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Enhancing EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension: Developing a HOTS-M Module for Grade 10 (Oman)

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Abstract

The 21st century has placed demands on higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) in the education sector. Reading provides learners with plenty of information in many different fields, and the readers can gain different and up-to-date knowledge. However, reading is regarded as one of the most complex skills to be learned and taught, and EFL learners face difficulties in dealing with reading texts. Most studies advocate that there is a close relationship between reading comprehension and HOTS. Integrating different HOTS strategies in the reading classroom has improved learners' reading comprehension skills. To obtain sustainable and effective reading comprehension, higher-level thinking skills are required. In the demand for enhanced EFL learners' reading comprehension competency, a HOTS module (HOTS-M) was developed to benefit educational policymakers, curriculum designers, teachers, and students. In this study, the module targets teachers who teach reading comprehension to 10th-grade EFL learners in Oman. Based on six expert interviews, this research aimed to identify essential strategies and activities required to develop the HOTS-M with the intention of providing a comprehensive resource to enhance English language education for 10th-grade EFL learners. Based on the analysis, the result confirmed that Questioning Strategies, Graphic organizers, Collaboration work, Critical Reading, Inference strategies ,and using technology had significant contributions to developing EFL learners' HOTS in reading comprehension. Based on the results, this module could benefit students, teachers, and curriculum designers as it demonstrated the effectiveness of HOTS-M in promoting 10th-grade learners' reading comprehension and critical thinking skills in English classrooms. This study is providing policymakers and curriculum designers in the Ministry of Education an opportunity to consider this study, and that is by revisiting the current curriculum and educational methods and trying to change when it is necessary.

Keywords: Higher Order Thinking Skills, Reading Comprehension, Module for Teaching Reading Comprehension, EFL Learners

Introduction

Reading comprehension equips learners with the ability to glean recent information in many recent fields and cover a broad range of topics (Alkhateeb et al., 2015; Meniado, 2016). As the global language of the world, it is essential for learners to learn how to read in the English language to broaden their knowledge (Alqarni, 2015; Ardhian et al., 2020; Mayer, 2016; Meniado, 2016). Learning reading will enable them to understand better through the ability to read in English, as most information is provided in that language (Alqarni, 2015; Kendeou et al., 2016). Reading comprehension is an essential skill for human beings that should be developed early (Catts et al., 2016; Meniado, 2016). It is also crucial for success in academics and other aspects of life, which requires the reader to obtain many cognitive and intellectual skills (Alqarni, 2015; Baghaei & Ravand, 2015). Hence, improving reading skills is an essential goal that the Ministry of Education in Oman strives to achieve. From another perspective, it is fundamental to evaluate teachers' understanding of reading comprehension and how to teach them, as teachers are essential in equipping learners with the necessary strategies (Al Jahwari & Ahmad, 2021; Alqarni, 2015). Even though the new education system is mainly student-centred and based on communicative teaching, according to Ali Sulaiman et al. (2018), it has been found that teacher-centred teaching still dominates the English classroom (Nasser, 2019). The teachers should play the role of facilitator by changing the teaching environment from teacher-centred to learner-centered. Their role is not based on spoon-feeding the learners with information but only guiding them to develop their ideas and perspectives. However, teaching reading methods in Omani schools is very similar to the ways of teaching other skills. Such methods focus on teachers' learning centres, which promote memorization and tend to stimulate lower thinking skills rather than HOTS, which encourages rote learning and teaching for the sake of passing the exams (Al-Issa et al., 2017; Al Maawali, 2021). The new English curriculum is also proposed to equip learners with new skills to prepare them for modern life and to deal with international social life (Ali Sulaiman et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the learners' role in Oman is still passive and depends entirely on the teacher (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Nasser, 2019).

Scholars have suggested numerous approaches that could boost teachers' abilities to increase their learners' reading comprehension. Such approaches involve comprehension monitoring, cooperative reading, visualization, predicting, making a connection, thinking aloud, and summarizing (Farzaneh & Nejadansari, 2014; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016; Jackson, 2016; Küçükoğlu, 2013; Ness, 2009; Sanati, 2020). Therefore, teachers must have adequate skills in handling reading comprehension in English classrooms, particularly in ensuring that learners overcome difficulties in reading (Al Jahwari & Ahmad, 2021; Alqarni, 2015). Reading comprehension is crucial for English as a foreign language (EFL) learners, and good readers often perform well in reading other sub-skills (Al-Mekhlafi, 2018; AlKilabi, 2015). However, numerous researchers have argued that most Omani EFL learners struggle and face difficulties in reading and comprehending texts (Al-Mekhlafi, 2018; Al Azri et al., 2019; Holi et al., 2020; Lenchuk, 2021). Regarding introducing the new Basic Education system (BES) in Oman, the English curriculum 'English for Me' places more emphasis on teaching the primary four skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening; learners still face difficulties in dealing with reading texts (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012). Although there is an improvement in reading results based

on the Progress in Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) international centre, the country's reading level is still deficient. In fact, Oman was the fifth last country in the study (Al Maawali, 2021; Lenchuk, 2021). Due to this problem, Omani primary school students have been identified as being slow in reading English texts (Fawzia & Salwa, 2016; Al Maawali, 2021).

