

## Using Ted-talks Videos to Enhance Students' Communication and Critical Thinking Skills

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### Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the impact of TED Talks on improving communication and critical thinking (CT) skills among seventh-grade Omani students. The study selected a convenient sample of 71 seventh-graders from Welayyat Bidbid School in the Dakhiliya Governorate of the Sultanate of Oman. Data collection methods included a questionnaire, observations, and focus group discussions. Approximately 10 TED Talk videos were shown to two experimental group classes to assess their effectiveness in enhancing students' communication and CT skills. The study employed a descriptive design to collect and interpret the data. The findings revealed that students with high and above-average proficiency in English demonstrated noticeable improvements in communication skills, particularly in speaking and listening. These improvements were evident in several linguistic domains, including vocabulary, pronunciation, self-correction, and presentation skills, especially in body language. In terms of CT, students exhibited self-regulated learning skills such as planning, self-monitoring, and note-taking. Conversely, low-achieving students remained mostly silent during the implementation, struggling to engage with the content due to their lower proficiency levels, which hindered their ability to reflect on the authentic language presented in the TED Talks. The study also highlighted challenges faced by the teacher during the implementation, including the need to empower students with cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective listening skills.

Additionally, selecting TED Talk videos that were age-appropriate, aligned with students' interests, and matched their proficiency levels proved challenging. The shift to TED Talk-based lessons also widened the gap between students, creating additional challenges for the teacher.

**Keywords:** TED talks, Flipped Strategy, Communication skills, CT, student's textbook

### استخدام محاضرات فيديو TED لتحسين مهارات التواصل والتفكير النقدي لدى الطلاب

#### المخلص:

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى استقصاء تأثير استخدام محاضرات TED في تحسين مهارات التواصل والتفكير النقدي (CT) لدى طلبة الصف السابع العمانيين. ولتحقيق أهداف الدراسة تم اختيار عينة ميسرة مكونة من 71 طالبة من طالبات الصف السابع من مدرسة ولاية بدبد في محافظة الداخلية بسلطنة عمان. تضمنت أساليب جمع البيانات استبيانات، وملاحظات، ومناقشات جماعية مركزة. تم عرض حوالي 10 مقاطع فيديو من محاضرات TED على فصلين تجريبين لتقييم فعاليتها في تحسين مهارات التواصل والتفكير النقدي لدى الطالبات. اعتمدت الدراسة تصميمًا وصفيًا لجمع البيانات وتفسير النتائج. كشفت النتائج أن الطالبات من ذوات المستوى العالٍ وفوق المتوسط في اللغة الإنجليزية أظهرن تحسنًا ملحوظًا في مهارات التواصل، وخاصة في التحدث والاستماع. كان هذا التحسن واضحًا في عدة مجالات لغوية، بما في ذلك المفردات، والنطق، والتصحيح الذاتي، ومهارات العرض، وخاصة في لغة الجسد. وفيما يتعلق بالتفكير النقدي، أظهرت الطالبات مهارات في التعلم الذاتي مثل التخطيط، والمراقبة الذاتية، وتدوين الملاحظات. بالمقابل، بقيت الطالبات من ذوات التحصيل المنخفض صامته خلال التنفيذ، حيث واجهن صعوبة في التفاعل مع المحتوى بسبب انخفاض مستوى إجادتهن للغة، مما أعاق قدرتهن على التفكير فيما تم تقديمه في محاضرات TED. كما أبرزت الدراسة التحديات التي واجهتها المعلمة أثناء التنفيذ، بما في ذلك الحاجة إلى تمكين الطلبة من مهارات الاستماع الإدراكية وما وراء الإدراكية والاجتماعية العاطفية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، فقد شكل اختيار مقاطع الفيديو من محاضرات TED التي تتناسب مع العمر واهتمامات الطالبات ومستوى إجادتهن تحديًا كبيرًا. كما أن التحول إلى الدروس القائمة على محاضرات TED وسع الفجوة بين الطالبات مما أدى إلى خلق تحديات إضافية للمعلمة. بناءً على النتائج، توصي الدراسة بإعادة إجراء البحث مع مجموعة عمرية مختلفة، مثل طلبة ما بعد الأساسي (الصفوف 10-12)، لاستكشاف دور العمر في فاعلية هذه الاستراتيجية التعليمية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** محاضرات TED، استراتيجية معكوسة، مهارات الاتصال، CT، كتاب مدرسي للطلاب

