Allah's Ability to See Us When We are Indoors

Mind Over Matter

Social Media Adoption in Omani Public Sector

493 Outstanding Students Honored

News Update

Emotional Intelligence in Language Instruction in Oman
A Break from the Internet

The disruption of electronic services which occurred a few days back turned the day out of order for majority of students and employees at our institution! Once we have access to the electronic services and the internet, it becomes difficult to stay disconnected! The whole SQU community, including the students, academicians and staff use the internet for everything from day to day work and research to socializing. The disruption of electronic services would definitely affect the workflow of any organization.

However, the disruption of the internet services for a few hours gave the opportunity for many of us to reflect on to what extent we depend on the internet for our daily work. One of my young colleagues said, the internet is much more important in life than the oxygen in the air that we breathe in. He even shared the sarcastic quote with me on Whatsapp that showed the importance of the internet in our lives. It goes like this: “Imagine if trees gave off Wifi signals, we would be planting so many trees and we would probably save the planet too. Too bad they only produce the oxygen we breathe!”

I had the chance to read the account of a college student from the UK who decided to spend a week unplugged from the internet. As the week progressed, she found herself sleeping far better, the reason being when she had internet on his Smartphone, she would be lying in bed for hours double-checking the newsfeed! For some other student, a week without the internet was refreshing, which was something they did not expect.

Internet is an integral part of research in an academic institution. Hence it makes sense to use the internet to do research. However, if the internet renders real-life interaction null and void, we should think about restricting its use for virtual interaction with others. The internet has influenced our young generation to the extent that many students do not even use the real-life library. Instead they search the web for any information they need. It is virtually impossible to go without internet for a significant period of time. Not only do we miss out on social events, but our work suffers too. However, it is better logging off occasionally; even if just for a day or two!

Horizon invites contributions from SQU members of staff and faculty. Contributions in the form of articles, news, travelogues, stories of unique and interesting experiences, encounters, etc., are welcome. Contributions may be edited for the sake of clarity and length. Please send your contributions to horizon@squ.edu.om preferably, as MSWord attachments. Authors will be suitably credited.

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The opening ceremony of the International Conference on Applied Mechanics and Industrial Systems organized by the Department of Mechanical & Industrial Engineering at the College of Engineering at Sultan Qaboos University, was held under the patronage of Mohamed bin Nasir Al-Rasbi, Secretary General at the Ministry of Defense. The conference featured 70 paper presentations by researchers from 20 countries across the world. The topics discussed during the three day conference included applied mechanics and design, materials and manufacturing, industrial systems engineering, thermo-fluids engineering, and, dynamics and control.

The conference featured three invited speakers: Prof. Ibrahim Dincer from the University of Ontario, Canada who spoke about innovation and smart energy solutions; Prof. Heshmat Aglan, Tuskegee University, USA, who spoke about latest advances in rail steel structural repair; and Prof. Richard F. Hartl from the University of Vienna, Austria, who spoke about the role of logistics and transportation in developed and modern industries.

The College of Engineering Holds Industrial Training Exhibition

The office of the assistant dean for training and community service of the College of Engineering at Sultan Qaboos University recently organized the Industrial Training Exhibition to highlight the summer industrial training experience of the final year undergraduate students of the college. Prof. Abdullah Hamed Al Badi, the Dean of the College of Engineering opened the exhibition that displayed the best 49 posters prepared by the students who completed their compulsory summer internship in 2016.

An essential component of the vision of the College of Engineering is to provide its students with a high quality engineering education. This education is not limited to the conventional class and lab delivery modes. The college believes that its students must be exposed to actual engineering practice via industrial training. Through industrial training, students are able to correlate what they have learned at the university with what is being practiced in the industry.

The trainees are involved in a range of activities during the training. These include design, analysis, manufacturing, testing, regulatory services, etc. The College of Engineering is keen to maintain links with its alumni, has cooperation with the, and keep them aware of the educational, research and social activities within the college. The college by its nature, always has close ties and continuous interaction with the industries of Oman and abroad. In the year 2016, around 410 students completed the compulsory industrial training.

