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EFL Omani Foundation Programme Students' Attitudes Towards Reading in English and Their Knowledge of Reading Comprehension Strategies

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ABSTRACT: *This study investigated the importance of reading in English for EFL Foundation Programme students at a private college university in Oman. It discussed the students' attitudes towards reading in English and their knowledge of reading comprehension strategies. The instruments used included a short questionnaire and a reading achievement test. They were handed to sixteen mixed-age and gender students from level one and sixteen mixed-age and gender students from level two. The findings of the study instruments' data showed that gender and English language proficiency had no statistically significant effect on the level of knowledge of reading comprehension strategies in English. They also revealed that age had no statistically significant effect on attitudes towards reading in English.Moreover, they showed no statistically significant correlation between the knowledge of reading comprehension strategies and attitudes toward reading in English. Although there were positive reading attitudes, students showed weak knowledge of reading comprehension strategies. The study recommends that EFL teachers develop their students' knowledge of reading comprehension strategies.*

KEYWORDS: EFL Omani foundation programme, students' attitudes, reading in English, knowledge of reading, comprehension strategies

INTRODUCTION

Many studies have been carried out to explore the importance of reading in second language acquisition (Şentürk, 2015). Krashen (2004), for instance, stated that reading develops language acquisition and enhances other language skills. Other studies showed that students need to read for general understanding first and then move to reading for more details to gain better language awareness (Harmer, 2007). He emphasised that through extensive and intensive reading, students can benefit from reading, supporting the continuous need for reading practice. Grabe (2009) claimed that determining difficulties in word recognition and grammar understanding and evaluating and solving problems in reading comprehension

leads successful L2 readers to much higher developed levels of metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness. He stated that reaching high reading comprehension levels can develop speaking proficiency in L2. He explored the results of some studies in his book and mentioned that L2 reading comprehension is strongly related to L2 language proficiency. In this paper, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) refers to the study of English by speakers with different native languages in regions where English is not the dominant language, henceforth being referred to as EFL.

EFL Students' Attitudes Towards Reading in English

Studies have revealed different factors that may affect learners' attitudes towards reading in English or L2. Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) stated that learners' attitudes towards reading relate to their reading motivations. They also claimed that developing learner's attitudes towards reading depends on how often they read. Later, Yamashita (2004) defined attitudes as feelings contributing to learners' learning and performance. She emphasised the importance of understanding the learners' attitudes towards reading to encourage them to engage in extensive reading.

Furthermore, she found that learners' attitudes towards reading in L2 are connected to their attitudes towards reading in their L1. Therefore, their better performance in L2 reading is related to their positive attitudes towards their reading in L1. Yamashita (2004) concluded by advising educators to understand their students' attitudes towards reading in L1 and L2 to make them perform better in extensive reading in L2. In addition, Montgomery, Durant, Fabb, Furniss, and Mills (2007) argued that readers interpret a reading text in terms of their "beliefs, attitudes and expectations" (p.11). In contrast with Wigfield and Guthrie (1997), Grabe (2009) argued that L2 readers mainly engage in reading for academic purposes and to support language proficiency, whereas reading motivation in L2 has not been explored yet. He added that L2 readers are motivated differently to read and that motivation in reading can be built by developing fluency through reading as many materials as possible. Therefore, this type of L2 learners who work on their reading fluency are more likely to continue developing their learning process and language proficiency.

Moreover, Şentürk (2015) found that students' positive attitudes towards reading can develop their proficiency in learning. Furthermore, she argued later that students' attitudes towards reading can affect their motivation and progress in reading comprehension. Therefore, students' attitudes towards reading in L2 can be developed, and motivations for reading can be gained.

EFL Students' Knowledge of Reading Comprehension Strategies

Afflerbach, Pearson, and Paris (2008) argued that unintentionally processing in reading determines reading skills, whereas purposely controlled processing is the reading strategies processes. They claimed that developing readers must learn to apply reading skills and strategies. Furthermore, Manoli and Papadopoulou (2012) found that reading skills are automatic processes a learner can learn through practice and repetition. In addition, reading skills are more text-centred and deal with a set of easy steps a learner can use to comprehend a written text by answering a set of tasks. On the other hand, Manoli and

Papadopoulou (2012) defined reading strategies as deliberate and conscious cognitive processes. Furthermore, they added that reading strategies are more learner-centred, which can support learners in developing their reading comprehension more professionally. They concluded that with practice and repetition, reading strategies are followed by reading skills, which learners need to be aware of.

