Exploring Informal Spaces for Language Teaching

Annie Bangtegan Domede and Sree Lakshmi Ammanamanchi

ABSTRACT

With the increasing prevalence of social media in modern society, educators have begun to explore its potential as a tool for enhancing language learning experiences. This study aimed to identify the social media platforms most used by English language teachers and to elucidate the strategies employed in integrating these platforms into their teaching practices. This study is designed to capture insights into the most preferred social media platforms for educational purposes and how these platforms are commonly utilized in English language classrooms. This research gathered data from a diverse sample of English language educators. The findings reveal that 76.5% of the respondents use YouTube, followed by WhatsApp, with 47.1% of the participants choosing it. Social media platforms are commonly used by teachers while teaching, and they utilize these informal educational spaces for vocabulary-building purposes, followed by teaching grammar and then listening. The findings of this research have implications for educators and educational policymakers, providing valuable insights into the current landscape of social media use in English language teaching. By understanding the platforms teachers prefer and their instructional strategies, stakeholders can better support the integration of social media into language education, thereby enhancing students' learning experiences.

Keywords: language teaching, language learning, social media, informal educational spaces, instructional strategies, ELT, technology

INTRODUCTION

Recently, the rapid expansion of social media platforms has transformed the landscape of communication, interaction, and information sharing across the globe. Recognizing the pervasive influence of social media in the lives of learners, educators have increasingly turned to these platforms as potential tools for enhancing teaching and learning experiences. In English language teaching (ELT), social media offers a unique set of affordances that can be leveraged to engage students, facilitate language practice, and foster authentic communication in the target language. For instance, Kabilan et al. (2010) pointed out that utilizing Facebook could

facilitate learning English online. This was reiterated by Lee in 2018, who posited that with FB, formal learning can be done by lecturers outside the classroom, anywhere and anytime.

Notably, online informal spaces or social media platforms have become valuable resources for educators to engage students, provide authentic language practice, and foster a collaborative learning environment. Several social media platforms are commonly used by English language teachers for various purposes, each offering unique features and benefits. For example, teachers may use YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, X, Instagram, TikTok, WeChat, etc., to enhance their teaching practices. By

leveraging these platforms effectively, educators can create diverse and engaging language learning experiences while fostering a supportive online community for language learning.

The use of social media in ELT is among the teaching and learning developments brought about by technological advancement and the dynamic needs of the time. Mukhtar (n.d.) aptly described this, saying that technology enables teaching and learning in language classrooms. While there are factors that could either facilitate or hinder the leveraging of social media platforms for ELT, such as accessibility, users' technological skills, legal and cultural concerns, etc., utilizing online informal spaces for language teaching can be effective and fulfilling. This is particularly true when teachers and students understand the desired outcomes of any exercise involving the use of social media. According to Li (2017), sharing and obtaining materials are the most consistent activities students do through social media. However, this is not to say that teachers should only limit their students to research-related tasks or to downloading and uploading materials when using social media.

Hagler (2013), as cited by Albiladi (2020), posits that social media, digital applications, and websites can be used for different purposes. As such, teachers can use social media as a platform for authentic language use by encouraging students to participate in discussions, share content, and interact with native speakers or other learners in the target language. Platforms like X, Instagram, and Facebook can be utilized to create a community of language learners where students can practice writing, reading, and even speaking skills through comments, posts, and messages. Teachers can also curate content from social media platforms such as YouTube, podcasts, and blogs, providing real-life language samples relevant to students' interests and current events. Teachers can make language learning more engaging and meaningful by incorporating these materials into lessons.

Furthermore, since social media can facilitate collaboration and cultural exchange, teachers can connect their classes with peers in other countries through platforms like Skype, Zoom, or language exchange websites. This allows students to communicate with native speakers, learn about foreign cultures, and practice their language skills in a real-world context. English language teachers can also use social media for formative assessment and feedback. Teachers can create polls, quizzes, or discussion threads to assess students' understanding of language concepts or to gather feedback on their learning experiences, and they can provide timely feedback on students' written work or language production through comments or messaging features.