Reading comprehension among Omani primary schools is low, and students have been identified as poor readers (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018; Al Damen, 2018; Al Seyabi & Tuzlukova, 2015). For instance, in one study, among 238 exam papers analyzed anecdotally, 52% of students scored only 50% in reading skills (Fawzia & Salwa, 2016). In another study, Al Seyabi and Tuzlukova (2015) declared that many in the 10th grade scored 'D' on the reading exam. EFL learners need a well-established reading culture, and teachers have limited influence in developing their reading skills (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018). Some researchers Abeeleh et al. (2021), Al Qannubi et al. (2018) and Al Rabeei et al. (2019) added that English reading lessons in primary schools are not engaging for learners because they face difficulties in reading English books extensively, which decreases their interest and hinders their ability to comprehend the reading texts. While most learners can read, they struggle to understand what they are reading and cannot answer reading comprehension questions (Holi et al., 2020; Mallillin, 2019). Even higher-level students have been found to be unable to read simple English texts (Al-Mekhlafi, 2018). Therefore, it is essential to master reading comprehension by providing suitable learning and teaching reading strategies to improve learners' reading comprehension (Abeeleh et al., 2021; Al Azri et al., 2019; Alami, 2016; AlKilabi, 2015; Mallillin, 2019).

A solid and mutual relationship has been found between higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) and reading comprehension because HOTS is similar to critical reading (Ardhian et al., 2020; Fahim et al. 2012; Friedman and Rowls, 1980). Learners who think critically can read critically (Ryan & Perez, 1984; Vaseghi et al., 2012). Bouziane and Zohri (2019) confirmed HOTS's effectiveness in improving learners' autonomy and interest in reading comprehension. On the other hand, Khatib and Alizadeh (2012) asserted that HOTS could be improved through reading. Reading comprehension means being occupied with understanding and extracting the meaning from the text. All these depend on the reader's previous knowledge, previous experience in reading, concepts, and other individual experiences. To master all these bits of knowledge, required interactive strategies that are always connected with thinking. To understand any reading text, HOTS are highly required. The reader needs to think more as long as the reading language gets more complicated. An efficient and robust reader connects and uses his/her prior knowledge with the reading text in a suitable way. This way will not be fulfilled unless the reader obtains various types of knowledge (Bleach, 2019). Xu (2011) mentions that learners need to be critical readers and able 'to organize, interpret, synthesize, and digest what they read. Thus, developing HOTS is an essential requirement for everyone. The use of different types of reading texts and materials can increase learners' interest in learning and enhance their autonomy and HOTS in learning (Saeed, 2021). Based on the revised taxonomy of Anderson, HOTS involves three primary skills: analysis, evaluation, and creation (Walsh & Sattes, 2011). It is critical for mastering reading comprehension, where learners analyze texts by breaking them into smaller pieces, evaluate authors' viewpoints, express opinions, and create their own stories (Thamrin & Widodo, 2019). Hence, this study aims to develop a HOTS module (HOTS-M) to enhance Omani 10th-grade EFL learners' reading comprehension.

In Omani primary schools, the existence of HOTS is still limited. An analysis of the EFL 5th grade curriculum (primary level) in public schools revealed the absence of thinking skills, decision-making, or analysis-based activities that are essential for comprehension (Al Rabeei et al., 2019). There is a shortage of integrating HOTS skills and other 21st-century skills like discussion and problem-solving-based strategies in the school curriculum or assessment questions (Abdulbaki et al., 2018; Al Khatri, 2019; Amena, 2020). Moreover, learners in schools have been exposed to little training in HOTS skills because the teachers tend to follow the teacher-centric and traditional way of teaching (Brahim, 2021; Saeed, 2021; Al-Qutaiti & Ahmad, 2018). Therefore, revisiting the curriculum and providing an authentic and flexible framework that guides teachers to implement such skills effectively allows them to design their syllabus (Al Khatri, 2019; Al Maawali, 2021). This effort to provide teachers with explicit instruction and training on integrating HOTS skills in the classroom will then help learners improve their critical thinking skills (Bouziane & Zohri, 2019; Saleh, 2019).

Based on past studies, HOTS is minimally used in teaching reading comprehension in Omani schools and primary schools. For instance, Al-Mahrooqi et al. (2016) claimed that despite the large amount of money spent on the primary education system (1998/1999) to enhance education in Oman, data suggests that the reading issue has worsened. Primary students still struggle with reading texts and reading comprehension strategies that encourage their HOTS, such as asking questions that can help them infer, anticipate, synthesize, and apply text knowledge in a new environment (Lenchuk, 2021). Consequently, it is essential to promote learners with cognitive, metacognitive, and other related strategies and encourage them to emphasize inference strategies. Due to the complexity this creates for teachers and students, such an approach should be infused in the teacher's guidebook and coursebook (Ahmed, 2020; Al Jahwari & Ahmad, 2021; Brahim, 2021; Holi et al., 2020). For instance, teachers can use HOTS skills successfully with EFL students if they know how to implement them well, and students can enjoy English activities based on HOTS through critical reading and debates in reading classrooms (Brahim, 2021). Therefore, Al Maawali (2021), AlKhoudary (2015) and Ancheta (2018) suggested introducing HOTS into the curriculum and integrating it into the reading comprehension classrooms. Hence, based on the issues above, developing a module based on HOTS is essential.