## 1. Introduction

Since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, technology has been the cornerstone of all societies. Nowadays, technology has provided different tools to contribute to education and introduce learning tasks in a simple attractive way (A'thehli, 2015; Al-siyabi, 2016). The use of technology in the classroom might be one of the factors that affect learners' attitudes in a positive way in their learning process. It is a way to make of the learners self-regulated learners who can handle their learning autonomously (Zimmerman and Schunk, 2011) Internet-based learning techniques develop the awareness of the learners of their own inner feelings. This might help them recognize their negative emotions and control them. TED talks videos have been considered one of these technological products that play noticeable roles in improving English learners' communication skills (Al-rafai, 2019).

TED talks platform consists of many recorded public-speaking presentations given by experts from various fields. TED (Technology, Entertainment and Design) talks cover a variety of topics such as education, technology, social life, business, entertainment, and many others. These presentations are usually short, precise and powerful (Humeniuk, et al., 2021). The presenters who are, most likely, inspiring experts in their fields share their creative and innovative ideas in their speeches. Therefore, for an English teacher, these presentations are precious as the used language is generally authentic so students can learn many linguistic aspects such as grammatical constructions, phonetics, up-to-date English vocabulary, persuasive styles and many others (Salem, 2019; Humeniuk, et al., 2021).

Many international studies have investigated the effectiveness of TED talks in improving students' proficiency levels in English. Those studies were conducted in different countries especially where English is taught as a foreign language. The findings revealed some positive results of using TED talks as a teaching strategy especially in teaching listening and speaking. In fact, integrating internet in teaching is the aptitude of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (A'thehli, 2016). Educators all around the world have been encouraging this indulge based on the results of many research papers. It was emphasized that the effectiveness of the internet in accelerating the teaching-learning process is noteworthy (Fadhila et al., 2023; Humeniuk et al., 2021; Al-shamsi, 2020; Al-siyabi, 2024). Educational institutes have been working on integrating social media platforms to fulfil many educational goals with minimum effort as well as minimum financial expenditure.

TED Talks is one of these popular platforms that include sharing of ideas and inspiring stories. These stories inspire the audience to go forward achieving goals and doubling productions in different life dimensions whether in learning or working. In addition to being inspired, the audience especially the students can improve their English through being exposed to authentic language (Ismaeli & Ali, 2018). Many relevant studies conducted on the impact of TED-talks on improving students' English communications skills have come up with positive results. Researchers found that the students of the experimental groups, who were taught listening and speaking through TED talks, have out-performed their counterparts in the control groups, who were taught through the conventional teaching methods. (Fahdila et al., 2023). They justified that TED talks expose students to listening to native speakers of English from around the world. This enables students of hearing and imitating different spoken accents. Also, this continuous exposure to authentic English helps English learners to become fluent in the speaking skill which consequently makes of them sure-footed negotiators and fluent speech givers (Ashraf & Salem, 2019).

Not only speaking is improved but listening as well. Active listening to TED talks requires focused attention and comprehension of the new presented topic. (Ratnanishih & Gumindari, 2022). Students try their best to make meaning of the oral input they are exposed to by building upon their background of that tackled topic (Al-Belushi et al., 2018). This means that topic familiarity is one important aspect of sharpening listening skill. All of these techniques help students to understand and retain information to get the most of TED-talks (Salem, 2019). By continuous listening and weekly exposure to TED talks, students' improvement can be easily noticed in pronunciation, phrasing, and intonation (Nursafira, 2020).

The current study aimed to explore the impact of TED talks on enhancing the communication and critical thinking skills of seventh-grade students. Most existing studies on TED talks have targeted university or high school students, making this research unique by targeting young learners. By comparing the effectiveness of implementing TED talks on these two different age groups, the researcher aimed to contribute some valuable insights to the existing literature.