Regarding reading strategies, Nilson (2010) argued that not all reading strategies will be effective for all students. Thus, students need to try what strategies will work for them. She advised students not to lecture on the reading strategies but to let them be taught on their own so that they could acquire them for later applications. Nilson (2010) mentioned some examples of the reading strategies teachers can deliver to their students to use when reading, such as scanning, reviewing the purpose of reading the text, reading with determination, and reviewing the text's main points. Furthermore, Al Rasheed (2014) investigated the importance of using pre-reading strategies in reading classes to ensure better reading comprehension, which supports the importance of using reading strategies to develop reading comprehension. She found that using pre-reading strategies activates prior or relevant knowledge and makes reading comprehension easier.

On the other hand, Meniado (2016) revealed in his recent study, which was conducted on Saudi college students from different randomly selected colleges in Saudi Arabia, that neither reading metacognitive strategies nor reading motivation necessarily leads to better reading comprehension. In contrast, he found a relationship between reading motivation and metacognitive strategies. He concluded that other factors that can develop reading comprehension are still to be explored and studied.

Statement of the Problem

According to Bouchamma, Poulin, Basque, and Ruel (2013), girls were still believed to be much better than boys in reading achievement. In addition, Stoet and Geary (2013) stated that boys achieve low reading marks. However, Shera (2014) claimed that the "gender gap in reading achievement" can be linked to whether the school sector is "public or private" (p.28). Therefore, it is crucial to explore the gender gap in reading achievement in the Omani context to discover whether the sector matters. This study will discover whether EFL Omani female students are better than male students in the foundation programme at a private university (Buraimi University College) in Oman regarding knowledge of reading comprehension strategies and their attitudes towards reading in the English language.

Aims of the Study

This paper searched the field of EFL Omani Foundation Programme (FP) students' attitudes towards reading in English and their knowledge of reading comprehension strategies. According to the Council (2008), a foundation programme (FP) in Oman is "designed to prepare students for their postsecondary and higher education studies" (p.6), where English is taught as the medium of instruction. The study focused on three main points, namely:

1. The relationship between EFL Omani (FP) students' attitudes towards reading in English and their knowledge of reading comprehension strategies.
2. The influence of the background variables: age, gender and level of English language proficiency upon EFL Omani (FP) students' attitudes towards reading in English and their knowledge of reading comprehension strategies.
3. The probability of predicting EFL Omani (FP) students' knowledge of reading comprehension strategies is based upon a combination of the variables of attitudes towards reading in English, age, gender, and level of English language proficiency.

Operationalisation of the Constructs

The study used two instruments: a short multi-item questionnaire and a reading achievement test in which the constructs were operationalised by:

Attitude towards reading in English. EFL Omani (FP) students individually responded to 20 short statements in the field of reading in English. Each statement required students to indicate their level of agreement on a 5-point Likert scale. The scale was designed to be 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Not Sure, 2=Disagree, and 1=Strongly Disagree. Removing directional bias was done by transposing all scores. High scores indicated a positive attitude towards reading in English, while low scores indicated a low attitude.

Knowledge of reading comprehension strategies in English. EFL Omani (FP) students' ability to answer 20 questions correctly and individually in a reading achievement test to measure their general reading comprehension strategies in English. The test involved students reading a passage and then answering true/false, guessing the main idea, guessing the meaning of words, answering multiple choice questions, inferring themes and finally filling in gap questions. A high score on this test indicated high levels of knowledge of reading comprehension strategies, while a low score indicated low levels of knowledge of reading comprehension strategies.

EFL Omani (FP) students' background data. The gathering of students' background data was measured by:
1. Age: students aged 20 years old and under and above 20 years old.
2. Gender: students indicate their gender by ticking male or female in a tick box; information is collected for descriptive purposes.
3. Students' level of English proficiency: students indicate their level of English language proficiency by ticking level 1 or level 2 in a tick box, information collected for descriptive purposes.

The Hypotheses

This study aimed to verify the following five hypotheses among EFL Omani (FP) students:
H1: Female students will hold statistically significantly different levels of knowledge of reading comprehension strategies in English than male students.