Despite the above perspectives on HOTS in education in the Sultanate of Oman and its proven effectiveness among learners, using HOTS skills in teaching reading comprehension is still restricted. Ali Sulaiman et al. (2018) argue that although this new educational system is significantly based on creative thinking, problem-solving, questioning, decision-making, investigating, and critical thinking (CT), it still needs to cope with the rapid changes in society. Studies in the area are still new, where the shortage is noticeable (Al Maawali, 2021; Bouziane & Zohri, 2019). Omani schools, in particular, often use a teaching method similar to other skills that emphasize memorization and lower- order thinking skills over HOTS. This approach fosters rote learning and exam-oriented teaching (Al-Issa, 2019; Al Maawali, 2021). The reason behind that is that many schools believe that critical thinking is unteachable and cannot be assessed and for EFL learners, HOTS is still at an early age as it takes a long time to progress (Bissell & Lemons, 2006).

Besides that, teachers lack training on HOTS, which leads to a dearth of knowledge of how to teach HOTS in their classrooms. Additionally, the students themselves have wrong beliefs about themselves that they are incapable of dealing with HOTS, and they refuse to accept dealing with it (Snyder & Snyder, 2008). The apparent gap is the issue of reading comprehension of Omani students in Basic Education (Cycle Two). To bridge this gap, this current study aims to study the effectiveness of HOTS on the reading comprehension of EFL primary-level learners (Cycle 2 Basic Education) by developing a HOTS-M module to address EFL learners' lack of reading competency. The effectiveness of HOTS-M was investigated, particularly in its ability to facilitate students in improving their reading comprehension deficiencies through using HOTS. This module was designed to help teachers deliver their reading comprehension lessons smoothly by following and practicing the provided instructions in their classrooms. It integrates schema, social constructivism, and Ausubel's Advance Organizer theories into the Advanced Bloom theory to enhance both reading comprehension and HOTS among learners. The HOTS-M module comprises many different tasks, and skills necessary to learn the English language. The strategies and activities involved in this module will encourage the teachers to help their students deal with reading comprehension texts by using various higher-order thinking skills. This, in turn, the students will be inspired to be more creative and critical thinkers in dealing with reading texts (Nor'ain et al., 2017). They will be able to identify a suitable strategy for them to follow while dealing with any task. The module's design is according to the 10^{th}-grade syllabus for semester one. In other words, the topics suggested for the module are the same topics of the syllabus as they have been selected due to their diversity and the length of the reading texts is up to students' current level in English. Some of these reading texts provide learners with new information as well as provide students with pleasure and entertainment (Ministry of Education, 2020). The module aims to give more attention to reading competency by incorporating higher-order thinking skills, which need to be improved in the English for Me Curriculum.

The improvement of reading comprehension among EFL 10th-graders through this module will likely motivate teachers to use this new content in the future. The research may persuade Oman's Ministry of Education stakeholders to a module that further enhances the students' reading comprehension and HOT abilities. Furthermore, by strengthening learners' HOTS and linguistic competency, this module is expected to help Oman become a developed country based on its national vision (Nasser, 2019). Hence, this study aims to answer this question: "What are the main HOTS strategies required to determine the outline and content of the HOTS-M?"

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed qualitative methods to enhance grade 10 EFL learners' reading comprehension through developing the HOTS-M module.

Research Participants

Six experts from different educational fields were involved in semi-structured interviews. Experts from different fields provide a kind of diversity to study. Those experts have different experiences and different views. The participants include experts in HOTS, EFL English teachers, and English curriculum designers from the Ministry of Education in Oman.

It is critical to encompass experts in the HOTS area to provide accurate and authentic information about HOTS. The two teachers have been involved due to their close communication with the learners and, therefore, having more awareness of the students' problems and needs. Their experience will assist in developing HOTS-M. The curriculum designers have been selected due to their experience designing the curriculum and their knowledge of the best way to integrate different activities into the course book. They, in turn, will contribute to designing HOTS-M. As qualitative researchers pursue saturation for richer insights, Glaser (1967) recommended saturation for adequate sample size in qualitative studies. The experts, who were identified from different fields, provided diversity in the study, where they had different experiences and views in teaching EFL learners. Two of them had extensive experience in schools, another two were English curriculum designers, and the last two were experts in HOTS as university lecturers. The semi-structured interviews aimed to obtain various perspectives regarding the components to build the proposed module.