Furthermore, this study aimed to investigate students' attitudes towards incorporating TED talks as a weekly class-based activity. Notably, there is a gap in research on this topic in Oman, and our Omani school students urgently require exposure to authentic English in their listening skills (Al-shamsi, 2020; Al-Belushi, 2018).

This research is particularly relevant as it addresses the need to evaluate the applicability and impact of TED talks as an instructional tool for language proficiency enhancement among young learners in Oman.

### 1.1. Research Questions:

This study aimed to answer the following questions:

- 1- Is there any noticeable improvement in grade seven students' communication skills as a result of introducing TED talks videos as weekly listening tasks?
- 2- Is there any noticeable improvement in grade seven students' CT skills as a result of introducing TED talks videos as weekly listening and speaking tasks?
- 3- What are seven graders' attitudes towards indulging TED-talks videos as weekly class-based tasks in teaching English?
- 4- What are the challenges faced by the teacher during the implementations of TED-talks-based listening strategy?

## 2. Methodology:

### 2.1. Design

This study adapted the descriptive design. Two classes of grade seven classes were selected conveniently to receive the treatment, which is teaching listening and speaking through TED talks presentations. The other classes of grade seven in the school were taught listening conventionally based on the modified-English tasks of the student's textbook. The target school was selected purposefully as the researcher is a teacher in that school.

### 2.2. Population and Sample

The study population consisted of about 3200 grade seven students in the Omani cycle 2 Basic Education schools in A' Dhakhiliyya Governorate, for the academic year 2023/2024. However, the sample consisted of (71) female students from Wilayat Bidbid School (5-12). Their ages are between 11 and 12 years. The students came from almost similar social and economic backgrounds. Their English proficiency level is almost similar as well.

### 2.3. The treatment

The treatment of the study was introducing a total of 10 TED talks presentations as videos. They were played as class-based listening tasks.

Some questions were developed by the researcher teacher to be answered by the students before watching the videos and post-watching. To further engage students and apply flipped strategy, a fortnightly optional homework assignment was allocated. It implied selecting any TED talk presentation, watching it, summarizing the content, and presenting it during speaking lessons in the classroom. The purpose of that homework was to apply flipped learning strategies which enable learners to assess their own progress to demonstrate self-regulated learning skills, including: planning, note-taking, self-monitoring, and self-correction.

The study extended over a period of around two months, with participants receiving TED talks-based listening instruction, once a week during their English lessons. This approach aimed to evaluate the impact of TED talks on communication and CT skills and assess students' ability to independently apply and monitor their learning during the optional homework assignments.

#### 2.4. Data collection

Three tools were used to collect data for the current study:

1- Classroom observation: The researcher teacher kept a note to jot down her daily notices during TED talks based listening tasks. She reflected upon students' interaction, reactions and involvement. In addition to the class teacher's observation, some visitors of the English teachers in the same school attended some classes and reflected upon them. Their reflections were taken into account by the researcher.

2- Focus-group discussion: After each TED talks based listening lesson, the teacher held a whole-class discussion in which the students were given the chance to express their feelings towards what they have heard and watched in terms of native language, the speed and the gained information. In addition to that the benefits and the challenges used to be discussed as well.

3- Students' attitude Questionnaire: The researcher used a survey method through an on-line questionnaire, Google Forms. It was consisted of four close-ended questions. To guarantee the accuracy and increase the validity of the responses, the stem of each question was translated to Arabic, the students' L1.

#### 2.5. Study Materials

Ten TED talks videos were selected by the researcher based on the content of grade seven textbook. This textbook includes five main units. Each unit consists of 12 lessons tackling the four main language skills and sub-skills.

The tackled topics of grade seven textbook (A) are: Free Time Activities, Great Thinkers, Amazing Environments, Shopping, and Festivals. The researcher downloaded the selected videos and kept them in a flash memory in case that access to the internet gets disturbed. The duration of the videos was also taken into consideration based on the attention span of this age group. Most of the videos didn't exceed 4 minutes. In addition to that the presenters' ages were also considered. The preferable speakers were those of kids and teens as this age group might work as inspiring influencers.