H.H. Sayyidah Dr. Mona bint Fahad Al Said, Assistant Vice Chancellor for International Cooperation, Sultan Qaboos University, received Pascal Leroy, Honorary Vice-Rector, International Affairs, University of Liege, Belgium. They discussed about initiating academic and research collaboration between the two organizations through student, and academic and research staff exchanges and collaborative research in veterinary medicine, agriculture and management. The two sides agreed on initiating the cooperation in veterinary science teaching and research. The scope of bilateral cooperation in animal nutrition, genetics, animal welfare and protection, disease control, breeding and artificial insemination was reviewed.

The University of Liege is the only public, pluralist and complete university institution of the French Walloon-Brussels community. It is a part of the Wallonia-Europe University Academy. The institution hosts 20000 students spread out over nine Faculties, one Institute and one Management School. The University of Liege is home to 530 research units in all subject areas, 20 large-scale inter-disciplinary research centers, and 1,500 contractual researchers. The meeting was also attended by Pierre Annoye, Economic Counselor, Embassy of Belgium in Abu Dhabi, and Denis Lahaye, Trade Commissioner, Walloon Export and Foreign Investment Agency, at the Embassy of Belgium in Riyadh.
Recent years have seen a proliferation of research linking Emotional Intelligence to success in the English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Hence, researchers have recommended explicit Emotional Intelligence instruction in language classrooms. With the importance of English in today’s globalized world, and the greater need to communicate in English, fostering a student’s communicative ability is important, particularly in an EFL context like Oman. In the Sultanate, it is common knowledge that the Government has invested heavily in English language instruction, but unfortunately, what is also commonly known is that the investment has not paid off. Researchers such as one of the authors of this article, Dr. Rahma Al Mahrooqi, have spent years investigating reasons for students’ inadequate English language skills, and today, there exists a substantial volume of research identifying possible reasons for students’ inadequate grasp of English even after years of language instruction both at the school and university levels. However, research linking emotional skills and language learning success in Oman is lacking, and several conversations between Dr. Chandrika Balasubramanian and Dr. Rahma Al Mahrooqi led to the idea to conduct research in this area. Specifically, the authors decided to investigate whether a lack of Emotional Intelligence skills could be one of the reasons for the failure of students to achieve competence in English.

In keeping with most other studies on Emotional Intelligence, the study used a self-report questionnaire as a primary data source. The questionnaire also included 11 open-ended questions designed to determine whether the students perceived themselves to be emotionally intelligent, whether their English classes helped them foster Emotional Intelligence skills, what they thought would help promote their Emotional Intelligence skills, and what they thought could be done to help them better deal with the rigours of university life. The questionnaire was distributed to the 60 undergraduate students in the English department.

The results of the multiple choice items on the questionnaire suggested that students’ Emotional Intelligence was lacking in the areas of self-regulation, empathy, and social skills. The open-ended questions focused on students’ perceptions about whether they felt emotionally prepared to deal with university life, and then specifically, whether their English classes played a role in helping them cope with their emotional difficulties, particularly during their first year of university life. Certain themes clearly emerged from students’ responses to these open-ended questions. The themes that emerged included students being unable to take care of themselves or deal with other people, the difficulty of university classes, and most importantly, the need for EI training in schools prior to entering university. Some student quotes include the following. Please note that with student quotes, the language has not been altered in any way.

We came from a high school which deals with us as a family so it takes care of us. However, when we come to the university, we face a lot of problems. The main obstacle during my first year was dealing with the other gender. Also, another problem was that I met different students who live in the different regions of Oman. So I had to deal with them carefully. Before I joined SQU I thought I was ready to study there because I thought it is similar to the schools. Immediately after I joined, I discovered that there is a huge difference between schools and SQU. High school should prepare students very well before they enter the university. They should train the students with different kinds of skills of how to deal with academic university life. In general, then, results of the study showed that a lack of Emotional Intelligence, and a lack of focus on emotional skills in any of the students’ language classes, do, indeed, hinder their abilities to perform well academically.

