

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE EFFECTS OF  
PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND READING  
ATTITUDES ON READING ABILITY OF EFL  
STUDENTS IN THE SULTANATE OF OMAN  
BASIC EDUCATION SCHOOLS**

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**UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA**

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by

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

RAT	Reading Ability Test
PI	Parental Involvement
ERSA	Elementary Reading Survey Attitude
SAH	Students Assessment Handbook

**SATU KAJIAN TENTANG KESAN PENGLIBATAN IBU BAPA DAN SIKAP  
MEMBACA TERHADAP KEBOLEHAN MEMBACA DALAM KALANGAN  
MURID EFL SEKOLAH ASAS DI NEGARA OMAN**

**ABSTRAK**

Kebolehan membaca dengan baik adalah satu cara utama yang dapat menyumbang kepada kejayaan akademik seseorang pelajar. Justeru, membantu pelajar mencapai kebolehan membaca dengan baik adalah penting maka ianya menjadi kebimbangan dalam kalangan guru dan ibu bapa. Walaupun terdapat pembaharuan dalam bidang pendidikan di Oman untuk meningkatkan kebolehan membaca dalam kalangan pelajar EFL, namun pelajar terus mengalami kesukaran membaca. Pembacaan pelajar boleh dipengaruhi banyak faktor. Oleh itu, kajian ini mengkaji pelbagai faktor berkaitan dengan kebolehan membaca dalam kalangan pelajar Oman yang terdiri daripada Tahap Satu Pendidikan Asas dari sudut; jantina, sikap membaca, penglibatan ibu bapa, pendidikan ibu bapa dan pendapatan. Selain itu, kajian ini juga akan meneroka cabaran yang dihadapi pelajar dalam membaca. Kajian ini berbentuk mod campuran dan bahagian kuantitatif mempunyai dua soal selidik dan ujian bacaan yang diberikan kepada 760 pelajar Gred Empat di Oman yang mendaftar di 19 buah sekolah. Seterusnya, dalam bahagian kualitatif dua belas respondens mengambil bahagian dalam temu duga separa berstruktur. Data kuantitatif dianalisis menggunakan statistik deskriptif, statistik inferensi termasuk ujian t, ujian ANCOVA sehalu, ujian ANCOVA dua hala dan ujian Kruskal-Wallis. Manakala bahagian kualitatif, analisis kandungan dilakukan berdasarkan transkrip temu duga. Penemuan kuantitatif menunjukkan bahawa pelajar EFL Oman menunjukkan kebolehan membaca yang rendah. Tambahan pula, jantina pelajar EFL ( $t = -2.58, p < .010$ ) sikap membaca yang tinggi ( $\eta^2 = .832, p < .001$ ) tahap



penglibatan ibu bapa (eta squared = .861,  $p < .001$ ) dan tahap pendidikan ibu bapa ( $\chi^2(4) = 11.125$ ,  $p < .05$ ) secara langsung telah memberi impak terhadap kemampuan membaca pelajar. Secara amnya, tahap pendapatan ibu bapa ( $\chi^2(2) = 1.744$ ,  $p > .05$ ) tidak menjejaskan keupayaan membaca pelajar. Dapatan bahagian kualitatif telah kenalpasti empat tema utama berkaitan cabaran membaca dalam kalangan pelajar EFL seperti kesukaran membaca, kurangnya perbendaharaan kata, masalah tatabahasa dan pedagogi guru yang tidak berkesan. Dapatan ini adalah selaras dengan dapatan kuantitatif kajian berkenaan dengan sebab-sebab kurang kebolehan membaca dalam kalangan pelajar EFL sekolah di Oman. Justeru, dapatan ini penting dan melibatkan semua pemegang taruh terdiri daripada guru EFL di Oman, guru sekolah, pembuat dasar pendidikan dan ibu bapa. Maka, semua pihak ini harus menyokong usaha membantu pelajar untuk meningkatkan kebolehan membaca mereka.