H01: There will be no statistically significant difference between the levels of knowledge of reading comprehension strategies in English held by female and male students.
H2: Students aged above 20 years old will hold statistically significantly different attitudes towards reading in English than students aged 20 years old and under.
H02: There will be no statistically significant difference between the attitudes towards reading in English held by students aged above 20 years old and students aged 20 years old and under.
H3: Level 2 students will hold statistically significantly different levels of knowledge of reading comprehension strategies in English than Level 1 students.
H03: There will be no statistically significant difference between the levels of knowledge of reading comprehension strategies in English held by level 2 and Level 1 students.
H4: There will be a statistically significant correlation between students' knowledge of reading comprehension strategies and their attitude towards reading in English.
H04: There will be no statistically significant correlation between students' knowledge of reading comprehension strategies and attitudes towards reading in the English language.
H5: Students' knowledge of reading comprehension strategies will be statistically predictable based on their attitudes towards reading in English, age, gender and level of English language proficiency.
H05: Students' knowledge of reading comprehension strategies will not be statistically predictable based on their attitudes towards reading in English, age, gender and level of English language proficiency.

Table 1. Research Hypothesis

Hypothesis No.	Independent Variables	Dependent Variable	Variables
1.	Gender	Knowledge of reading comprehension skills	
2.	Age	Reading attitude	
3.	Level of proficiency	Knowledge of reading comprehension skills	
4.	-	-	1. Knowledge of reading comprehension skills 2. Reading attitude
5.	1. Reading attitude 2. Gender 3. Age 4. Level of proficiency	Knowledge of reading comprehension skills	

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RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The Methodology

To satisfy the study's aims, a three-part "self-administered questionnaire" (Oppenheim, 2000, p.103) was designed to meet the requirements of the attitude scale. A questionnaire can "contain checklists, attitude scales, projective techniques, rating scales", and it is "an important instrument of research, a tool for data collection" (Oppenheim, 2000, p.100). However, to meet the requirements of the knowledge scale, a reading achievement test was written for Level 1 and Level 2. The test involved students reading a passage and answering 20 different reading comprehension assessments (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1992).

Participants and Sampling

Due to the time constraints and the small-scale study (32 participants), implementing a random sampling method was inappropriate. Therefore, a convenience sampling method was applied. The study was conducted on EFL Omani students enrolled in a foundation programme at a private college university (Buraimi University College) in Oman where English language is taught as a foreign language. They were at Level 1 and Level 2. In the beginning, the target of the study was to include 40 participants. However, the number of available participants was lower than the target. This was due to students' absence before the final exams of the first term. The sample consisted of 32 mixed-aged male and female students. Level 1 students comprised eight males (50%) and eight females (50%). Similarly, level 2 students comprised eight males (50%) and eight females (50%). In Level 1, 4 students (25%) were above 20 years old and 12 (75%) were under 20. In Level 2, there were three students (18.75%) above 20 years old and 13 (81.25%) under 20 years old. Students' names or any identification were not required to maintain the confidentiality of information and the anonymity of participants (Macdonald & Headlam, 2008).

Design of the Instrument

The questionnaire consisted of three parts plus a fourth part: a reading achievement test—the first and second part of the questionnaire aimed to gather students' background data. The third part was to collect students' attitudes towards reading in English. The fourth part was to gather their knowledge of reading comprehension strategies.

The Validity of the Instrument

The progress of the questionnaire and the writing of the reading achievement test followed consecutive steps to ensure good content validity of the instruments. These steps included interviewing four mixed-age and gender EFL Omani (FP) students, discussing the topic with two lecturers teaching English to EFL students plus a high school teacher, reviewing the relevant literature, forming the hypotheses and distributing an initial version of the questionnaire to a pilot sample of 4 mixed age and gender EFL Omani (FP) students in the foundation programme at a private university. Any discovered complications were immediately noted and removed. The instrument had the following scales:

Attitude scale. To measure the attitudes towards reading in English, the study adopted a reading attitude questionnaire from the work of Smith (Smith, 1991, as cited in Mahato, 2016). Students responded to the

statements on a 5-point Likert scale. According to Oppenheim (2000), the scale's chief function was "to divide people roughly into a number of broad groups with respect to a particular attitude" (p. 187). The scale was designed where 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Not Sure, 2=Disagree and 1=Strongly Disagree. The attitude reading scale was a construct comprising 20 items. The construct was categorised into three variables which are found in the third part of the questionnaire (see Appendix B), namely: reading for enjoyment (items: 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8 and 9), anxiety and difficulty (items: 5, 6 and 10) and reading comprehension strategies (items: 11-20). Then, four mixed-age and gender EFL Omani (FP) students were interviewed for crucial themes. In order to check the content validity of the questionnaire, the questionnaire was sent to 3 experts: two lecturers teaching English to EFL students and a high school teacher. Their comments included changing the wording of the introductory part of the questionnaire and the "skills" to "strategies" (see Appendices A and B). They also recommended changing the wording of items 1,2,4,5,6,7,11,15,16,17,19, and 20 as they believed these items were unclear (see Appendix A). Their comments were incorporated to improve the final version of the questionnaire (see Appendix B). Later, an initial version of the questionnaire was piloted with four mixed-age and gender EFL Omani (FP) students.

Knowledge scale. To measure the knowledge of reading comprehension strategies, the study adopted questions from IELTS Reading Tests by McCarter & Ash (2001) and the work of Kispal (2008) to design a reading achievement test, which is found in the fourth part of the questionnaire (see Appendix A). The reading passage was adopted from RICEPEDIA, an online encyclopedia that aims to provide all necessary information about rice. The knowledge reading scale was a construct comprising 20 questions. The construct was categorised into six variables measuring six strategies, namely: Scanning (5 true/false questions), Skimming (2 guessing the main idea questions), Guessing the meaning of words (2 questions), Detailed information (4 multiple choice questions), Inferring themes (1 question) and finally Inferencing (6 filling in gap questions). Four mixed-age and gender EFL (FP) students were interviewed for critical themes. The same experts were consulted three times to check the content validity of the reading achievement test. They recommended rewriting questions 8, 9 and 12 as these questions were unclear (see Appendix A). Their comments were incorporated to improve the final version of the questionnaire (see Appendix B). Later, an initial version of the test was piloted with four mixed-age and gender EFL university students.

The Reliability of the Instrument

Due to the time constraints, the convenience sampling method and the small sample study (32 participants), test-retest reliability to measure the consistency was not appropriate for this restricted study. Therefore, in order to check the internal consistency and reliability of the test instrument, the study used the "Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for data analysis" (Arkkelin, 2014, p.2) to accept Cronbach Alpha tests of inter-item correlations. However, before getting into the results of the Cronbach Alpha tests, it is essential to mention that the study started first by developing a coding scheme by giving variables numbers. The next step was, as recommended by Pallant (2016), to reverse items 5, 5,6, and 10 in the third part of the questionnaire "before checking reliability" (p.101) since these items had negative

wording (see Appendix B). Next, the data was checked for errors. In this study, 0 indicated no reliability and + 1.00 for optimal reliability.

Attitude scale. The Cronbach's alpha for the attitude scale was .754 (see Table 2). The scale demonstrated statistical internal consistency reliability. According to Garth (2008) "a reliability coefficient of .70 or higher is considered "acceptable" in most Social Science research situations using (Cronbach's Alpha.)" (p.83). Therefore, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the attitude scale indicated a high reliability.

Table 2. Attitude Test Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardised Items	N of Items
.754	.752	20

2.5.2. Knowledge scale. **As shown in Table 3, Cronbach's alpha for the knowledge scale was .865. Since it was higher than .70, then it meant that the scale also had a high reliability.**

Table 3. Knowledge Test Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardised Items	N of Items
.865	.863	20

Data Collection Procedure

After receiving the GSE Ethics Form from the academic tutor, the researcher contacted the Head of the Foundation Programme at (Buraimi University College) and explained the study's purpose. The study required one class of 20 mixed-aged male and female EFL Omani (FP) students from Level 1 and another with the same features from Level 2. After his approval, the head of the (FP) set a date for the researcher to come and conduct the study. On the agreed date, the researcher went to the university college and gave the head two questionnaires in envelopes. The head assigned two random session teachers from Levels 1 and 2. The two teachers administered the questionnaires to their classes. The researcher requested the

teachers to ask their students to read the instructions carefully and respond individually. Students responded to the attitude questionnaire and answered the reading test. The researcher came the next day and collected the envelopes.

Limitations of the Study

Like any other study, this study had its problems and limitations. To begin with, the small sample of this study (32 participants) made the findings inappropriate for future generalisations. Also, this study was limited to EFL Foundation Programme Students studying English in a private college university (Buraimi University College) in Oman. Therefore, this study's findings might not apply to different contexts, such as public universities. In addition, there was a possibility that the students might not give their correct age or gender.