Research Instrument

The semi-structured interviews were conducted using 11 questions that were followed by probes. Two experts in teaching English to EFL learners validated the interview questions. The experts had more than 15 years of teaching experience in English in high schools and higher education institutes. They were not involved in the interviews.

Data Collection and Analysis

The qualitative thematic analysis approach was used, aimed at precision. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the best module development approaches to address the research objectives. The focus was on identifying primary HOTS skills and strategies for developing HOTS-M. The research's main question was, "What are the main HOTS strategies required to determine the outlines and contents of HOTS-M?"

Following this, validation forms were sent to each participant through which the same six interviewees verified the validity of analyzing HOTS-M's first draft. They provide interpretations via peer review and debriefing to avoid interview bias and offer valuable insights as recommended by (Hamilton, 2020). The reliability of the semi-structured interview interpretation was then ensured through an inter-rater agreement among the six interviewees (Spanjer et al., 2008). An interview coding expert was assigned to code six interview samples. The percentage value of the experts' double-checking of the first draft of the analyzed HOTS-M using the ATLAS.ti9 software was calculated through the Percentage Calculation Method (PCM) formula by using the total agreement divided by the total number of agreements and disagreements, multiplied by 100 as suggested by (Nor'ain et al., 2017; Tuckman & Waheed, 1981).

$$\frac{\text{Total Expert Score (x)}}{\text{Total Maximum Score (x)}} \text{X } 100 = \text{Content Validity Level}$$

This step was used as recommended by past researchers (Baker et al., 2009). The experts validated the HOTS-M through an initial draft analysis where they assessed validity and content appropriateness to achieve the study's goals through data collection. The final draft of the HOTS-M was validated by five educational experts who had extensive experience in

teaching and dealing with curriculum. Their valuable feedback and comments were analyzed via descriptive analysis. The reliability of the HOTS-M was obtained by distributing a questionnaire among ten experts with more than 20 years of experience supervising EFL teachers. They evaluated the HOTS-M based on its clarity, cohesion, learning and teaching strategies, module content, learning outcomes, resource materials, and learning activities. This questionnaire was adopted from Queen Margaret University and was validated by two curriculum and instruction specialists. The HOTS-M Module was checked and amended where the validity and reliability had been achieved (Swiontkowski et al., 1999). Thus, HOTS-M validation and reliability had been tested to confirm the proposed questions of the study.

Results and Discussion

The interviewees gathered insights on teaching reading comprehension by proposing some strategies and activities that are suitable for designing the HOTS-M. This information was organized with the assistance of the ATLAS. ti 9 application. The collected data pertained to various HOTS strategies and activities to enhance students' reading comprehension in HOTS-M.

Interview with Experts

The development of the targeted module involved conducting interviews with six English EFL experts, including teachers, curriculum designers, and HOTS specialists in Oman. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), unstructured, open-ended questions are posed to gather opinions and ideas about a specific topic. Before the interviews, the experts provided their details and consent. The sessions, conducted online through Zoom, lasted about an hour each. The recordings were promptly transcribed for data analysis and were organized according to interview questions and research objectives that specifically addressed the research question. The question was, “What are the main HOTS strategies needed to determine the outlines and contents of HOTS-M?”

The Strategies Required in Developing HOTS-M

From the analysis of research questions, six comprehensive themes emerged. The six interview sessions revealed that all the experts agreed on the importance of the six teaching and learning strategies in developing HOTS-Module (HOTS-M): Critical Comprehension (Questioning, Critical Reading, Inference), Audio-Visual Tool (Graphic Organizers, Multimedia and Technology), and Interactive (Collaboration Work). Such strategies could play a significant role in improving learners’ reading comprehension as well as HOTS.

Theme 1: Questioning Strategy (Critical Comprehension)

The majority of interviewees agreed with the significance of questioning as a comprehension approach for enhancing Higher Order Thinking Skills module (HOTS-M). HOTS Expert 1 asserted the efficacy of this strategy in augmenting students' reading comprehension, stating, “In terms of the effectiveness of HOTS questions in improving reading, we know they are effective…”

HOTS Expert 2 also confirmed the value of such a strategy in arising students’ curiosity for knowledge by stating:

> “It is very powerful in developing students’ curiosity. … through questioning, the students

> will think and reflect on what they read and discuss it. It would also have to develop in them that sense of curiosity. They would want to know more about what they are reading.

Teacher 1, along with Curriculum Designers 1 and 2, asserts that employing a questioning strategy may enhance the opportunity for outstanding students to participate and engage in problem-solving. Curriculum Designer 1 for instance, promoted, as he stated, that, "It's raising a student's awareness about this problem and what problems it might cause in the future…"

Teacher1 highlighted the potential for enhancing the appeal and enjoyment of reading sessions for students through the implementation of the strategies she outlined.