With this research, the authors suggest that one possible way to address the problems with English language instruction in Oman is to better address the emotional needs of students. One of the central tenets of Communicative Language Teaching is creating a comfortable learning environment by focusing on the needs of the learners. Creating a comfortable learning environment could lower a student’s Affective Filter, and thereby lower their anxiety, increase their motivation, and enable them to be better learners. For decades now, language teaching professionals have focused on these ideas and formulated ways for their students to be more successful. While many researchers have written about focusing specifically on learner needs, other scholars have focused on how to motivate students, and still others have focused on how to better students’ social skills and facilitate their use of affective strategies; all these issues are directly linked to Emotional Intelligence. In this article, Balasubramanian and Al-Mahrooqi stress that the ideas embodied in Goleman’s Emotional Intelligence are not new; his five components of Emotional Intelligence have been discussed, even within the language classroom, in many different ways. The current study suggests, however, that in Oman, Emotional Intelligence needs to be dealt with more directly; students need to have Emotional Intelligence training, and we suggest that this be done in the language classroom. It is clear that the EFL teacher in Oman needs to take onboard the responsibility for incorporating Emotional Intelligence instruction into their EFL classes.

Financial & Technical Resources: The adoption of social media requires financial and technical resources. Technical resources include providing technical support and assistance in the use of social media platforms as well as providing access to any services and software that are required. There should be financial resources to provide these requirements along with providing the necessary training to use these platforms. Perceived Benefits: The benefits expected from using social media is one of the key drivers for the adoption of social media by government organizations. The benefits include the ease of communication, the low operating costs, and the ability to establish two-way communications with the community. Compatibility: This term refers to the consistency between the adoption of social media and the organization’s values, strategy, practices, needs, and the IT infrastructure. It also refers to the consistency between social media platforms and the experience of employees using it.

Community Influence: It refers to the influence of the civil society. One study suggests that this factor has a positive influence on government organizations as well as being one of the key drivers for the adoption of social media by these organizations. Social Media Strategy & Policies: The adoption of social media by government organizations is a new phenomenon and the adoption is not always based on a long-term strategy but rather is usually based on the principle of trial and error resulting in the consumption of resources. Centralization: This term refers to when actions cannot be made until a higher authority approves them, individual decisions are discouraged, and when even small issues must be referred to someone with higher authority. Some studies suggest that centralization has a negative impact on those responsible of managing social media accounts as it restricts their speed of interactions and responding to the public. Nevertheless, other studies suggest that the presence of centralization has a positive effect, which leads to higher levels of social media adoption.

Important factors in the context of Omani public sector organizations

In order to understand the importance of these factors in the context of social media adoption by Omani public sector organizations, the researchers used the analytical hierarchical process (AHP), which is a decision-making tool based on experts' judgments on the importance of each factor compared to another factor. The researchers asked 11 Omani experts in the field of social media to participate in the decision-making process.

The results showed that the existence of social media strategy and policies is the most important factor, where some of the participants believed having strategy and policies would make things much easier for those responsible for managing social media accounts. One participant noted that it will have a positive impact in terms of reducing fears of the risks of these platforms and this is because it will explain for instance how to deal with some of the risks related to social media. In the second place in terms of importance comes the existence of training, experience, and staff resources. One of the participants noted that the presence of proper training and sufficient experience would help reduce the concerns related to such platforms. That is, staff who received appropriate training and has sufficient experience will be better able to deal with the various related risks, such as negative comments, rumors, and links that contain viruses, spyware for instance. In third place in terms of importance comes the impact of community influence, where most of the participants pointed out that the presence of government organizations in social media is mainly due to the presence of the audience there and they want to reach them through those platforms. In fourth place comes the top management support factor, where most of the participants stressed the importance of this factor for the adoption of social media. One participant noted that some government organizations did not adopt these platforms because top management is not convinced of the benefits of social media for their organizations and because of the concerns from the related risks.
Extraction of crude oil from reservoirs occurs in three stages. At the primary stage of crude oil production occurs by high pressure in the reservoir. According to some reports, only 30-40% of crude oil is produced. The secondary stage starts when the oil is depleted due to the fall in reservoir pressure and in order to enhance oil production, water and immiscible gases are injected into the wells, where additional 15-25% oil is recovered, leaving behind about 35-55% of oil as residual oil. When the amount of the recovered oil drops, the enhanced oil recovery technologies are being applied. This is known as a tertiary stage or enhanced oil recovery (EOR).