## 2.6. Stages of the implementation

1- Pre-implementation: In this stage the teacher involved the students in an open discussion about the topic included in the target video of TED talks. In that discussion students answered some open-ended questions raised by the teacher. That process prepared the students mentally to construct new knowledge through building upon their previous one.

2- During-implementation: Students watched the video inside the classroom played in the LCD screen as most, if not all, of the governmental classrooms in Oman are provided with TV screens. During watching, students used to start answering the given questions in the worksheet of the listening tasks and list the newly acquired vocabulary.

3- Post-implementation: Students were given time to answer the questions in their worksheets. Then a post-watching discussion used to be held in the classroom including eliciting newly gained vocabulary, the main ideas discussed in the watched video and the benefits they got from watching and listening.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. The Impact of TED talks on Enhancing Communication Skills

The first research question, "Is there any noticeable improvement in students' communication skills as a result of introducing TED talks videos as weekly listening tasks?", was answered based on the researcher teacher's and guests' observations. It was noticed that exposing seven graders to TED talks had significantly enhanced the listening and speaking skills of the participants of high and above-average English proficiency. Therefore, using TED talks presentations as class-based listening tasks and optional homework, effectively met those outstanding students' needs and interests. They had shown a great leap in the speaking activities. For example, their presenting skills have remarkably improved. They started emulating native speakers. That was evidenced through demonstrating body language in their presentations.

They used facial expressions, hand movements, eye contact and many others. To the teacher's surprise, some flipped learning strategies have emerged as students started showing a kind of keenness in terms of going further by watching extra TED talks videos independently at home as extensive listening tasks. They tackled those videos in different ways such as summarizing, listing new vocabulary and giving some speech accordingly in the speaking classes.

On the contrary, the students of low proficiency level in English hardly demonstrated any improvement in the speaking or listening skills. Each time a TED talks video was played in the classroom, they complained that they could not keep up. They claimed that the pace was too fast which made it challenging for them to follow along. Those students could rarely jot down more than two or three words in their vocabulary notebooks. The reaction of those students might be attributed to the lack of vocabulary which might hinder them of linking what they know to what they don't in order to build a meaningful learning (Al-siyabi, 2016). Based on their proficiency level, most of the words were new for them, so how could they build upon an empty lexicon. In addition, those students got used to modified language in the English class listening tasks and they hardly had an attempt, so doing a task based on listening to authentic English was really beyond their level. Consequently, a psychological barrier got directly erected in their minds. They convinced themselves that that particular type of English used in TED-talks was above their level and they had no capability to understand it.

### **3.2. The Impact of TED talks on Enhancing Critical Thinking Skills**

The second research question, "Is there any noticeable improvement in students' critical thinking skills as a result of introducing TED-talks videos as weekly listening tasks", was answered based on the researcher teacher's and guests' observations in addition to the data the students' questionnaire and the focus-group discussion. Participant students have demonstrated a sort of critical thinking skills such the analytical skills. They tried to understand the presented topic thoroughly. They used to keep asking questions about what they don't know in the presented information so they used to go deeper and investigate further. Also, they developed some written critical thinking skills such jotting-down some information, phrases, collocation and words to reuse them in other linguistic tasks such as writing tests and quizzes. Besides, students showed some self-regulated learning skills that have contributed to developing their CT such as planning well for what topic they would surf in the target platform and which presented to select in addition to considering the duration of the video.



Consequently, this process has taught them the real meaning of evaluation indirectly. Flipped learning strategies and collaborative learning were widely practised during TED-talks implementation stage.