> "Through the questioning strategy, the reading lessons will be more interesting, students will enjoy their lessons a lot, and the outstanding students will participate more…"

Additionally, Curriculum Designer 2 confirmed that this strategy could raise students' awareness toward the different types of questions, avoiding giving students direct questions focusing on the types of questions that could stimulate students' higher-order thinking skills. He explained:

> "…Giving them(students) direct questions or basic questions is not interesting for them. So, you need to have these kinds of higher-order thinking questions to motivate the outstanding students and also to challenge other students in the class…"

The respondents concurred with several standardized questioning activities to be administered to the students. The agreement was to concentrate on having students read a segment of text, infer its content, and predict its subject matter. Students can use their imagination to solve problems and discuss their ideas with their teacher. Curriculum Designer 1 suggested, "They (Students) need to take part in resolving this problem". He also raised the point of stimulating the students to use their imagination while writing their questions as he asserted on raising the following question, "What's their imagination".

HOTS Expert 2 recommended assigning students to read a text and then either make a list of questions and their responses or discuss what they know about it. According to his suggestion, "they(students) may make a list of questions or answers". Figure 1 demonstrates the main concepts of questioning strategy and its implication part.

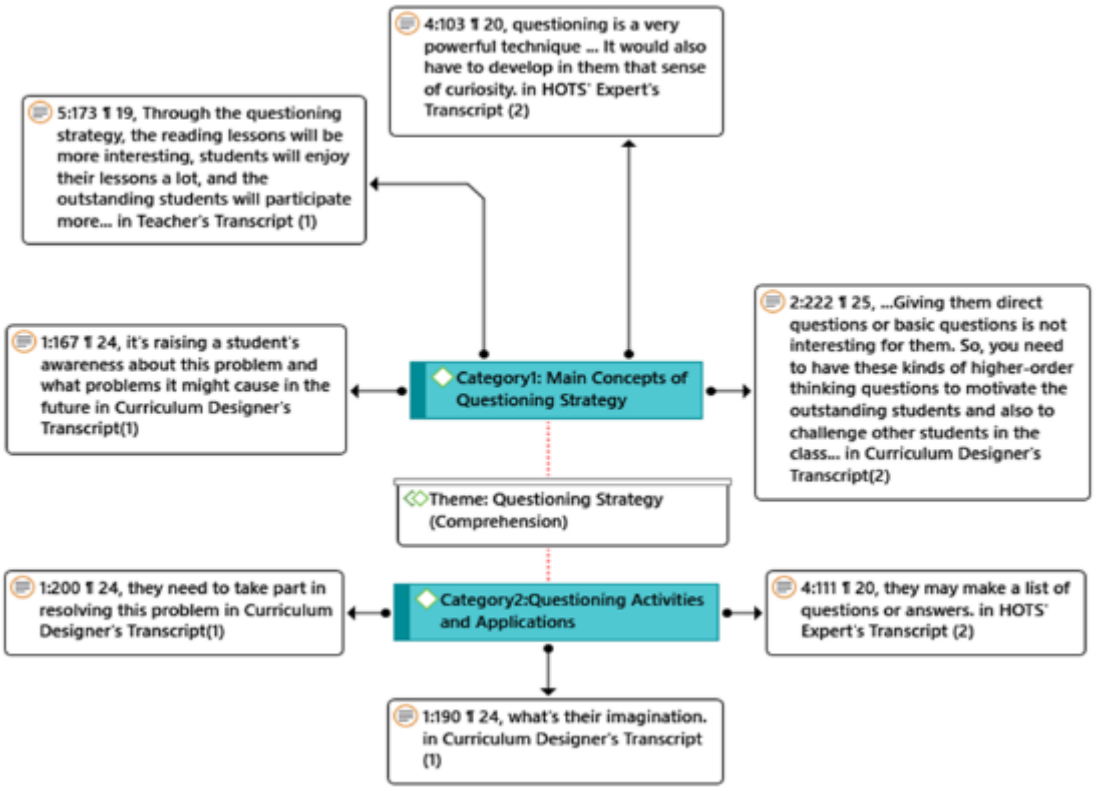

Figure 1: Questioning Strategy

Theme 2: Critical Reading (Critical Comprehension)

For the development of HOTS and HOTS-M, the critical reading strategy is also a very successful critical comprehension technique. Three of the interviewees agreed that this kind of approach might be crucial in encouraging students to assess and critique someone's viewpoint or body of work. Through critical reading, the reader learns about the hidden and disclosed meanings of the text. As asserted by HOTS Expert 2:

> "Through critical reading, students can tackle the text critically and try to analyze its arguments. They react to the text's authors and evaluate them…"

HOTS's Expert1 illuminated that through critical reading, "…you are trying to give your opinion about something as you criticize what's happening and you are evaluating what you're reading."

Teacher 1 discussed the benefits of using this technique to allow students to assess the reading materials since she said that it, "…enabled students to not just read but to judge someone's opinion". Additionally, Teacher2 highlighted that such a strategy could encourage students to think freely and deeply about the topic and to express themselves:

> "…students think about the topic before they read the text. We give them a chance to express themselves with what they know and what they want to tell us about the topic…"

Each expert has recommended that students participate in critical thinking activities and advocated for the adoption of critical reading software program. As Teacher 2 has pointed out, they discovered that it was preferable to have pupils assess the book and the author, “we want to know what the students think about the text or what is the writer saying.” HOTS’ Expert 1 shared the same view by stating, “You are evaluating what you’re reading.” Students are able to freely express themselves through this type of activity. Teacher 2 clarified, "We give them a chance to express themselves with what they know and what they want to tell us about this topic."