DATA STATISTICAL ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The study used SPSS to run statistical analysis on the gathered data, and tests were used for descriptive and inferential purposes. The Shapiro-Wilk test was used to check the normality of data distribution (n=32). Leven's value was used to check the homogeneity of variance. The results of these tests showed that the data from both the attitude and knowledge scales were usually distributed. Three statistical tests were used to test five hypotheses: Independent Samples t Test, Pearson correlation coefficient and Multiple Linear Regression.

Normality of the Attitude and the Knowledge Scales

SSPS was used to assess and check the normality of the attitude and the knowledge scales. The scores of these two scales were computed without deleting any items. Shapiro-Wilk test results were "more convenient" to be used to check the normality of the data distribution (Sarmento & Costa, 2017, p.115) as the study sample was < 50. As shown in Table 4, the Sig. The value for the total attitude scores was .615, and the Sig. The value for the total knowledge scores was .097. According to Pallant (2016), these results were non-significant "(Sig value of more than .05)" (p.63). This also meant that the scores on the two scales were usually distributed. Since the sample study size was small where (n = 32), graphical methods were not used to check the normality as they "may not provide sufficient information to decide whether or not data are normally distributed" (Norušis, 2006, p.8). Hence, the participants in the study sample completed the reading attitude questionnaire and the reading achievement test individually (the dependent variable was done separately), the scores on the two scales were typically distributed, and populations had the same variances. Parametric techniques were used in this study to examine the study's null hypotheses.

Table 4. Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Total_Attitude	.101	32	.200*	.974	32	.615
Total_Knowledge	.124	32	.200*	.944	32	.097

Testing the Hypotheses

H1: Female students will hold statistically significantly different levels of knowledge of reading comprehension strategies in English than male students. **Reject**

H01: There will be no statistically significant difference between the levels of knowledge of reading comprehension strategies in English held by female and male students. **Fail to reject**

An independent-sample t-test was conducted to compare the levels of knowledge of reading comprehension strategies in English scores for males and females. There was no statistically significant difference in scores (see Table 5) for males (M = 10.63, SD = 5.14) and females (M = 10.50, SD = 5.26; t (30) = .06, p = 1.79, two-tailed). As shown in Table 6, the magnitude of the difference in the means (mean difference = .12, 95% C/: -3.63 to 3.88) was minimal (eta squared = .0001) (Pallant, 2016, p.248).

	gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Total_Knowledge	Male	16	10.63	5.149	1.287
	Female	16	10.50	5.266	1.317

Table 5. T-Test

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Table 6. Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Total_Attitude	Equal variances assumed	.349	.559	.068	30	.946	.125	1.841	-3.636	3.886
	Equal variances are not assumed.			.068	29.985	.946	.125	1.841	-3.636	3.886

H2: Students aged above 20 years old will hold statistically significantly different attitudes towards reading in English than students aged 20 years old and under. **Reject**

H02: There will be no statistically significant difference between the attitudes towards reading in English held by students aged above 20 years old and students aged 20 years old and under. **Fail to reject**

An independent-sample t-test was conducted to compare the attitudes towards reading in English scores for students aged 20 years and under and those above 20 years old. There was no statistically significant difference in scores (see Table 7) for students aged 20 years old and under (M = 70.44, SD = 8.63) and students aged above 20 years old (M = 76.00, SD = 10.34; t (30) = -1.44, p = .21, two-tailed). As shown in Table 8, the magnitude of the difference in the means (mean difference = -5.56, 95% C/: -13.42 to 2.30) was moderate (eta squared = .065) (Pallant, 2016, p.248).

Table 7. T-Test

	age in years	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Total_Attitude	20 years old and under	25	70.44	8.632	1.726
	Above 20 years old	7	76.00	10.344	3.910

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Table 8. Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Total_Attitude	Equal variances assumed	.523	.475	-1.445	30	.159	-5.560	3.849	-13.420	2.300
	Equal variances are not assumed.			-1.301	8.487	.227	-5.560	4.274	-15.318	4.198

H3: Level 2 students will hold statistically significantly different levels of knowledge of reading comprehension strategies in English than Level 1 students. **Reject**

H03: There will be no statistically significant difference between the levels of knowledge of reading comprehension strategies in English held by level 2 and Level 1 students. **Fail to reject**

An independent-sample t-test was conducted to compare the levels of knowledge of reading comprehension strategies in English scores for Level 1 university students and Level 2 university students. There was no statistically significant difference in scores (see Table 9) for Level 1 university students (M = 11.25, SD = 4.89) and Level 2 university students (M = 9.88, SD = 5.41; t (30) = .75, p = .81, two-tailed). As shown in Table 10, the magnitude of the difference in the means (mean difference = 1.37, 95% C/: -2.35 to 5.10) was minimal (eta squared = .018) (Pallant, 2016, p.248).