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EFL STUDENTS IN THE SULTANATE OF OMAN BASIC EDUCATION  
SCHOOLS**

**ABSTRACT**

Ability to read well is one of the leading means that significantly can contribute to students' academic success. Therefore, helping students to attain a good reading ability is the concern of many teachers and parents. Despite educational reforms in Oman to uplift EFL students' reading abilities, it appears that students continue to experience reading difficulties. In fact, EFL students' reading can be affected by many factors. Therefore, the present study examined Omani Cycle One Basic Education EFL students' reading ability in relation to their gender, reading attitudes, parental involvement, parental education and income level. Additionally, the present study also explored the challenges students faced in reading. Following the mixed-methods research design; in the quantitative section, two validated questionnaires and a reading test were administered to 760 Omani Grade Four students enrolled in 19 schools in Oman. Subsequently, in the qualitative part of the study; twelve respondents participated in the semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, inferential statistics including t-test, one-way ANCOVA test, two-way ANCOVA test, and Kruskal-Wallis test. While analysis of the qualitative part; content analysis was performed from the transcribed interviews. The quantitative findings showed that Omani EFL students had low reading ability. Furthermore, EFL students' gender ( $t = -2.58, p < .010$ ) students' high reading attitudes ( $\eta^2 = .832, p < .001$ ), parental involvement level ( $\eta^2 = .861, p < .001$ ) and parental education level ( $\chi^2(4) = 11.125, p < .05$ ) exerted

an impact on students' reading ability. Contrarily, parental income level ( $\chi^2(2) = 1.744, p > .05$ ) did not affect students' reading ability. The findings of the qualitative part found four main themes related to school EFL students' reading challenges, such as reading difficulties related to reading passages, lack of vocabulary, grammatical incompetence and ineffective pedagogical practices. These findings were triangulated with the quantitative findings of the study to discuss possible reasons causing a low reading ability among EFL students. The overall findings may implicate Omani EFL teachers, schoolteachers, educational policymakers, and parents therefore; it is crucial that all the stakeholders assist students in order to enhance their reading abilities.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This research aims to study the Omani students' ability in English comprehension and its relationship with parental involvement (PI) in reading among Omani students with different/diverse attitudes towards different reading levels. In this study, English learning by non-native learners falls under the research category of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) which investigates multiple sociological and psychological factors influencing learning a language foreign to the learners in the Sultanate of Oman, where English is taught as a Foreign Language (EFL). The sociological variable is the parental involvement in reading which includes the external and environmental factors affecting learner's English language acquisition in terms of comprehension ability. While the psychological variable is the attitude towards reading that is theoretically assumed to affect Omani young learners' ability to read and comprehend English texts. It is also recognized as the internal and personal factor affecting the same ability.

This chapter starts with addressing the importance and significance of reading comprehension in the process of learning to help the researcher to specify the study's objectives. Moreover, inquiries of the study are identified. The significance of the research and the limitations are presented to enhance the discussion of the research topic. Furthermore, key terms and definitions are highlighted, and the conceptual and operational definitions are explained.

## **1.2 Background of the Study**

'Iqra' which means 'read' was the foremost word mentioned to the Prophet Mohammed (Peace be upon him) from the Holy Quran (Al-Halak, 2010). This exhibits that reading is the most significant source of knowledge and information. Barber (2002) and Spivey (2007) defined reading as the multi-faceted dictum that can significantly influence a person's overall life experience. Besides reading as the key to acquiring vast domains of knowledge, it is also an essential requirement for self and community development. In the past, the ability to read and write was defined as literacy. However, the definition of literacy has changed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and it is currently defined as an advanced capability in reading (Abler, 2013). This includes understanding written texts and the ability to interact. Presently, comprehending written text is of great importance. The learning skills for literacy have also been modified in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and are known as the four Cs; critical thinking, communicating, creative thinking and collaborating, each of which includes a set of other skills that enable their achievement.

Reading skills are important to acquire in learning a language. It is a fundamental skill that plays roles in the improvement of related literacy skills. Focusing on reading skills also comprises long-term progress of individuals who can become essential members in a society, involved and connected to their communities and social matters, creative, active, and in this means they can contribute to the social progress in their social circle (Al-Mahrooqi & Deman, 2016). As for the Omani people, reading in EFL is probably the most critical/crucial/vital resource to improve communication not only within the Sultanate of Oman but also among foreigners worldwide (Al-Barashdi, 2000). Furthermore, EFL is also considered as one of the most important human gains in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and it has become an important

enjoyment among the priorities of educational systems in the world. When a person knows how to read in EFL, he/ she is able to interpret the underlying thoughts in a passage and understand the content of the text of a certain language. Therefore, it is essential to teach students to learn to read in foreign languages such as English that will promote advanced learning and provide them with massive chances to practice and use the language further beyond school. Thus, improves their reading skills. Moreover, students will also become more advanced in their progress in studying the English language.