The experts also emphasized a few assignments that allowed students to share their thoughts on the author and the reader by answering the following question about whether they agreed or disagreed with the author's beliefs, “do they agree?” (Curriculum Designer2). Another exercise aimed to get students to transform the texts into an argument so they could assess the reader in a debate or group discussion. Teacher 1 presented this exercise and provided an explanation, “to change a reading lesson into a debate”. Figure 2 shows the main concepts and the suggested critical reading activities.

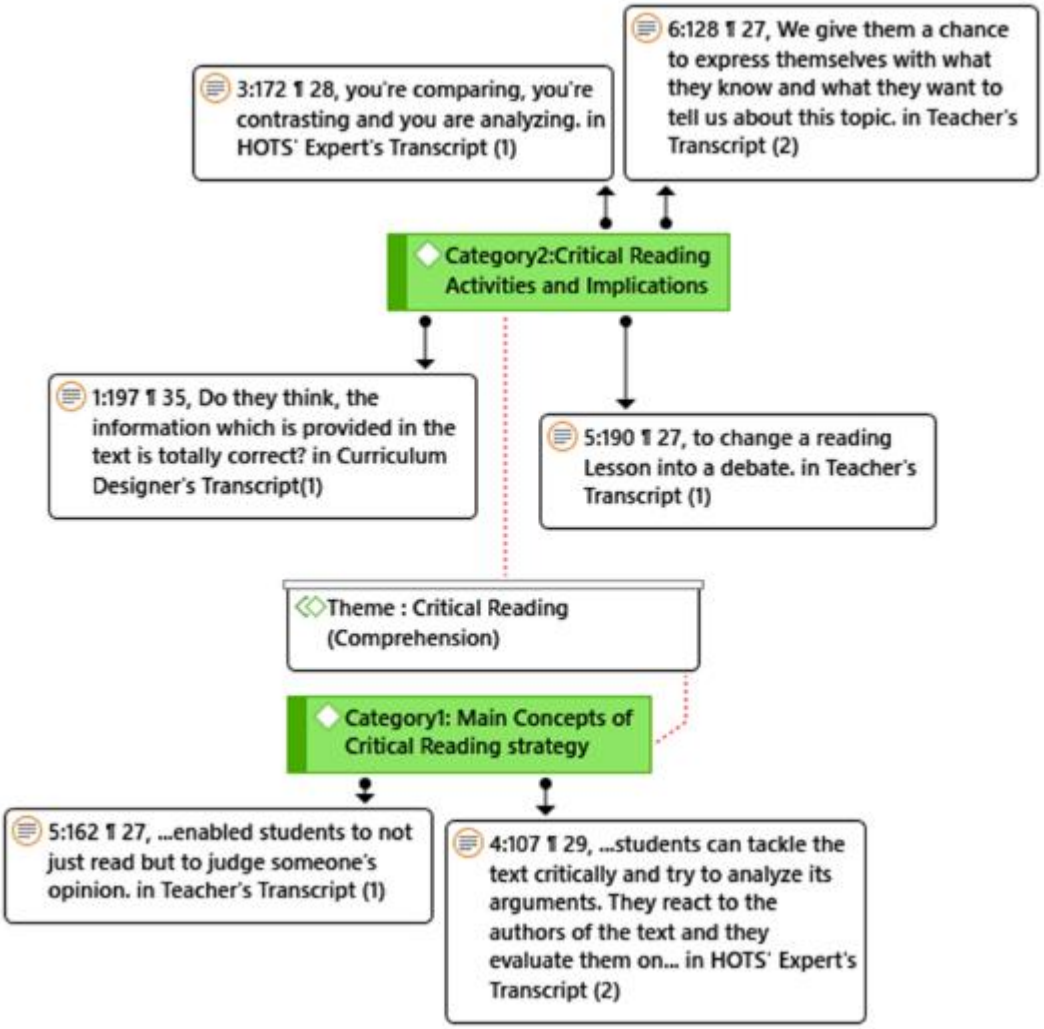

Figure 2: Critical Reading

Theme 3: Inference Strategy (Critical Comprehension)

According to the analysis of the interviews, the majority of experts mentioned the crucial part that inference strategy may play in creating HOTS-M. According to Curriculum Designer 2, "Inference is the foundation for higher-order thinking skills."

Students would be able to defend themselves and learn how to extract information from any book by using such a technique. As Teacher 1 pointed out, "…they(students) could also make details of how they get this information. They will practice reading between the lines". Curriculum designer 1 further shared Teacher 1's viewpoints by mentioning, "…helps students to read between the lines and to understand what is beyond."