Social media provides several opportunities for language teachers to improve their teaching practices and engage students in meaningful language learning experiences. When used strategically, social media platforms can engage students, promote language learning outside the classroom, and provide authentic language use experiences. However, as mentioned earlier, teachers must consider social media's potential challenges and risks in language teaching. Privacy concerns, digital literacy skills, and maintaining a respectful online environment are some factors that need to be addressed when integrating social media into the classroom. By leveraging the diverse functionalities of social media platforms, teachers can create dynamic and interactive learning environments that foster language learning and cultural awareness.

This research seeks to explore the integration of social media into English language classrooms, focusing on identifying the most commonly used

platforms by teachers and examining the strategies they employ in their instructional practices when using social media. By investigating the preferences and practices of educators regarding social media use, this study aims to contribute to the understanding of the role of these platforms in ELT contexts. The research shall inform pedagogical approaches that capitalize on the benefits of social media while addressing the challenges associated with its use in educational settings. By shedding light on the platforms preferred by teachers and the strategies they employ to integrate social media into their teaching effectively, this study aims to provide insights that can guide educators in taking advantage of the potential of these digital tools to enhance English language learning outcomes and for administrators to explore on ways to support social media integration in the curriculum and the lesson delivery of their teachers.

Research Questions

This study sought to determine the social media platform mostly used by English language teachers. Specifically, it obtained answers to the following questions:

1. What is the social media platform teachers commonly use for English language teaching? 2. What strategies do teachers employ to leverage social media in language teaching?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that learning is not just an individual process occurring solely in the learner's mind but a fundamentally social one. This concept highlights the critical relationships between newcomers and old-timers and their activities, identities, artifacts, knowledge, and practice. Although the book discusses communities such as midwives, tailors,

quartermasters, butchers, and recovering alcoholics, its insights can be applied to other social groups, including those who use informal spaces like social media to learn and teach English. Social media is a popular web application that allows users to communicate and share digital content in professional and non-professional settings (Lutkevich, 2013). Users act as consumers and creators of information, knowledge, and opinions transmitted through comments, photos, visual media, and more. Popular social media platforms include YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook (Ariana &Mirabela, 2014).

Research has shown that social media positively impacts education by improving communication, collaboration, and engagement among learners (Rodríguez-Hoyos et al., 2015). For example, studies on the usage of Twitter, now X, suggest possible benefits in reviewing, discussing, practicing, and cooperating in a range of learning environments (Gao et al., 2012). Using social media as a learning tool is seen to help make information more dynamic and enjoyable, thereby improving the quality and student objectives (Page et al., 2021). In addition, social media activities can assist students' English learning by enhancing involvement, communication, and completing assignments (Habibi et al., 2018; Balbay& Kilis, 2017). Social media has been recognized for its educational potential, with many students using social media platforms to practice their English skills (Alshabeb&Almaqrn, 2018; Çelik&Aytýn, 2014). Specifically, digital media has been found to improve students' motivation and achievement in learning (Lin et al., 2017), with digital media tools like YouTube being the most popular platform for learning English (Al Arif, 2019; Pitaloka et al., 2021).

Conversely, other studies claim that the social

networking site, FB, is presently the most favoured platform for online socializing among college students. According to the survey by Albiladi (2020), his respondents reported using several social media websites such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and others in their EFL classes. The most-used social media platform in their EFL classes was Facebook, followed by YouTube and Twitter. His findings further reveal that Instagram accounted for a small percentage of his participants, and so did other platforms, such as ELLLO and Duolingo. While this may be so, the point of the argument remains that in ELT, social media platforms can be utilized as these informal spaces can be helpful and effective in creating a better teaching and learning experience for both the teachers and the students. As Nasution (2022) put forward, citing Ariantini et al. (2021b), Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Instagram can help kids' linguistic abilities.

First, as social media platforms provide opportunities for authentic language use, teachers can leverage these platforms to enhance students' language skills, such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking in a meaningful context. Second, social media's interactive and multimedia nature can enhance learners' motivation and attention to tasks (Pham, 2020). As such, teachers can leverage features like likes, comments, and shares to provide immediate feedback and validation, encouraging participation and active learning among their students. In addition, as shared in *BusyTeacher.org*. (n.d.), social media facilitates collaborative learning by enabling students to collaborate on projects, share resources, and provide peer feedback. With this in mind, teachers can foster a sense of community and enhance their students' communication skills by incorporating social media that allows students to interact with their peers.