To communicate in English, students must read to understand the meaning. Constructing meaning through reading is a fundamental ability for effective communication (Best, Ozuru, Floyd, & McNamara, 2006). However, for students that generally think in their mother tongue, it makes it difficult for him/ her to perceive the text or sentence or even the word, or to change the place of a word from one sentence to another, as they may find it difficult to read words or phrases that have not been previously dealt with English (Basaran, 2013). These students may encounter difficulties at various educational stages. Therefore, in learning a foreign language, where the individual can hardly communicate with foreigners of a target language, the more tangible way in enhancing the level of proficiency for learners is reading using different forms, i.e. either paper-based texts or electronic versions, to develop socio-cultural competence (Al-Brashdi, 2002; Ansarin, Zohrabi, & Zeynali, 2012;Walqui, 2003). This includes the interconnected and digital world which demands an extensive range of skills and knowledge where reading lies at the core.

Duke and Pearson (2002) indicated that to be good in reading, readers need to go through continuous and complex activities. Reading activities has been implemented in schools presumably with the interest of both teachers and students.

However, lack of reading ability among students may be due to several factors, i.e. external and internal factors. External factors are associated with things beyond the students' ability such as the education environment and curricular, while internal factors consist of cognitive and affective factors inside the student such as their motivation in English learning (Mahmoudi & Mahmoudi, 2015). For the latter, it could be said that it is related to the concept that each student is a unique entity with mental and psychological characteristics. For the former, it can be said that it is related to the learning environment such as at school or at home. Interestingly, in early childhood, the behaviour of children can resemble their involvement in reading (Cheng, 2019). These relatively stable dispositional behaviours towards activities related to books and reading have been revealed to be associated with literacy skills such as knowledge of print protocols and vocabulary (Gambrell, 2015), letter and word knowledge (Balir et al., 2015), academic accomplishment (Kolomeichuk, Randler, Shabalina, Fradkova, & Borisenkov, 2016). These links can be clarified by the affective behaviours, commitments, dedications and awareness in response to their attitude towards reading (ATR) (McGeown, Osborne, Warhurst, Norgate, & Duncan, 2015), which, in turn, is vital for learning.

In the Sultanate of Oman, along with learning of other subjects, learning of the English language is not an exception. It is considered as the Basic Education's primary goal. The Basic Education programme commenced in Oman in the year 1998 aimed to cultivate the students' proper skills and knowledge to eventually ease them in their life course (Ministry of Education 2006, Ministry of Education 2009). In this programme, the Ministry of Education in Oman envisage teaching the English language as a mean of communication, knowledge, and a vehicle for studying and learning. One of the main objectives and concerns of the authorities in Oman's

Ministry of Education is to enhance the abilities and cultivate the skills of students in grades 5 to 10 to read an extended text and understand it (Ministry of Education, 2018). Schools and teachers are asked to search for solutions for improving reading in English by requesting students to find meanings of selected text they have read. The advantages of understanding the text or reading comprehension help students to make decisions, evaluate their reading skills of different themes, and develop their tangible thinking, which includes scientific and critical skills (Ministry of Education, 2004). Aligned with the vision of the Ministry of Education, researchers regarded reading comprehension ability (RCA) as a skill of thinking (Rubin, 2002; Madkour, 2002). Besides that, reading is also considered as a significant input skill which plays a vital role with other remaining skills in developing and improving students' performance. Moreover, a student's ability to read has long lasting effects on his/ her current and future quality of life. Consequently, for a prosperous education system, it is necessary to recognize the students' requirements and the purpose of education. The factors that affect the students' academic performance in different contexts and countries are abundantly reviewed in many studies and articles found on the internet (Cascio, 2015; Rahamneh, 2012).

### **1.3 The Role of Home Factors in Children's Reading Ability**

Many factors contribute to poor reading comprehension (Al-Hosni, 2016). Among the most likely important factor is an ineffective teacher. Second, it is the curricula which could be the strongest reason causing poor reading comprehension. Third factor refers to students who are uninterested in learning the English language, thus would cause negative performance in their comprehension. Finally, the insufficient of students to English surroundings beyond classrooms may also contribute to the poor performing comprehension. Al-Mahrooqi and Denman (2016)



stated that students in Oman face difficulties in reading, including poor reading comprehension. This causes them to underperform in reading tests. The current study did not focus on the above mentioned factors but rather concentrated on the role of parents at home. To explain, the study focuses on the parent's education, gender, and occupation. In addition, family size and structure are taken into consideration. These factors may contribute negatively or positively to reading comprehension, depending on which factor is more influential and effective in fostering reading comprehension.