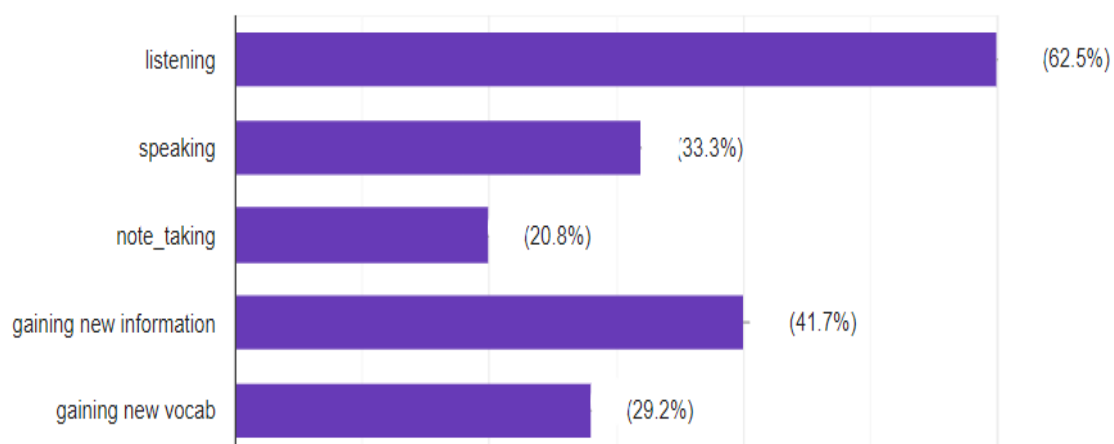
### 3.3. Students' Attitudes towards Using TED talks

In addressing the third research question, which focused on evaluating the attitudes of Omani seventh-graders towards using TED talks in learning English, a structured, close-ended questionnaire was sent to the student participants via grade-seven Whats App school group. The questionnaire was administered using Google Forms. According to the responses received, more than 90% of the participants expressed that they found TED talks-based listening tasks to be interesting. Examining the outcomes related to the learning aspects, 62.2% of the students reported an enhancement in their listening skills. This was closely followed by 41.7% indicating that they gained new information. The selection of topics for the TED talks was methodically aligned with the students' textbook content, suggesting that topic familiarity could have contributed to their ability to acquire new information.

Furthermore, 33.3% of the respondents noted an improvement in their speaking skills through exposure to TED talks. The students also highlighted gaining new vocabulary and practising note-taking skills as additional benefits. The shape below illustrates the distribution of these percentages.

#### Shape 1

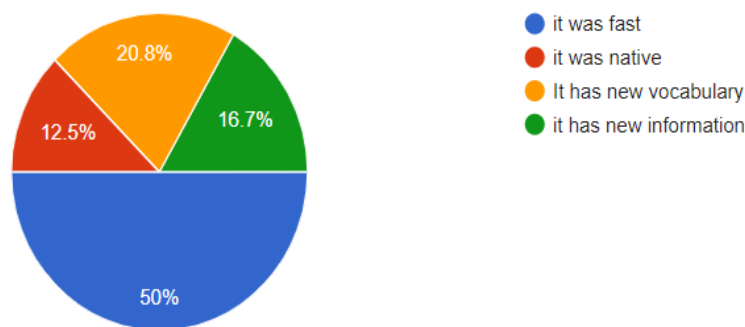
*Impact of TED-talks videos on students' linguistic skills from their point of views*



In terms of the challenges students faced during TED talks listening classes, it can be noticed in shape 2 that about 50% of the students complained that it was too fast. Also, about 28.8 of the student participants found the new vocabulary an obstacle hindering them of making meaning of target speech. In addition to that the presented information was new for them so it might have affected the listening process as they were trying to focus on the given information.

## Shape 2

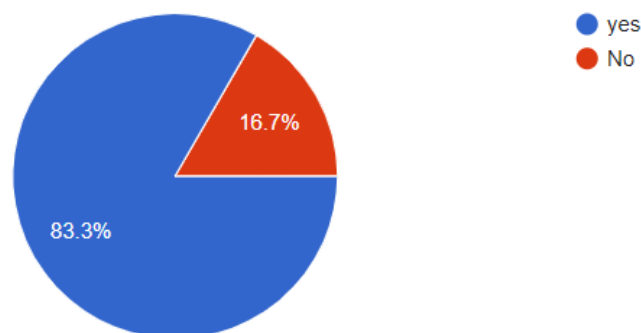
*challenges students faced during TED talks listening classes*



Regardless of the challenges they faced, about 83.3% of the student participants responded that they would like to be taught listening through TED-talks videos the next semester. Whereas 16.7% of the respondents were unwilling to be exposed to TED-talks again.