Table 9. T-Test

	Level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Total_Knowledge	Level 1	16	11.25	4.892	1.223
	Level 2	16	9.88	5.414	1.354

Table 10. Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Total_Knowledge	Equal variances assumed	.284	.598	.754	30	.457	1.375	1.824	-2.351	5.101
	Equal variances are not assumed.			.754	29.696	.457	1.375	1.824	-2.352	5.102

H4: There will be a statistically significant correlation between students' knowledge of reading comprehension strategies and their attitude towards reading in English. **Reject**

H04: There will be no statistically significant correlation between students' knowledge of reading comprehension strategies and attitudes towards reading in the English language. **Fail to reject**

The relationship between knowledge of reading comprehension strategies (as measured by the knowledge scale) and attitudes towards reading in English language strategies (as measured by the attitude scale) was investigated using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of normality, linearity and homoscedasticity assumptions. The two variables had a strong negative correlation, r = -.001, n = 32, p > .05 (Pallant, 2016, p.139). As shown in

Table 11, the analysis revealed no statistically significant correlation between the two variables.

Table 11. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation

		Total_Attitude	Total_Knowledge
Total_Attitude	Pearson Correlation	1	-.001
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.998
	N	32	32
Total_Knowledge	Pearson Correlation	-.001	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.998	
	N	32	32

H5: Students' knowledge of reading comprehension strategies will be statistically predictable based on their attitudes towards reading in English, age, gender and level of English language proficiency. **Reject**

H05: Students' knowledge of reading comprehension strategies will not be statistically predictable based on their attitudes towards reading in English, age, gender and level of English language proficiency. **Fail to reject**

Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no violation of normality, linearity and homoscedasticity assumptions. As shown in Figure 1, "no major deviations from normality" were noticed since the points "lie in a reasonably straight diagonal line" (Pallant, 2016, p.160). In the scatterplot (see Figure 2), the standardised residuals were "rectangularly distributed with most of the scores concentrated in the center" (Pallant, 2016, p.160).

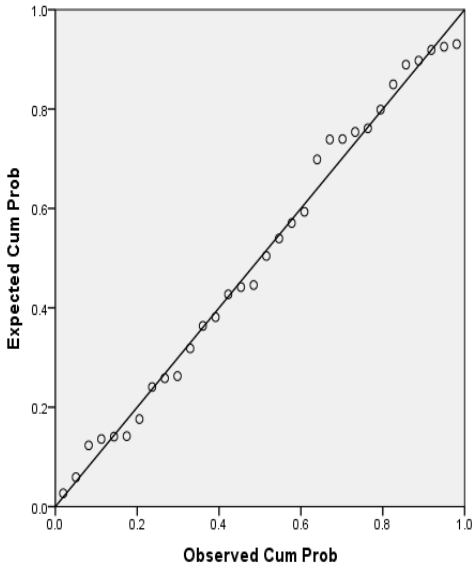

Figure 1. Normal P-P plot of regression standardised residual for the dependent variable