Reviewing the literature, it was found that majority of works emphasized on the importance of reading comprehension was influenced by series of factors including cultural background, socioeconomic status, attitudes toward students learning motivation and other factors (Aljondi, 2010; Almaskari, 2004; Alsadi & Mansi, 2011; Baccus, 2004; Cunningham, 2008; Harris, 2009; Kubis & Mullan, 2010; Nathanson et al., 2008; Sallabas, 2008; Tyler, 2006; Vasquez, 2005; Vasquez, 2008). Furthermore, Jordan, Orozco, and Averett (2001) indicated that family-related aspects such as the size, the structure, the education, and type of work of the parents, either it is inside or outside, can play a significant role. These can be considered as family characteristics involved in the learning process. Besides, other factors such as academic performance, age, grade, and gender, which can be called as the child's characteristics, also have a vital role in the comprehension and learning process.

Generally speaking, Mccanne (1963) categorized these factors into internal factors and external factors. The former comprises of students' reading ability, interests, and motivation. Moreover, linguistic competence that students possess, students' attitudes and beliefs are other factors of this category. The later factors of the second group discussed are the quality of the student's environmental surroundings which includes their parents, teachers, peers, and family.

Lastly, Arumugan (2004) categorized the external factors as home factors, intervening factors, and school factors. The first category was concerned about family structure that includes siblings and parents. In addition, it also comprises friends, reading materials, and information and communication technologies. The second category was related to reading attitudes, students' interest in reading, and teachers' views of teaching the students to read. The third group was concerned regarding the reading materials. Additionally, school administration, senior teachers, principals, and peers are categorized under this third category.

Thereby, home learning is a rich environment for child development with regards to reading comprehension influence. Moreover, the work of Sheldon and Epstein (2005) revealed a significant connection between home literacy reserves and literacy development of the children.

#### **1.4 Students' Reading Attitudes**

Reading attitude is described as a structure of positive emotions toward reading that provokes learners to get near to or keep away from a reading circumstance. Porkaew, Ketvalee, and Fongpaiboon (2018) indicated that reading attitude is usually connected to students' previous reading experiences and events, the exposure to people that read, and their perceptions about the usefulness of reading (Grabe & Stoller, 2002).

Students' desire to read is linked to the elements of reading performance, such as reading consistency. This reading pattern adds to the advancement of their reading abilities (Kovachy, 2015; McClure, 2017). As for children's reading motivation, it consists of multiple components, including attitude, behaviour, belief, interest, and participation in reading for a variety of purposes (McGeown, 2015; McGeown, 2016;

Wigfield, 2016). Although, it is also recognized that a number of components can influence the motive of reading, readers' dependency is mostly on reading attitudes and interest in reading. Typically interest and attitude are likely to be seen as effective in nature. They are precursors of performance and are obtained from personal experience.

The works of Capwell (2012) claims the effect of reading habits at an early age affects children's life, school grades, learning readiness, and future academic achievements. It is noticed that the brain can improve the learning of languages and literacy by sharpening the reading skills, especially at an early age. Therefore, parents that read stories to their child could encourage their children's to read. This creates positive emotions/ feelings and experiences, thus leads to a physical and psychological positive effect on the children. Consequently, these positive benefits increase the chances of success and future happiness for the children that have undergone these positive experiences with their parents (Capwell, 2012).

The literature on education has proven that PI plays a critical role in terms of the children's attitudes toward reading. Many examples exist in which it is stressed that the function of PI in home literacy on the reading capabilities of their children (Rashid, Morris, & Sevcik, 2005). Their study covered home factors, e.g. habits of reading different books and watching TV, the existence of libraries, and parents reading skills.

These factors showed a major effect on children's reading comprehension capabilities. The results revealed a positive remarkable connection between reading capabilities and attitudes of children towards reading with the level of education that the parents possess and the literacy of the family in general. As a result, parents that

own home libraries that contain a variety of books and parents that read for the children have shown a positive attitude in their children's reading abilities.