## Shape 3

*How far are students willing to be exposed to TED-talks next semesters*



### 3.4. The challenges faced the teacher

Regarding the fourth research question that aimed to investigate the challenges that might encounter English teachers when applying TED-talks as a teaching strategy, the researcher found that creating an alignment between the textbook content and TED talks tasks was really hard.

The students have got used to be exposed to modified language during listening classes. The pace of the voice used to be slow and clear as each single letter of the word used to be clearly expressed. So, shifting the students' involvement from the modified listening tasks to an authentic material was really challenging. Research in second language learning has identified the absence of meta-cognition among learners as one of the major problems contributing to students' inability to comprehend listening texts (Velanki, et al, 2022). Consequently, the researcher teacher had to equip the student participants with different listening techniques especially meta-cognitive strategies (Al-Belushi, et al., 2019) to help the learners produce meaningful messages from what they are exposed to. In addition to that, topic familiarity was an obstacle as well. As the teacher should find a TED-talks video that matches the content of the student's textbook to create a kind of integration and keep students in one track without scattering their minds. Also, the duration of that video and the age of the presenters should be taken into account as well. As the teacher noticed that if the speech giver was a kid, the students showed more interest and engagement during task-doing. One more challenge appeared without been prepared for by the researcher teacher was the emerging of proficiency gap between the high-achievers and the low-achievers especially when flipped learning was implemented. High-achievers developed a remarkable interest in the English class as far as they had started watching some TED talks videos independently. They asked the teacher to grant them opportunities to present their summaries in front of the class. Each one of the high-achievers and average level was competing to come up with the best video and the best summary. That keenness in independent autonomous learning intensified unwillingness of the low-achievers to participate and caused them a sort of disappointment of themselves.

#### 4. Discussion

Although the majority of the student participants emphasized that using TED talks videos in the English class was interesting, the findings of the study demonstrated that using TED talks-based tasks to improve grade seven students' communication and critical thinking skills was notably fruitful for students of high proficiency level. Also, a sort of progress could be detected within average students. Surprisingly, the influence of this strategy on improving listening and speaking skills of low-achievers was almost vague. Though, in most of the previously conducted studies tackling the same issue, the findings were in favour of implementing TED-talks as it has made a significant contribution to developing students' English competency. This disagreement could be interrupted clearly through considering the study sample. Most, if not all, of those studies were

conducted on older students whether at university level or high schools. Therefore, the age factor might have played a significant role in creating that sort of appropriateness of the treatment for a specific age group. For example, in their study that focused on developing the academic speaking skills for university students by using TED Talks-based activities, Esmaeli and Ali (2018) applied their study on 70 university students. They reported that TED talks-based activities have had a great impact on improving students' listening and speaking skills. A similar result was highlighted by Ratnaningsih & Gumindari (2020), when they investigated the impact of TED You tube channel to improve listening in English learning. A sample of 12 university students was selected purposefully for a case study. The findings showed that the use of media from the TED You Tube channel has a good impact on improving the English listening skills of IAIN Cirebon students. Those positive impacts included increasing English vocabulary, students' ability to identify topics, and motivating students to practice English listening skills. Also some positive outcomes appeared in Al-Jarawra and Bathania's (2018) study entitled, "The Effect of Using TED Talks and TED- ED Websites on 10th Grade EFL Students' Mechanics of Speaking in Jordan". It was conducted on tenth grade female students. To some extent, Ashraf and Salem (2019) almost reached the same result in their paper entitled, "A Sage on a Stage, to Express and Impress: TED Talks for Improving Oral Presentation Skills, Vocabulary Retention and Its Impact on Reducing Speaking Anxiety in ESP Settings". Henceforth, it could be identified that the findings of the current study aligns with the results of some related studied in terms of the existence of the positive impacts of using TED talks on improving English competency. However, applying the treatment on young learners, seven graders, made it difficult for the low-achievers to show a progress within two months. More exposure to TED talks videos might lead to some improvement within those students (Humenuik et al., 2021). This can be proved through the students' positive attitudes towards using TED talks videos in teaching listening and their desire to be used by the teacher next semester. This can be further supported by some similar findings emerged in Astika, & Kurniawan (2019) findings when they investigated the challenges facing (27) university students learning listening through TED talks videos at an Indonesian university. They reported that the unfamiliar accents, the speed of the given speech and new vocabulary were the main challenges. Regarding the challenges the teacher faced during applying TED talks in grade seven classes, there were many. The most time-consuming challenge was the required accuracy in selecting the most appropriate videos that align with the students' textbook content.