As per the LoU, SQU and Khatib and Alami will focus on the following research activities through bilateral agreements between the two sides: Developing the service and application of spatial data infrastructure; Upgrading GIS and remote sensing platforms and SQU labs; Engaging in research collaboration about real-time renewal of local scale digital maps using real time GIS and spatial data; Engaging in research collaboration about combining remote sensing and cloud technologies; and, collaborating in the implementation of a regional spatial strategy for particular governorates in Oman.

SQU will encourage its academic departments, research centers and students to conduct research through innovation in the field of remote sensing and GIS applications. In addition, the two sides will conduct specialized lectures, workshops and the exchange of experience and expertise, and will provide support to carry out the proposed programmes. Khatib and Alami Company has been working in the Sultanate since 1972 and is a leading company in the GCC.

**Talk Highlights Applications of MEOR in Oman**

Since the initiation of Microbial Enhanced Oil Recovery (MEOR) biotechnology for the crude oil in 2007 in Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), many MEOR technologies have been successfully established. Different types of microbes have been isolated, characterized and were found to potentially capable to enhance oil recovery and reduce heavy oil viscosity to light oil. The production of bio-products in bioreactors ex-situ and subsequent injection into the reservoir is the next major objective of the SQU research team. This was revealed by Prof. Saif Al-Bahry, Director of the Oil and Gas Research Center at SQU who delivered a talk titled “potential applications of microbial enhanced oil recovery (MEOR) applications in the Sultanate of Oman” at the university.

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Oil and gas are the backbone of the economy in Oman with total reserves of 5.5 billion barrels of crude oil, which is the second lowest in the Arabian Peninsula after Yemen.
How do We Explain Allāh’s Ability to See Us When We are Indoors?

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It is hard for the human mind to imagine that it is possible for anyone’s vision to penetrate walls, since the human being himself/herself does not possess this ability. This does not mean that Muslims (and probably other believers) do not believe that Allāh can see them when they are indoors since Muslims believe in the unseen, and so believe it when Allāh (as well as Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him) says that He can (having ‘Al-Baṣīr’, ‘The All-Seeing’, among His Names), given the following verse, 14th of surat Al-alaq ‘The Clinging Clot’:

Verse: «أَلَمْ يَعْلَمْ بِأَنَّ اللَّ يَرَى»
Translation: “Knows he not that Allāh does see?”

The ability of ‘seeing’ is mentioned in absolute terms; that is, it is not restricted to specific circumstances, asserting Allāh’s ability to see. In fact, believing that Allāh can see us when indoors is closely related to believing that He knows what we do, that is, believing that He is the Omniscient (The All-Knowing).

To explain this to the believers/Muslims, let us imagine the hardest/strongest wall that man ever made, the concrete (steel and cement) wall. Since we cannot see through such a wall, we (though believe that Allāh can do it, being the All-Powerful) cannot imagine, having the minds that we have, that it is possible. Allāh’s ability (omnipotence) to see through such a wall (and in fact see everything else in this universe) can be proven based on Allāh’s ability to make man’s vision very strong, and in fact, as strong as to penetrate through such a concrete wall. Let us consider the following verse, 22nd of surat Qāf:

Verse: “لَقَدْ كُنْتَ فِي غَفْلَةٍ مِّنْ هَذَا فَكَشَفْنَا عَنْكَ غِطَاءَكَ فَبَصَرُكَ الْيَوْمَ حَدِيدٌ”
Translation: (It will be said:) “You were heedless of this; now have We removed your veil, and sharp is your sight this day!”