### **1.5 Problem Statement**

Despite the importance of English language put forward by the Ministry of Education, still there is a growing realization among academicians that Omani students are lagging behind in showing satisfactory English reading performance. There are empirical evidences found to suggest that students are facing challenges when with reading in English. Despite some educational reforms propounded in 1998/1999, Omani students are still exhibiting poor reading skills. This prevailing situation is alarming and calls for further research to delve into this matter to devise and recommend strategies to address this problem.

Under Basic Education, English is taught beginning Grade One until Grade 12, five times/lessons per week. However, despite the increasing amount of time allotted for improvement efforts to enhance develop performance in English language (FL), it has been highlighted in prior research in the context of Oman (e.g. Al-Huraizi, 2005; Al-Maskari, 2004; Al-Salimi, 2005) that Omani students are lagging behind in yielding satisfactory performance in English reading. Furthermore, this problem was also highlighted (Omani Ministry of Education, 2003) that school students' reading ability was poor and recommended to unravel the possible factors that could enhance their reading. Consequently, this can be presented as one of the issues that the current research is aiming to probe and obtain more insights of the problem under study.

Al-Salimi (2005) noticed that although in Basic Education, student started learning to read in Grade One until Grade Three, this did not prepare them to read even short paragraphs when they enter Grade Four. The evidence garnered in prior

research (Ministry of Education of Oman, 2005, 2008) support the view that Omani school students particular those enrolled in grade 1 to grade 4 had weak reading ability. The similar studies also indicated that school students failed to show reading performance according to the expectations of the Ministry of Education of Oman.

In addition to these researches, Omani school students also obtained below average passing marks on on-line language test, and these results placed Oman on fifty-eight rank among the seventy countries of the world. This view is also empirically supported in the previous research in which Arab students showed poor reading and literacy skills in the English language (Al-Maskari, 2004; Al-Salimi 2005).

In report by the RAND Reading Study Group for the US Office of Educational Research and Improvement (2002), the group proposed a heuristic that explain variability in reading comprehension among learners involving variability. Reader attributes involve learner's affective, psychological, and individual differences (ID) which differ considerably among learners.

Next, the nature of reading text also matters in reading comprehension, when readers are reading various representations of the text. Different genre of texts, such as narrative and expository reading that vary in content also matter for students with different proficiency level in understanding texts (Alazri, 2013).

Next, features of any given text also have a large impact on comprehension, when readers are reading various representations of the text (Basaran, 2013). Different genre of texts: narrative, descriptive, expository, or persuasive genres that vary in content, reading levels, bringing the impact of different text features on readers with varying capabilities in understanding texts. Next is the Activity which

involve the purpose or tasks of reading and the outcomes of reading for each purpose, making a difference between deep and surface reading, skimming or studying, reading to know or to solve a problem, which lead to different outcomes of reading, short term and long term (Best et al., 2006).

In terms of Context of reading, learning to read does not only occur in the classroom, but extends far beyond the classroom. Differences in reading ability can traced to the varying sociocultural environments in which children live, such as at home. Learning is acquired through social interactions between parents and the students (Altschul, 2011). It also depends on how the given information is processed and comprehended according to the readers' culture. Here the role of family, especially parents in supporting reading comprehension matters (Arumugan, 2004).

In Omani context, the Ministry of Education recommended to study the various factors that might exert an impact on students' reading ability. Among the factors, other than those related to English language textbooks, students' health status, school environment, and family's economic status were recommended. The Ministry of Education (2005) also called for the investigation into students' reading attitudes and how these attitudes interact with parental involvement.

The Ministry had also recommended to take an account of students' family-related aspects, and their own attitudes toward reading which are related to students' reading ability, (Ministry of Education, 2007). Al-Mahrooqi (2016) also highlights the parental involvement issue that further needs extended investigation

In addition, the ministry of education in its Ministerial Decree No (105/2006) has stressed on a point to devise lucrative strategies to address students' reading problems. Additionally, the decree also called for the involvement of parents and

teachers to help students enhance their reading ability (Al-Barwani, Albeely, & Al-Suleimani 2012; Ministry of Education, 2006). Following this decree, few researches (Almaskari, 2004; Alsiyabi, 2004) investigated if parental involvement was an affective factor redressing Omani students' reading problems.