Moreover, social media platforms offer access to a wealth of authentic materials, such as videos, articles, and posts in the English language. Teachers can use the appropriate social media platforms to expose their students to real-world content that can enrich their learning experience and cultural insights and directly connect with native speakers (Siddig, 2020, p.77). Finally, social media can be accessed anytime, anywhere, providing flexibility and convenience for both teachers and learners. This asynchronous nature allows for personalized learning experiences and self paced learning, allowing teachers to attend to their students' varying requirements and learning preferences. Also, as Grosseck (2009, p. 479) suggests, cited by Mahmud (2021), social media serves as a tool for preparing and collecting didactic materials, evaluating and analyzing student progress, composing informative and formative presentations, etc.

Johnson (2014) claims that teachers have recognized the potential of interactive social media for learning and want to incorporate it into the classroom for more engaging learning. Recent research studies show that YouTube can be a valuable source for language learning. The study by Listiani et al. (2021) proposes several benefits of using YouTube as a medium for second language learning, given that it has become an integral part of students' daily social media consumption.

While YouTube has been deemed a helpful learning resource for young learners, researchers have highlighted several concerns, such as the need for a stable internet connection, irrelevant ads interrupting the videos, and next-video suggestions that are not always relevant to the learning material. Thus, while YouTube can be

an effective learning resource, strategies must be implemented to tackle its weaknesses and optimize its benefits for young learners.

A study by Kabilan et al. (2010) examined whether university students perceive FB as a valuable and worthwhile learning space that could aid, augment, and reinforce their English language acquisition. The results indicated that the participants acknowledged FB's potential as an online learning environment that could facilitate English language acquisition. Similarly, Wang, Chen, and Liang (2011) investigated the influence of social media on college students. They explored how students utilized social media platforms, their pros and cons, and their implications for educators. The researchers maintained that technology is crucial to students' success in contemporary times, given its consistent growth and popularity. The research was descriptive and exploratory, and their findings revealed that although most college students use social media and spend considerable time on it, social media negatively affects their academic performance. Hamadeh et al. (2020) argue that social media enables students to develop critical thinking and social skills, but it may not necessarily positively impact writing skills. These findings indicate that social media platforms can, among others, effectively make ELT and learning more interactive and interesting. To achieve these ends, teachers must use social media platforms with caution and careful planning. This further means that educators must be adequately trained to maximize online learning opportunities (Atmojo& Nugroho, 2020).

In cognition of the other side of the coin regarding leveraging social media platforms in ELT, teachers must understand that social media presents challenges related to privacy, distraction,

and digital equity. For example, the potential for distraction on social media platforms can divert learners' attention from educational goals. This means managing time spent on social media for educational purposes can be challenging. Teachers must also consider data privacy laws and ensure a safe online environment for their students. Additionally, the abundance of information on social media may result in information overload, making it difficult for learners to filter and evaluate content for relevance and accuracy. When this challenge is not addressed, it may confuse students and may negatively impact their learning journey.

Furthermore, teachers need to consider socioeconomic factors that can contribute to the digital divide - a phenomenon where not all students have equal access to technology and social media platforms. This can widen existing educational disparities instead of promoting interactive and meaningful English language learning for students. Teachers must also recognize that using social media platforms for ELT means managing social media accounts and moderating online interactions. These require a reasonable amount of time and effort from teachers. Allam and Elyas (2016) point out that, based on their findings, time is an essential factor hindering social media adoption in EFL classrooms in the Saudi context. In addition, the teachers believe that adopting extra classroom activities is impractical (Allam &Elyas, 2016). Without proper monitoring and moderation, social media can become a distraction rather than a tool for learning.

Hence, teachers must adopt certain measures to ensure that the use of social media in their teaching is safe, appropriate, relevant, and effective. According to Nur and Syarifuddin (2008), as mentioned by Mukhtar (n.d.), teachers

should consider online materials that can engage learners effectively and cognitively. Teachers need to carefully choose materials that create a language experience that allows the achievement of communicative competence and purposes rather than just filling in the time. In addition, teachers must monitor online discussions to explain concepts or encourage students to think more deeply about a topic (Oxford University Press ELT, 2012). This means that teachers should consider incorporating social media in ELT and creatively and skillfully plan how to monitor and guide their students. This means that teachers must have a clear purpose for integrating social media into their teaching and a well-thought-out idea of how they evaluate their students' progress. They are expected to specify the target output that their students need to accomplish with or through social media platforms.