Actually, most translations of the Holy Qur’ān interpret the word “حديد” to mean “sharp”, and this is not incorrect; it is the desired meaning. Nonetheless, we need to pay close/careful attention to the words of the Holy Qur’ān. Allāh Almighty chose the word “حديد”, which means “iron/steel”, not “حاد”, which is the direct translation of the word “sharp”, and Allāh, I believe, means it.

Allāh Almighty says that “after the veil is removed”, “man’s vision will be steel”, not even like steel, but rather “steel” itself; Allāh does not say ‘فنصر كالألم ككال الحديد’, ‘your vision is like steel’. This means that man’s vision, with and by the omnipotence (and empowerment) of Allāh, will have the strength of steel, that is, will be steel-strong. What does this mean?

This basically means that man’s vision (eyesight) will be able to penetrate anything that steel can penetrate through, including the concrete wall. Today, we see that all penetrating, cutting, piercing, grinding, and sharpening machines/tools, like drills, circular saws, and all other types of electric saws, are made of steel (because some of them are designed to cut steel itself). This means that man’s eyesight will be as strong in its effect and power as these machines.

Back to the question in the title of this article, if Allāh Almighty can make human beings’ eyesight this strong (steel-strong), isn’t this sufficient evidence that Allāh’s own vision is even stronger than this, than steel and all other materials, and all the time, not just on a specific occasion, as the case is with human beings, whose vision acquires the strength of steel on the Judgment Day, to see the truth (or probably even before that, when the Angels come to take their lives). To be more specific, Allāh’s vision has been much more powerful than steel even before time began, and will be so after time ends, since Allāh created this universe before us and before time, which we live by.

Now, after proving that Allāh can see through concrete walls (as well as everything else), isn’t this sufficient proof that Allāh can see through our skin and flesh (much weaker than steel), and so knows what we think, intend to do, and believe? Needless to say that this is not the only explanation for Allāh’s ability to see, since everything in the universe is a sign that Allāh is omnipotent.

References:
The Importance of RTPC
Roberto Fiorentino

Roberto Fiorentino is Counsellor with the Institute for Training and Technical Cooperation of the World Trade Organization in Geneva. He holds degrees from the University of Wales, Aberystwyth and the College of Europe, Bruges. Prior to joining the WTO he served as researcher at the United Nations University – Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS) in Bruges, Belgium. His areas of concentration are international trade with focus on regional trade agreements. His publications include The Landscape of Regional Trade Agreements and WTO Surveillance, in Baldwin R. and Low P. Ed. ‘Multilateralizing Regionalism: Challenges for the Global Trading System’, Cambridge University Press, 2009. Representing the Director General of WTO, Roberto Fiorentino attended the opening ceremony of the third Regional Trade Policy Course (RTPC) held at SQU.

Horizon: Why do WTO foster partnerships with academic institutions in conducting RTPCs?
Fiorentino: RTPC are one the WTO’s flagship technical assistance programs and they serve multiple objectives. As many other WTO training and technical assistance activities, their aim is to build capacity by deepening government officials’ understanding of the WTO agreements and by strengthening their ability to undertake WTO work. However, RTPCs are unique in placing a specific focus on the regional trade policy context and its linkages with the WTO. This is done through the participation of regional academics and policy specialists who co-lecture with officials from the WTO. In this respect, the partnership with selected universities, as in this case, the SQU, is key to assuring the regional component of the RTPCs. The WTO is deeply grateful for SQU for hosting the event. We are also grateful to Oman’s Ministry of Commerce and Industry in supporting us in hosting the regional course in the Sultanate.

Horizon: How do the participants benefit from the RTPC program?
Fiorentino: The course enables the participants to immerse themselves in the work of the WTO and it provides a unique opportunity for hands on learning about the multilateral trading system and the Arab and Middle East regional trade environment. WTO and RTP experts come together to provide the participants with different perspectives of the trade policy issues being discussed; this should encourage critical thinking about trade policy formulation by exploring the linkages between the WTO rules and disciplines of the respective country’s interest in the regional and multilateral trading environment. This course considers the legal side of the WTO agreements and the economic implications of these rules and disciplines for the countries. These knowledge, skills and experience that they acquired should ultimately assist them in shaping the trade policies of their economies.