The literature review in the context of Oman indicates that most of the previous research largely focused on highlighting students' use of reading strategies and reading performance (Alhuraizu, 2005; Alkindi, 2007). However, how parental characteristics, such as parental involvement and parental education level interact with Omani school students is under researched. Additionally, gender which is considered as one of the main factors that influence second language learning (Andreou, Vlachos, & Andreou, 2005) is under-researched particularly in the context of Oman. It is crucial to focus on this variable because males and females differ in their use of strategies of reading and comprehension (Saidi, 2012). In the similar vein, Zeynali (2012) also asserts that there is a gender gap in the language learning strategies. Readers also vary in their knowledge and the gender is one of the prime variations. Now what is not known yet is that how gender interacts with the reading comprehension of Omani students. Exploring such gender differences can be lucrative for the English language teaching to focus on the weaker one as males and females comprehend texts differently (Brantmeier, 2003).

To bridge this gape, the present study was carried out to see if Omani school students' reading ability was related to their gender, reading attitudes, and parental involvement. In addition, the present study also explored Omani school students' possible challenges that they experience while reading. Such information would likely to open new vista of knowledge for EFL Omani teachers, curriculum designer,

and Education Policy Makers to take necessary actions to promote reading culture among Omani students.

## **1.6 Research Objectives**

1. To investigate the level of Omani Cycle One Basic Education EFL students' English reading comprehension ability.
  - a). To investigate the level of Omani Cycle One Basic Education EFL students' English reading ability in narrative and expository reading passages.
2. To investigate if there is any significant difference between male and female Cycle One Basic Education EFL students in terms of reading ability.
3. To investigate the level of attitude of Cycle One Basic Education EFL students towards reading.
  - a). To investigate the level of attitude of Cycle One Basic Education EFL students towards recreational reading and academic reading.
4. To investigate whether there is any effect of level of reading attitude of Cycle One Basic Education EFL students on their reading ability, while controlling for their English performance.
5. To investigate if there is any effect of level of parental involvement on Cycle One Basic Education EFL students' reading ability, while controlling for their overall English performance.
  - a). To determine if there is any effect of parental encouraging level and parental modelling level on Cycle One Basic Education EFL



students' reading ability, while controlling for their overall English performance.

6. To examine if there is any effect of parental education level and income level on Cycle One Basic Education EFL students' reading ability.
7. To investigate if there is any significant interaction effect of parental involvement level and reading attitude level on Cycle One Basic Education EFL students' reading.
8. To explore the challenges that Omani Cycle One Basic Education EFL students face in reading.

### **1.7 Research Questions**

1. What is the level of Omani Cycle One Basic Education EFL students' English reading ability?
  - a). What is the level of Omani Cycle One Basic Education EFL students' English reading ability in narrative and expository reading passages?
2. Is there any significant difference between male and female Cycle One Basic Education EFL students in terms of reading ability?
3. What is the level of attitude of Cycle One Basic Education EFL students towards reading?

- a). What is the level of attitude of Cycle One Basic Education EFL students towards recreational reading and academic reading?
4. Is there any effect of level of reading attitude of Cycle One Basic Education EFL students on their reading ability, while controlling for their English performance?
5. Is there any effect of level of parental involvement on Cycle One Basic Education EFL students' reading ability, while controlling for their overall English performance?
- a). Is there any effect of parental encouraging level and parental modelling level on Cycle One Basic Education EFL students' reading ability, while controlling for their overall English performance?
6. Is there any significant effect of parental education level and income level on Cycle One Basic Education EFL students' reading ability?
7. Is there any significant interaction effect of parental involvement level and reading attitude level on Cycle One Basic Education EFL students' reading, while controlling for their overall English performance?
8. What are the challenges that Omani Cycle One Basic Education EFL students face in reading?

## 1.8 Hypotheses

The hypotheses of the study were developed according to the nature of the research questions of the present study:

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no any significant difference between male and female Cycle One Basic Education EFL students in terms of English reading ability.

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no any effect of level of level of reading attitude of Cycle One Basic Education EFL students on their reading ability, while controlling for their English performance.

H<sub>03</sub>: There is no any effect of level of parental involvement on Cycle One Basic Education EFL students' reading ability, while controlling for their overall English performance.

H<sub>04</sub>: There is no any effect of parental encouraging level on Cycle One Basic Education EFL students' reading ability, while controlling for their overall English performance.

