshops, and so on,
- Engaging in teamwork,
- Dealing with expatriates inside and outside the workplace,
- Presenting information in oral and written modes.

Another focus group participant mentioned the importance of considering the language register, especially when dealing with native speakers. One participant said, “I feel embarrassed sometimes when I speak or write in English to native speakers because of a lack of understanding the formal and informal modes of communication.” On the other hand, another participant referred to a key concern: limited English, which makes his message seem vague instead of clear.

Workplace engagement is another emerging theme. One focus group reported that workplace engagement comes through tasks such as problem-solving, teamwork, understanding the context, critical thinking, and the like. All these tasks require a good command of functional English to be used in certain situations when an employee needs to inquire about specific information, search online, articulate ideas and present them professionally, and offer explanations and justifications. One focus group member claimed that:

Excerpt 3

We need good English proficiency to actively participate in solving problems, giving our feedback, analyzing problems, seeking out information through the internet, and so on.

Another participant identified another role of English proficiency in accessing information

### **Part Three Findings: Soft Skills as a Key Element in Professional Development**

Question Three: What are the elements of professional development that must be included when designing a framework underpinning the proposed digital training course?

One focus group referred to the concept of ‘soft skills’ as a major element in professional development, and when they were asked specifically about the soft skills, they identified two important skills, communication and interpersonal skills. Thus, these are considered the two important themes in this finding. They considered soft skills as a main aspect in enhancing employees’ professional development in the workplace. One of the participants argued that “soft skills are even more important than technical skills considering them a ‘pushing force’ towards more efficiency and productivity in the workplace. Below are two excerpts that confirm the importance of involving soft skills in the training course for professional development.

#### Excerpt 1

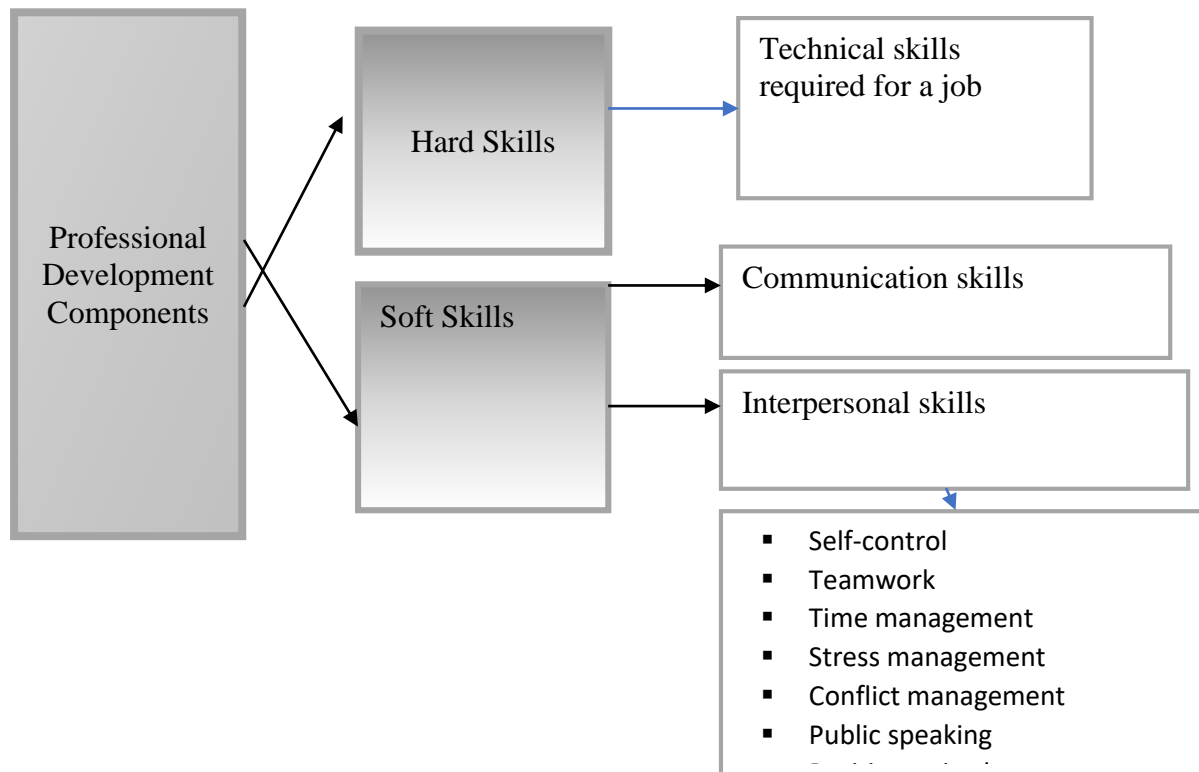
Possessing soft skills at the workplace enable an individual to communicate effectively, work well with others, solve problems, and to take appropriate decisions.

#### Excerpt 2

In the modern workplace, employers have become more concerned with the soft skills than the hard skills or knowledge about the field.

Another participant suggested an important idea regarding the method of integrating soft skills in the training course. He suggested that soft skills must be integrated through materials and activities. “We need to develop soft skills through special activities such as tutorial education, audio-video materials, case studies, and the like”.

Having reviewed the literature, the researchers realized that the term soft skills is considered a major pillar within the scope of professional development, and as such the researchers suggest creating a framework of outlining professional development in the workplace. The framework below illustrates the main components of professional development according to two sources, the literature review and the findings of the study.



**Flowchart: A Framework of Professional Development**

## **DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS**

In the modern world, employees and trainees are inevitably expected to develop professionally to cope with the latest changes and transformations. This study aims to investigate the impacts of the development of a digital course that serves as a training mode for enhancing employees' professional development.