Also, video selection, in terms of duration, topic familiarity and presenters' suitability, was another crucial issue. In addition to that, the sudden emerge of a big gap between students in terms of interest, understanding, motivation and initiative to go further. Some students continued watching TED talks videos autonomously at home as a flipped strategy then they took chances to discussing the content in the class. The probable reasons of that gap between the students might be due to the differences between them in terms of vocabulary repertoire and the practising of some listening techniques such as cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies (Velanki, et al., 2011).

## 5. Limitations

The scope of the current study was limited to female seven graders Omani students in A' Dhakhiliyya Governorate in the 2023 /2024 academic year. There are some implications and recommendations for further research.

## 6. Implications

Using TED-talks to enhance grade seven students' communication and critical thinking skills has demonstrated positive outcomes, as supported globally by different research papers (Ratnaningsih & Gumiandari, 2022; Humeniuk, et al., 2021; Nursafira, 2020; Salem, 2019; Al-Rafai, 2019; Ashraf & Sale, 2019). Conventionally, Omani students are accustomed to learning listening skills through modified scripts, where the target language is simplified to accommodate to various proficiency levels, and tasks are manageable within a brief audio duration, typically ranging from 1 to 2 minutes.

However, with the advent of the digital era and global changes in educational paradigms, the academic landscape for students has undergone a transformation. Consequently, the integration of native resources to teach listening and speaking skills has become imperative (Al-Mamari, 2009). The findings of this study revealed that exposing participants to native resources, particularly TED talks, significantly contributes to meet the target level of English proficiency required in the digital era. The language used in TED talks reflects contemporary, everyday language, making it relevant and engaging for students (Humeniuk, et al., 2021).

Furthermore, incorporating audio-visual aids in the listening class has been proven beneficial in encouraging students to practice various listening skills, including cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies (AL-Belushi, et al., 2018), particularly those employed before and during listening sessions.

This shift towards utilizing authentic, real-world language resources and multimedia elements aligns with the evolving needs of students in the digital age, fostering a more dynamic and effective learning environment (Al-thehli, 2016).

## 7. Recommendation

The study highlighted a positive impact of TED talks on enhancing the communication and critical thinking skills of seventh-grade students, particularly those with high and average proficiency levels. Notably, the study found that the impact on low-achievers was not evident. In light of these findings, it is recommended that further research to be conducted to explore the effectiveness of TED talks among students of low proficiency level in English and students of different age groups. For instance, conducting studies with post-basic students in grades eleven and twelve could provide valuable insights. The dynamics and outcomes may vary among older students, and their response to TED talks might differ compared to seventh graders.

## 8. Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the impact of the TED talks videos on improving seven graders Omani students' communication and critical thinking skills. It also aimed to investigate students attitudes towards using TED talks for the listening lessons. The challenges that the teachers might face during implementing TED talks-based listening strategy in grade seven classrooms was also examined. The results were positive in terms of enhancing and developing the communication skills of high-achievers and average students as well while the level of the low-achievers stayed the same without any obvious progress. The attitudes of the students towards using TED talks were generally positive. They liked the experience and they like to repeat it. The teacher encountered some challenges such as TED talks-text-book alignment, TED talks videos selection in terms of suitability and appropriateness for seventh graders and the accuracy of applying flipped learning strategy.

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