H<sub>05</sub>: There is no any effect of parental modelling level on Cycle One Basic Education EFL students' reading ability, while controlling for their overall English performance.

H<sub>06</sub>: There is no any effect of parental education level on Cycle One Basic Education EFL students' reading ability, while controlling for their overall English performance.

H<sub>0</sub>7: There is no any effect of parental income level on Cycle One Basic Education EFL students' reading ability, while controlling for their overall English performance.

H<sub>0</sub>8: There is no any interaction effect of parental involvement level and reading attitude level on Cycle One Basic Education EFL students' reading.

### **1.9 Rationale of the Study**

According to the finding of different studies regarding ability in reading comprehension was due to the following elements: firstly, the present research establishes knowledge about how students' reading attitudes are associated with their overall reading abilities. Such knowledge can be taken into consideration while framing strategies to address school students' poor reading (Alazri, 2013). Secondly, the recent results of the Omani educational studies indicate that Omani school students exhibit poor reading, (Alkindi, 2007), therefore the present study, by highlighting possible causes that impede school students' reading, is likely to be lucrative to identify what causes their poor reading. Thirdly, there is a sparse existing knowledge on the phenomenon under investigation in the present study; therefore to bridge this existing gap, the present research studied Omani students' reading ability in relation to their own reading attitudes, and their family related variables. It is also believed that the present research would produce results that could be utilized by the concerned authorities to make a right sense of factors that either enhance or reduce school students' reading ability.

### **1.10 Significance of the Study**

The present research contributes to the scanty existing knowledge about Omani students' reading ability in relation to their reading attitudes and parental involvement, specifically the ways of improving reading ability among Omani students starting from Cycle One of Basic Education. The study looks into the role of home environment explaining the students' reading and promoting reading non-native L2 language. Hopefully this study will provide useful information for L2 teachers and higher authorities working in education sector. It is anticipated that the results of the present study would shed light on how parental involvement could be beneficial in fostering reading culture among school students. Furthermore, the results would also assist personnel and organizations involved in policy and decision making, to help Omani students overcome difficulties and improve reading and other skills of English language.

### **1.11 Delimitations**

First, this study was conducted in one governorate in the Sultanate of Oman, namely South Batinah. It may provide some insight into the situations in other governorates, as the Ministry of Education controls and supervises schools in Oman. Second, this research also studies English taught in Basic Education students of Grades 4 in government schools. Third, this study focused only on school students' reading attitudes, and possible causes hampering their reading. In other words, this study was delimited to reading only, whereas the rest of three skills were not in the scope of the present study.

## **1.12 Limitations**

As no research can be devoid of limitations, similarly the present study has identified some limitations that should be kept in mind while interpreting its results. First, the present study included students only from public government schools. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalised to the students of private schools. Second, school students' reading attitudes were measured through predefined items in the survey. Therefore, the present study may not present the complete picture of underlying factors causing school students' positive or negative reading attitudes. Third, the present study determined students' reading ability based on the reading comprehension test. Some of the students might not be serious to read the comprehension passages knowing that the test marks would not be included in their final grades. Therefore, the picture of school students' reading ability drawn in the present study may vary from their actual reading ability.

Fourth, drawing on the large data, this study determined the role of parents' involvement in fostering school students' reading ability. However, this study may not give the account of those students' reading ability whose parents are away from home or no more in the world. Final, the present study revealed that parental involvement matters in school students' reading ability, but the nature of parental activities at home that affect students' reading ability is not covered.

## **1.13 Definitions of Key Terms**

### **Parental Involvement in Reading**

Conceptual definition:

Klauda (2009) identified parental involvement in reading as “behaviors and statements that reflect involvement in, and approval or encouragement of another’s reading, emitted with or without the intention of promoting that individual’s reading motivation and activity” (p.15).

Operational definition:

In this study, this term is operationalized as parents’ involvement in fostering and promoting reading culture among their children. In other words, parental involvement refers to the support available to children at home in an attempt to pave a way for their reading growth.

### **Reading Ability**

Conceptual definition:

Reading ability refers to the score that each student gains throughout a reading test. It refers to the fluency and accuracy of reading. Measuring the level of reading ability is not an easy task. Teachers or test writers should first know what reading skills to test and how. Al-Riyami (2011). (1990) adds that piloting the test, analyzing it, modifying it and validating it should occur.