To begin with, the present study revealed the anticipated positive impacts of the training course on employees' professional development in the oil and gas academy and industry. This finding aligns with previous studies (Aguilar & Cohen, 2022; Al-Khalidi, 2014; Cooper & Brooker, 2018), which found that investment in training has considerable advantages as it contributes to developing employees' knowledge, performance, efficiency, and soft skills (Tang, 2018).

Hence, the outcomes of the findings support the argument that continuous training is important for enhancing the performance of the staff in their companies or institutions. As the existing research, the findings assured that training would enhance not only the performance, but also the attitude of the employees. This result is in accordance with the previous studies of (Debra, 2011), who discovered that there is a connection between training and developing a positive attitude towards professional development. This in turn, leads to the conclusion that the concept of attitudes contributes to shaping professional development activities and practices (Bozkurt et al., 2012).

The second objective of the study is to explore the role or position of English in enhancing employees' professional development in the workplace. The results revealed that, based on the perspectives of Omani employees, gaining English language proficiency plays a significant role in enhancing employees' professional development in the workplace environment. This result goes in alignment with several papers that have been conducted locally, where the current study takes place, and globally (e.g., Almahrooqi, 2014; Thomas et al., 2016; Coleman, 2010; Akther, 2022; Al-Khalidi, 2023a, 2023b) to investigate the role of English in the workplace. In the context of Oman, for example, this finding confirms what Almahrooqi (2014) said about the role of English in the workplace. "In addition to factors such as global and technological development, given the multilingual nature of the workforce, which includes around 500,000 foreign workers, English has become a necessary medium of communication in Omani workplaces, especially in the private sector" (p. 1).

According to Coleman (2010), there is a positive relationship between English and the concept of development, including professional and personal development, enhancing employability, encouraging global collaboration and communication, conducting academic research studies, conducting conferences, and so on. Akther (2022) came up with similar results that English language proficiency plays a vital role in enhancing a person's professional development, considering English as a means of gaining global education English as a means of obtaining international employment prospects English as a means of promoting international communication (p.195).

Overall, the findings draw us to the conclusion that professional development is viewed as a mixture of soft skills and technical skills in conjunction with gaining a strong English language proficiency to create a productive and harmonious atmosphere in the workplace environment. This research demonstrates that the perceptions of Omani employees in the oil and gas academy and industry mirror the international review in this study. Significantly, these findings confirm His Majesty Sultan Qaboos's Royal speech stating that:

We always call for the development of human resources, their scientific capabilities, technical skills, and technological expertise to meet society's urgent requirements and needs and to provide



opportunities for those resources to fully contribute to the blessed renaissance witnessed by Oman in all walks of life. (2008)

This is due to the belief that English will remain the preeminent language of science, scholarship, and international business for the foreseeable future. Perhaps now more than ever, English education in Oman is at a critical juncture with the country seeking to better integrate into the international community by taking advantage of the access to global markets and academic and professional mobility that globalization allows while, at the same time, striving to maintain its culturally distinct identity. Within this context, a variety of perspectives and approaches highlighting the state of the art of English education in Oman and some of the most important challenges, opportunities, and potential ways forward are explored. This is due to the belief that English will remain the preeminent language of science, scholarship, and international business for the foreseeable future. Perhaps now more than ever, English education in Oman is at a critical juncture with the country seeking to better integrate into the international community by taking advantage of the access to global markets and academic and professional mobility that globalization allows while, at the same time, striving to maintain its culturally distinct identity. Within this context, a variety of perspectives and approaches highlighting the state of the art of English education in Oman and some of the most important challenges, opportunities, and potential ways forward are explored.

## CONCLUSION

This study aims to investigate the impacts of developing a digital course that serves as a training mode for enhancing employees' professional development. This research study also examined the role of mastering English proficiency in ensuring professional development in the workplace. This research has presented several key findings. One of the findings places a spotlight on the role of English in ensuring productivity, communication, and efficiency in the workplace. This finding confirms the previous studies showing that employees need to be competent not only in technical skills but also in communication skills in accordance with the requirements of the 21st Century. The second finding confirms the need for soft skills to perform efficiently in the workplace. These findings support the speech of his Majesty Sultan Qaboos's Royal speech stating that:

We always call for the development of human resources, their scientific capabilities, technical skills, and technological expertise to meet society's urgent requirements and needs and to provide opportunities for those resources to fully contribute to the blessed renaissance witnessed by Oman in all walks of life. (2008)

Based on the findings, it is recommended that industry and academic institutions consider the relationship between the workplace and the investment of English to help employees and professionals operate effectively and professionally in the workplace. Also, the study recommends

integrating soft skills with hard skills through developing training programs in the workplace, especially online programs that help them continue growing at their own pace. Offering valuable and professional training to existing employees and trainees positively impacts the performance of employees in their current workplace settings. Professional training programs lead to a higher level of performance.

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Appendix 1: Interview Guide Regarding **the role of English in the workplace**

	Enhancing English language competency is important in oil and gas industry and academy in Oman.			
	English helps me develop a better understanding of global competencies.			
	English helps me communicate with expatriate colleagues locally and globally.			
	English is important for the main channels of communication such as emails, reports, memos, and the like.			
	English is needed for the on-going training by employers.			
	English is important for improving employees' soft skills at the workplace.			
	English is important for carrying out research and data collection for the workplace.			
	English is important for presentations.			
	English is important for the workplace processes such as problem solving, teamwork, interviews, etc.			

English is important for learning the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.