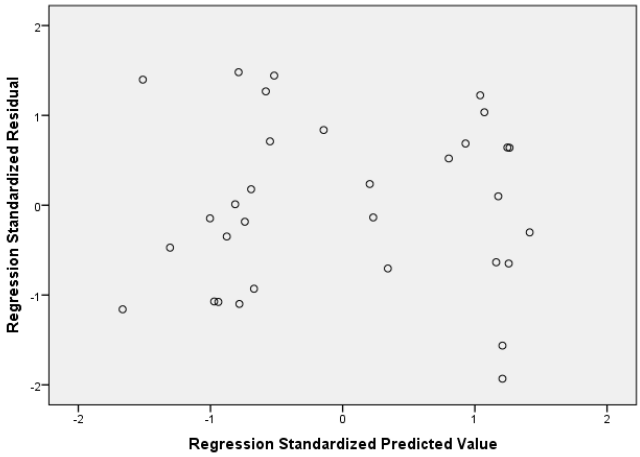

Figure 2. Scatterplot for dependent variable: Total Knowledge

A multiple linear regression was calculated to predict knowledge of reading comprehension skills based on attitudes towards reading in English, age, gender and level of English language proficiency. As shown in Table 13, the model failed to indicate a statistical significance with the data (F (4,27) = .153, p = .960 > .05) with the Adjusted R Square of -.123 (see Table 12). This meant that "the variable was not making a significant unique contribution to the prediction of the dependent variables" where (p > .05) (Pallant, 2016, p.163). As shown in Table 14, the listed variables were (attitude towards reading in the English language; Beta = -.022, p = .921, age; Beta = -.051, p = .797, gender; Beta = -.025, p = .906 and level of English language proficiency; Beta = -.141, p = .464). As a result, the whole model failed to predict knowledge of reading comprehension strategies based on the independent variables of attitude towards reading in the English language, age, gender and level of English language proficiency.

Table 12. Prediction Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.149[a]	.022	-.123	5.429

Table 13. *ANOVA*[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	18.059	4	4.515	.153	.960[b]
	Residual	795.816	27	29.475		
	Total	813.875	31			

Table 14. Coefficients for Independent Variable in The Prediction Model

Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	14.493	9.965		1.454	.157	-5.953	34.940					
	Total_Attitude	-.012	.121	-.022	-.100	.921	-.261	.237	-.001	-.019	-.019	.772	1.295
	gender	-.250	2.093	-.025	-.119	.906	-4.543	4.044	-.012	-.023	-.023	.841	1.189
	age in years	-.625	2.403	-.051	-.260	.797	-5.556	4.305	-.044	-.050	-.050	.933	1.071
	Level	-1.451	1.954	-.144	-.743	.464	-5.461	2.558	-.136	-.141	-.141	.965	1.036

DISCUSSION

The study's findings revealed some interesting results. First, the result of hypothesis 1 revealed that EFL Omani (FP) students' gender had no statistically significant effect on the levels of knowledge of reading comprehension strategies in English. This result meant that female EFL Omani (FP) students in this private college university were not better than males in reading comprehension strategies. In terms of gender itself, Moreno (2011) believed that it is "difficult to account for educational differences between the sexes as based on biology" (p.23).

Likewise, the results of hypothesis 2 revealed that age had no statistically significant effect on attitudes towards reading in English and hypothesis 3 also revealed that level of English language proficiency had no statistically significant effect on knowledge of reading comprehension strategies. One of the possible interpretations for these two results could be due to the close range of age in hypothesis 2 and the close level of English proficiency in hypothesis 3. However, these results were not new. A study done by Soku, Simpeh, and Osafo-Adu (2011) had similar results. Their study revealed that age had no significant effect on students' attitudes towards "the study of both English and French" and that the "level of students had no significant effect on students' attitudes to the study of English and French" (p.20).

The results of hypothesis 4 revealed no statistically significant correlation between the knowledge of reading comprehension strategies and attitudes towards reading in English held by EFL Omani (FP) students (see Table 11). Based on Table 15, students scored a total average mean of approximately 72 in total reading attitudes, which is considered positive.

Table 15. Total Average Mean of Reading Attitudes

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total_Attitude	32	53	90	71.66	9.157
Valid N (listwise)	32				

Based on Table 16, students scored an average mean of approximately 11 on the total knowledge of reading comprehension strategies test. This result assumed that male and female students were weak in the reading test.

Table 16. Total Knowledge of Reading Comprehension Strategies Test

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total_Knowledge	32	1	18	10.56	5.124
Valid N (listwise)	32				

Finally, the results of hypothesis 5 revealed that EFL Omani (FP) students' knowledge of reading comprehension strategies cannot be statistically predictable based on their attitude towards reading in the English language, age, gender and level of English language proficiency. As a result, there was no prediction model.

IMPLICATION TO RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

The results of this study question commonly held beliefs in the field of EFL, specifically about how demographic factors like gender, age, and English language ability affect students' understanding of reading comprehension strategies and their attitudes towards reading in English. My findings align with the previous study (Soku, Simpeh, & Osafo-Adu, 2011), indicating that these demographic factors had no significant impact on the level of reading comprehension strategy knowledge or reading attitudes among EFL learners. This discovery requires a fundamental change in the future directions of EFL research, emphasising the need to investigate further cognitive, affective, and socio-cultural aspects that could significantly influence the development of EFL reading comprehension abilities and attitudes.