Operational definition:

In this study, reading ability is the overall level that students score on the English reading comprehension test, which consists of three levels of Barrette’s Taxonomy, namely: literal, reorganization and inferential.

## **Students Attitude towards Reading**

Conceptual definition:

Colman (2006) defined attitudes as an enduring pattern of evaluative responses towards a person, object, or issue. However, Issan (2006) defined this concept as a positive or negative feeling directed toward a particular social object, situation, person or idea” (p.86).

Operational definition:

In this study this term refers to a positive or negative feeling oriented to reading as a human activity carried out by Basic Education students in Grade four of Basic Education Cycle one, in the Sultanate of Oman.

## **Omani Basic Education Students**

Conceptual definition:

As defined by the Omani Ministry of Education, Basic Education is a “unified ten-year education, provided by the government for all children of school age. It meets their Basic Educational needs in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values, enabling them to continue their education or training based on their interests, aptitudes, and dispositions, and enabling them to face the challenges of their present circumstances and future developments, in the context of comprehensive social development.”(Ministry of Education, 2001, p.1)

Operational definition:



In this study, Basic Education students refer to students in Grade four in cycle one of Basic Education in Oman and who are currently undergoing a unified ten-year education program Basic Education.

#### **1.14 Summary**

The information garnered in the chapter shows that Omani students are facing the problem of reading ability in L2. This existing problem calls for necessity of the research to be carried out to gain in-depth understanding of what leads to students' reading problems. Additionally, it is also of immense importance to devise ways that could be beneficial to address the problem. To this end, the proposed research objectives are framed in an attempt to address the phenomenon involved in students' poor reading.

The present study is also carried out with a hypothesis that parental involvement could be one of the defining variables that could positively influence school students' reading ability. This aspect of the present study is important because school students' overall English proficiency is also defined by the home factors. After all, children spend longer hours in home than schools. The results of the present study would serve as a guideline for the educators and the policymakers in education department who are concerned with students' reading performance. The delimitations of the present study that draw the demarcation line of the study are also essential to close the research gap on reading problems in different socio-cultural setting.

In addition to the individual and home-related factors, this study also conducts a qualitative enquiry about the factors hampering school students' reading. Such information would be useful to understand and address the pernicious effects of variables contributing to students' poor reading.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

The current chapter discusses English reading comprehension in Omani Basic Education Schools in relation to parental involvement in reading and students' attitudes towards reading English. Each section contains an in-depth discussion of the content significant for the study.

In this chapter, I first discuss reading in general and, second, reading comprehension in English. Thirdly, I will elaborate on home literacy environments and parental involvement in reading. Next, I discuss student attitudes towards reading and explain the levels in Barrett's Taxonomy (1968) of reading comprehension. I will then describe the language acquisition theories that support this study, i.e. cognitivism by Piaget (1963) and ZPD by Vygotsky (1978) as well as Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory.

In addition, this chapter highlights past studies on English reading comprehension and its relationship with parental involvement and students' attitudes towards reading. Finally, the conceptual framework of this study is explained and illustrated in this chapter.

#### **2.2 The Setting of the Study**

##### **2.2.1 The Geography of Oman**

This study was carried out in the South Batinah Governorate of the Sultanate of Oman. The Sultanate of Oman lies on the Tropic of Cancer in the extreme Southeast corner of the Arabian Peninsula (Ministry of Information, 2018). The land encompasses a total area of about 309,500 square km, covering a diverse range of

topography, including mountains, deserts and fertile plains (Ministry of Information, 2018).

The Omani coast is 3,165 km long from the Strait of Hormuz in the north to the borders of the Republic of Yemen in the south. It borders three seas including the Arabian Gulf, the Oman Sea and the Arabian Sea. Oman shares borders with Saudi Arabia to the west, the United Arab Emirates to the north and the Republic of Yemen to the southwest (Ministry of Information, 2018).



Figure 2.1 Sultanate of Oman Map

### 2.3 Education in Oman

Before 1970, Oman was an isolated country with untapped natural resources (i.e. petroleum and minerals). For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, education in Oman was available only in the nation's mosques. During that era, students studied the Holy Quran and the basic principles of reading, writing and arithmetic, which were taught informally in mosques (Al-Lamki, 2005). Formal modern education began in Oman in 1930 (MOE, 2004). However, forty years later in 1969, there were only about 900