Teacher 2 discussed the perspectives of the earlier interviewees and how this strategy can motivate students to provide explanations for their responses, "…when we get ready answers from the students, we want to check if they understood what they are supported to do or how they found the answers…"

Teacher 1 went on to affirm that this kind of approach might assist pupils in analyzing, contrasting, and comparing the texts. By providing justification, this approach could assist students in handling both easy and difficult problems:

> "…integrating inference strategies in reading lessons can improve students 'abilities in analyzing reading texts. so, they can answer some complicated questions…"

Since this method plays a significant role in improving students' higher-order thinking abilities, HOTS Expert 1 concentrated on how it may make reading lessons more engaging and fun. He went on to describe this:

> "…inferencing is a different type of interesting strategy and can find a very direct connection with HOTS so they would help each other. The more inferencing is happening, the more learners would train themselves to be HOTS-friendly."

Learners must receive early training to develop a variety of inference skills in order to manage both the inference strategy and HOTS. Despite being considered the cornerstone of HOTS, the experts did not place as much emphasis on inference classroom activities and exercises. It was suggested that only Teachers 1 and 2 give inference exercises to their students so they might be encouraged to defend their responses and look at textual sources. Per Teacher 1's recommendation, "They (Students) could also make details of how they got this information." This could indicate that the students ought to have offered evidence or specific details about how they came to know particular facts. Teacher 2 suggested the same practice by outlining these kinds of questions. She stated, "We ask them these questions: Where did you find the answer? Which paragraph, which line, and what is the keyword in this question?" (See Figure 3).

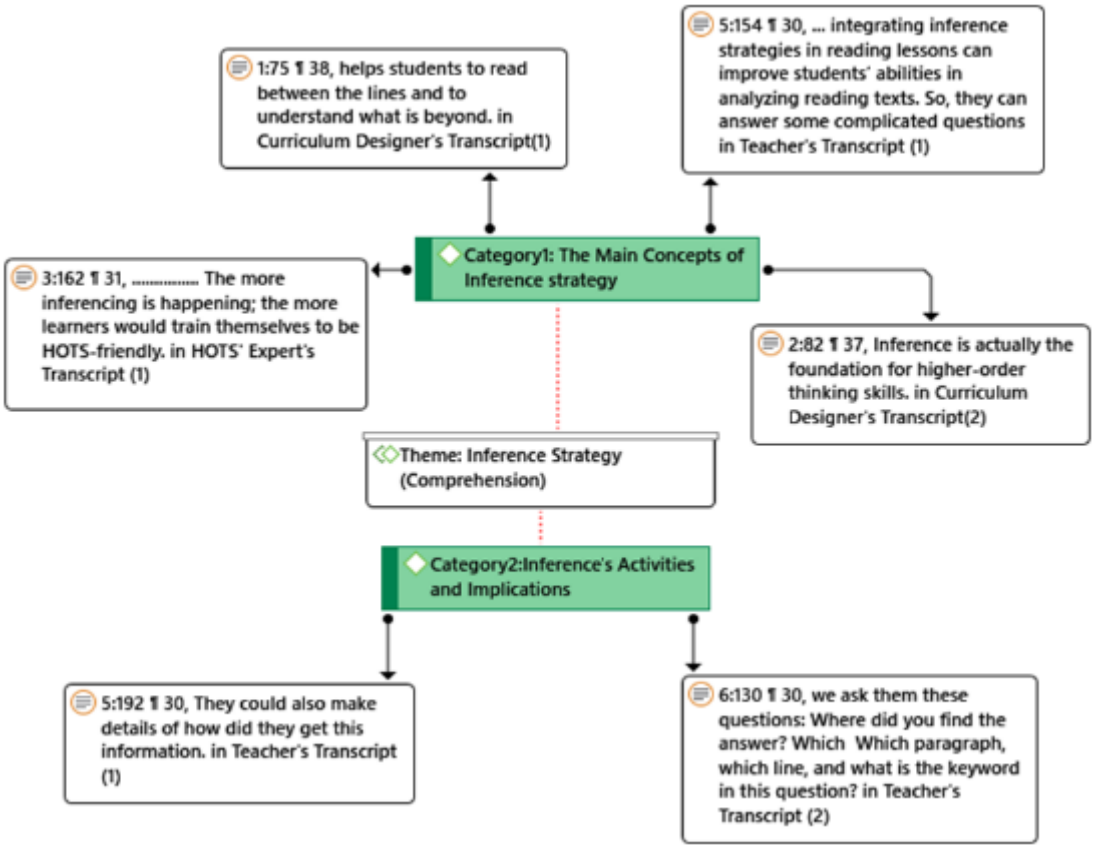

Figure 3: Inference Strategy

Theme 4: Graphic Organizers (Visual Strategy)

The graphic organizers' strategy is a visual strategy that all the interviewees and other studies refer to its essential role in improving students' reading comprehension and HOTS. By using this strategy, Teachers 1, 2, and HOTS Expert 1 suggested that since certain students possess visual intelligence, reading lessons could be more engaging and fun. According to Teacher 2:

> "Some students are visual learners, and they like to see pictures, hear sounds…So, they feel more interested. They get attracted by these photos and the drawings on the board."