Furthermore, verifying insignificant relationships between demographic characteristics and reading attitudes or strategy knowledge requires additional comparison studies. This research might use our

findings as a starting point to examine how various educational interventions or pedagogical techniques affect learners' understanding of strategies and their attitudes in different cultural and educational settings. Furthermore, this study emphasises the significance of performing meta-analyses or systematic reviews that gather data from many settings to reveal comprehensive patterns and nuanced insights into the development of EFL reading comprehension.

Implications for Practice

From a practical perspective, the findings indicate an urgent requirement for curriculum designs and educational methods that go beyond standard demographic categorisations. Considering the absence of substantial disparities in reading strategy knowledge and attitudes towards reading among individuals of different genders, ages, and competence levels, it is recommended that educational stakeholders embrace inclusive curriculum designs. Accessible and engaging curricula should be provided to all learners based on the recognition that excellent reading comprehension practices are universally advantageous, regardless of learners' demographic origins.

Moreover, the study's results support the implementation of professional development programmes that prioritise pedagogical practices that successfully cater to the varied requirements of learners. Educators should be able to use universal design principles for learning (UDL) effectively. This involves using teaching methods that are diverse and adaptable to engage students with varying learning preferences and levels of expertise in learning strategies. This method is significant considering the favourable reading attitudes identified among participants, indicating that learners may be open to improved reading strategy teaching.

The apparent disparity between the favourable attitudes towards reading and the self-reported deficiency in technique knowledge allows educators to incorporate explicit instruction on reading strategies into their teaching methods. Utilising technology and employing creative teaching techniques, such as gamification and interactive digital content, can significantly improve students' involvement in English reading and promote a more profound grasp of efficient comprehension skills.

Furthermore, the lack of a prognostic model relying on demographic variables in our research highlights the need for educational policies and practices that are supported by empirical facts. Educational officials should prioritise efforts that provide access to high-quality reading comprehension training for all, regardless of demographic factors. This approach should go beyond considering demographics and instead focus on inclusive strategies for EFL education.

Overall, this study adds to the increasing evidence indicating that solely considering demographic factors may not be enough to comprehend or improve EFL reading skills properly. Instead, it emphasises the necessity of adopting a comprehensive and inclusive strategy that considers diverse factors that impact learners' reading methods and attitudes. Therefore, future study and practice must focus on identifying

and dealing with these factors to ensure that every student can fully develop their reading comprehension abilities.

CONCLUSION

This small-scale study examined and found no statistically significant differences in students' attitudes towards reading in English and their knowledge of reading comprehension strategies based on their age, gender and level of English language proficiency. It also found no statistically significant correlation between EFL Omani (FP) students' attitudes towards reading in English and their knowledge of reading comprehension strategies. In addition, it failed to develop a prediction model for EFL Omani (FP) students' knowledge of reading comprehension strategies based upon a combination of the variables of attitudes towards reading in English, age, gender, and level of English language proficiency. Moreover, it was discovered that female students were not better than male students in terms of knowledge of reading comprehension strategies and attitudes towards reading in English in this private college university. Although the study revealed that students' attitudes towards reading in English were positive, they showed weak knowledge of reading comprehension strategies. Therefore, the study recommends that EFL teachers develop their student's knowledge of reading comprehension strategies.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has paved the way for future studies that will help us better understand how EFL students read for comprehension and how they feel about reading in English. A more varied sample and multivariate analysis could allow future studies to delve further into cognitive and demographic characteristics, including socioeconomic status and educational background. In order to understand how reading methods have changed over time, researchers suggest looking at longitudinal or cross-sectional studies that compare students from different grade levels. Experimental studies are necessary to determine the usefulness of new approaches to education, such as metacognitive training and the integration of technology into the classroom. Also, qualitative and quantitative approaches can be used to evaluate the influence of contextual and cultural elements on EFL learning. Research can also look at how reading attitudes affect overall academic performance and how reading comprehension abilities affect educational and occupational results in the long run. These future studies may expand upon the current study's conclusions while at the same time helping to enhance educational policies and procedures. As a result this should lead to better results for EFL students in their coursework.

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