Social media platforms are utilized in ELT to achieve varying purposes. Primarily, teachers use social media in the classroom to communicate with the students and for individual learning activities. Moreover, according to Pham (2020), the common language skills teachers target when using social media platforms are speaking, listening, and grammar. For Muftah (2022), digital resources and documents readily available for students to explore with social media enhance their oral, written, listening, and reading competence. He also added that social media could be used to enhance students' knowledge of syntax and lexical complexity since social media can also promote a student-centered approach through the facilitation of interactive collaboration and exchange of information between and among students. This is supported by Rana et al. (2018), as cited by Ghimire (2022), claiming that in Nepali rural schools, the use of ICT in the classroom, to some extent, transformed teaching and learning activities from a traditional teacher-centered approach to a student-centered modality.

The use of social media for teaching English has some drawbacks. However, as Paliath and Evangeline (2022) put it, the positives of such means for ELT far outweigh the negatives. Understanding teachers' preferences regarding social media platforms for English language teaching is crucial for effectively integrating these tools into the classroom. This study can shed light on which platforms are most used and how teachers utilize these informal online spaces in teaching. This research informs educators and contributes to the evolution of best practices in integrating social media into language education, ultimately benefiting teachers and learners alike.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used descriptive research design to determine the social media platform commonly used by teachers for English language teaching and their strategies for leveraging social media in language teaching. According to Sanchez (1997), as cited by Domede (2020), descriptive research design describes and interprets the present condition of a particular phenomenon or topic. Consequently, this study sought to present, describe, and understand how English language teachers utilize the informal learning space.

Participants of the Study

This study adopted convenience sampling in choosing the participants. The researchers sent the link to the questionnaire to English language teachers whom they know or who were referred to them by family and friends. The participants are teachers in or outside of Oman and were all contacted online. Of those prospective respondents, only 38 completed the online survey. Hence, this study investigated the collected data from these 38 participants.

Instrument of the Study

The survey tool developed for this research is composed of four (4) questions about the most used social media platforms by teachers and their strategies for maximizing the use of these platforms in their language teaching. Specifically, the questions in the study instrument are based on the research questions crafted by the researchers. The questionnaire was designed so that the participants ticked their best answer to each question and provided any additional responses where they deemed appropriate. The respondents can tick as many options as they think appropriate.

Procedure

A link to the tool was generated after the survey questionnaire on Google Forms was created, reviewed, and checked for fitness for purpose. This link was shared with the identified respondents described in the previous section. The identified participants were informed that their participation in the study was purely voluntary and that they may choose not to answer the questionnaire at all. The answers from willing respondents were automatically collected and stored on Google. The collected data were then sorted and analyzed according to the research questions.

Data Analysis

The data used in this study were collected through a questionnaire created via Google Forms. The data collected from the 38 participants was then presented and sorted through frequency counting and ranking to identify the social media platform chosen by the most users. The same was done in identifying the most preferred strategy employed by teachers in using social media platforms in their English language teaching.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section of this research paper presents, analyses, and interprets the data collected for this study. In particular, this section discusses the two (2) main focus of this study: the social media platform commonly used by teachers for ELT and their strategies for leveraging social media in their teaching.

Social Media Platforms Commonly Used by Teachers

In English language teaching (ELT), teachers commonly use social media platforms to accomplish tasks and achieve target learning outcomes. As can be seen in the table below, YouTube is the most used platform. It was chosen 82.4% of the time as the platform used by the respondents for ELT. WhatsApp follows this at 52.9%, then Instagram at 26.5%, and Facebook at 23.5%. Other social media platforms identified by the teachers as among the online spaces they utilize in their teaching include TikTok, X, WeChat, Skype, Blogspot, LinkedIn, WordPress, and Voov. A closer look at the result of the study reveals that although some respondents identified less-known social media platforms, they mostly use popular social media platforms. According to Ariana and Mirabela (20 4), YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook are the most known platforms.

Table 1
Social Media Platforms Commonly Used by Teachers

No.	Social Media Platform	No. of Responses in Percentage (%)	Rank	Description
1	YouTube	82.4%	1	Mostly Used
2	WhatsApp	52.9%	2	
3	Instagram	26.5%	3	
4	Facebook	23.5%	4	
5	Others	8.8%	5	Least Used
	TikTok, X, WeChat, Skype Blogspot, LinkedIn, WordPress, Voov			

This result corroborates the claim of Al Arif (2019) and Pitaloka et al. (2021) that YouTube is the most popular platform for learning English. This finding implies that despite the respondents' varying circumstances, backgrounds, and technological infrastructures, of all the available social media platforms, their common choice for ELT is YouTube. As Listiani et al. (2021) explain, one possible reason is that YouTube has become integral to students' daily social media consumption. This means that teachers find integrating YouTube into their teaching easy as students are familiar with the platform. The proliferation of different YouTube videos about various aspects of English language teaching and learning makes YouTube a go-to destination for teachers. Also, given that there are language educators and experts actively creating and sharing relevant materials for language teaching on the platform, YouTube being a popular choice for ELT is understandable. Additionally, certain learning institutions created YouTube channels purposely for uploading teaching materials for ELT use. Hence, their teachers gravitate toward using YouTube since there are supplementary materials already designed according to their teaching requirements.

On the contrary, the findings of this study contradict the result of the investigation conducted by Albiladi in 2020. According to his respondents, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter (now X) were the most used social media platforms in their EFL classes. A small percentage of his participants chose Instagram and other social media platforms. This discrepancy in the result regarding the most used social media platform could be due to the accessibility of Facebook, even in remote areas where internet speed is not that stable and fast. In places where the internet is slow, browsing and using Facebook is much easier than opening YouTube videos.

This study also shows that WhatsApp is the second most used by teachers. While using WhatsApp for teaching-related purposes in some learning institutions in Oman is not at all encouraged, the use of WhatsApp among professionals for communication, networking, announcements, etc., is becoming increasingly common. Lutkevich (2013) observed that users can communicate and share digital content in both professional and non-professional settings

through and with social media. It comes then as no surprise that the respondents of this current study utilize WhatsApp in their teaching, so much so that WhatsApp also continues to upgrade its features, allowing users to share materials, call, and record audio and video. WhatsApp has end-to-end encryption for messages, too, for privacy protection purposes. In other words, teachers and students can utilize WhatsApp to serve similar purposes in teaching and learning that other social media platforms offer to their users, such as practicing English, discussing class requirements and topics, etc. This aligns with Alshabeb and Almaqr 's (2018) and Çelik and Aytýn (2014) claim that students use social media platforms to practice their English skills.

Strategies Utilized by Teachers in Using

Social Media Platforms

As presented in Table 2, social media is used for vocabulary-building purposes at 81.1%. Using social media to create speaking prompts came in second at 48.6%, followed by leveraging social media platforms for informal writing activities such as blogging, participating in written online discussions, etc., at 37.8%. The respondents also identified using social media to facilitate student collaborative outputs, such as project preparation, answering group assignments, etc. This strategy garnered a total of 35 1% of the responses. Other strategies identified by the respondents include using social media to promote love for reading among their students, idea generation for specific tasks, and motivating students to learn and complete a particular task.

Table 2

Strategies Utilized by Teachers in Using Social Media

No.	Strategies	No. of Responses in Percentage (%)	Rank	Description
1	Vocabulary-Building Purposes	81.1%	1	Mostly Used Strategy
2	Speaking Prompts	48.6%	2	
3	Informal Writing	37.8%	3	
4	Collaborative Outputs	35.1%	4	
5	Others	8.1%	5	Least Used Strategy
	Reading, Idea Generation, Motivation			

As can be gleaned from the table, teachers use social media to achieve varying objectives. From this current study, social media platforms are mostly used as part of teachers' strategies to help students enrich their vocabulary. This finding agrees with the observation of Ariantini et al. (2021b), as cited by Nasution (2022) that using social media platforms in class can help improve kids' linguistic abilities. The result of this investigation agrees with Muftah (2022) that using social media in ELT can enhance students' knowledge of syntax and lexical complexity. This is supported by an observation shared by Kabilan et al. (2010), who say that FB is a valuable and worthwhile learning space that could reinforce English language acquisition.

This study also shows teachers leverage social media platforms to create ELT speaking prompts. This result supports the idea purported by Pham (2020) that the common language skills targeted by teachers when using social media platforms are speaking, listening, and grammar. In addition, the finding of this study confirms Muftah's (2022) claim that using social media can provide students with support for enhancing their oral, written, listening, and reading competence. Again, this demonstrates how social media platforms can help make English language teaching and learning more effective when used correctly. This further corroborates the point of Rodríguez Hoyos et al. (2015) that social media can improve communication, collaboration, and engagement among learners.

The study also indicates that teachers use social media platforms for ELT through informal writing activities. In other words, teachers utilize appropriate social media platforms like blogs, online posts, etc., to teach their students and let students create their own to showcase their writing abilities. Moreover, the finding of this current study signifies that teachers incorporate social media platforms to promote and allow collaboration among their students for project completion, group discussion, etc. This result confirms that social media enables collaborative learning, allowing students to collaborate on projects, share resources, and provide peer feedback (*BusyTeacher.org.*, n.d.). This finding also corresponds with the suggestion of Gao et al. (2012) that social media can support students in reviewing, discussing, practicing, and cooperating. The same idea was proposed by Habibi et al. (2018) and Balbay and Kilis (2017). These researchers posited that social media activities can aid students' English learning by improving involvement, communication, and completing assignments. In addition, as shared

by Grosseck (2009, p. 479), as cited by Mahmud (2021), social media serves as a tool to achieve many tasks, including collaborative works like composing informative and formative presentations etc.

This study also found that teachers utilize social media platforms for reading, idea generation, and motivation. This corresponds to the result of Pham's study in 2020, where it was established that social media enhances motivation and attention to tasks due to its interactive and multimedia nature. Similarly, Lin et al. (2017) added that digital media can help improve students' motivation and achievement in learning. This was elaborated by Page et al. (2021), explaining that using social media as a learning tool helps make information more adaptive and enjoyable, which can motivate students. Likewise, Johnson (2014) suggested that incorporating social media in teaching makes learning fun and engaging for students.

This research has revealed the prevalent use of YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook by English language teachers as integral tools for enhancing their teaching practices. These platforms are utilized for vocabulary-building exercises, speaking prompts, informal writing activities, collaborative outputs, reading assignments, idea generation, and motivation. These findings underscore the diverse ways educators leverage social media to create dynamic and engaging language learning experiences. Social media platforms support various aspects of English language teaching, offering opportunities for authentic communication, multimedia learning, and collaborative engagement.

CONCLUSION

This research shed light on the prevalent use of

social media platforms among language teachers, with YouTube emerging as the most commonly utilized platform, followed by WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook. These platforms are primarily leveraged for vocabulary building, speaking prompts, informal writing, and collaborative output completion. These findings underscore the diverse ways educators integrate social media into their language teaching practices, highlighting the platforms' potential to enhance various aspects of language learning. In light of these findings, the researchers recommend that teachers and school administrators embrace social media platforms as complementary tools for English language teaching. However, it is crucial to ensure that their use aligns with educational goals and that appropriate guidelines are in place to address privacy, security, and ethical considerations. Educators can benefit from professional development opportunities focused on effective integration strategies and best practices for utilizing social media platforms in language teaching. In terms of future research, potential topics for further study in the realm of social media for language teaching include investigating the impact of social media on language learning outcomes, exploring practical pedagogical approaches for integrating social media into the curriculum, examining the role of social media in promoting intercultural communication skills and exploring the use of emerging social media platforms for language teaching. Additionally, research focusing on the experiences and perspectives of students regarding the use of social media in language learning could provide valuable insights into its effectiveness from the learner's standpoint.

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Dr. Annie Bangtegan Domede, *University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Al Musannah, annie@act. edu.om; Annie.Domede@utas.edu.om*

Dr. Sree Lakshmi Ammanamanchi, *University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Al Musannah, sree@act.edu. om; Sree.Ammanamanchi @utas.edu.om*