It has been established that employing this technique may make reading books easier for students since it allows them to arrange their thoughts more effectively, as HOTS Expert 2 noted:

> "…graphic organizers and concept maps techniques are very helpful because they make the students organize their thoughts and also, they make learning certain concepts more comprehensible."

Additionally, Curriculum Designer 2 explained that, in addition to helping students connect ideas, this approach might also help them practice a variety of other abilities. As he stated:

> "I think a graphic organizer is very useful. It helps students to construct their understanding by exploring the relationship between the concepts." He adds: "It's not only one particular skill but many different skills can be practiced and can be followed also by the teacher."

Applications for graphic organizers in the classroom have been proposed by three experts: Teacher 1, Curriculum Designer 1, and Curriculum Designer 2. They stressed the value of using a visual organizer technique to arrange the work, summarize it, and determine how ideas relate to one another. Curriculum Designer 1 recommends graphic organizer exercises like completing sentences, answering WH questions, and summarizing the texts' key ideas in order to assess and judge them. He said that the pupils ought to "brief and summarize their points. They will focus on the important things about the text." Furthermore, Teacher 1 favored making a notebook in which the theme and concept maps may be displayed using eye-catching forms and diagrams by stating, "The ideas of the texts could be presented in the diagram, in the shape of flowers, graphs, or tables." Curriculum Designer 2 recommended some other activities like connecting activities, drawing shapes on the board, and linking story characters by saying, "…ask the students about the relationship between this and that." Figure (4) demonstrates the graphic organizer's strategy.

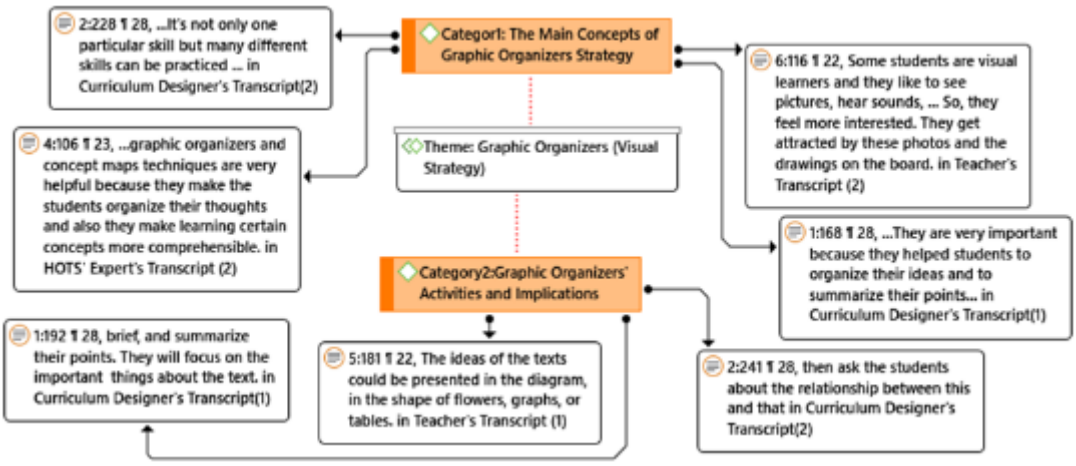

Figure 4: Graphic Organizers Strategy

Theme 4: Multimedia and Technology Tools (Audio-Visual Strategy)

The experts recommended incorporating technology and multimedia as part of the audio-visual strategy while creating the HOTS-M (module). Because technology improves the reading comprehension of EFL students, they suggested employing it to create HOTS-M (Kim, 2020; Mohammadian et al., 2018). Teacher 1, Teacher 2, and HOTS Expert 1 endorsed this view. HOTS Expert 1 highlighted this by saying:

> "…linking HOTS with technology…I think you might need it because if the learners can effectively use technology in reading critically… so, it is kind of the blended learning model for improving learners' HOTS."

In addition, Teacher 2 pointed out the benefits of utilizing technology in saving the teaching lessons time as she stated:

> "I think using technology sometimes saves time because if you work one time, then you can save this forever. You can use it, again and again, every year."

Additionally, Teacher 1 discussed how using technology in the reading classroom can enhance students' HOTS and draw them in by converting the reading texts into audio and visual texts through the creation of animations, as she explained:

> "Another way of using technology and that is by changing the written texts into cartoons. In such way, we turn that text into practical reading text which helps to improve learners' higher level of thinking…"

Most respondents have recommended the use of technology and multimedia in the classroom. Only two of them, nevertheless, have offered some exercises pertaining to the use of technology in reading comprehension instruction. In their classrooms, Teachers 1 and 2 both favored using multimedia activities. Teacher 1 proposed, for instance, "using technology and that is by changing the written texts into cartoons". Teacher 2 referred to applying multimedia in teaching vocabulary by indicating, "…the word with its meaning, or you complete the sentence with a word, you will see the words moving, and you see the colors on the screen." Figure (5) demonstrates the multimedia and technological approach suggested.

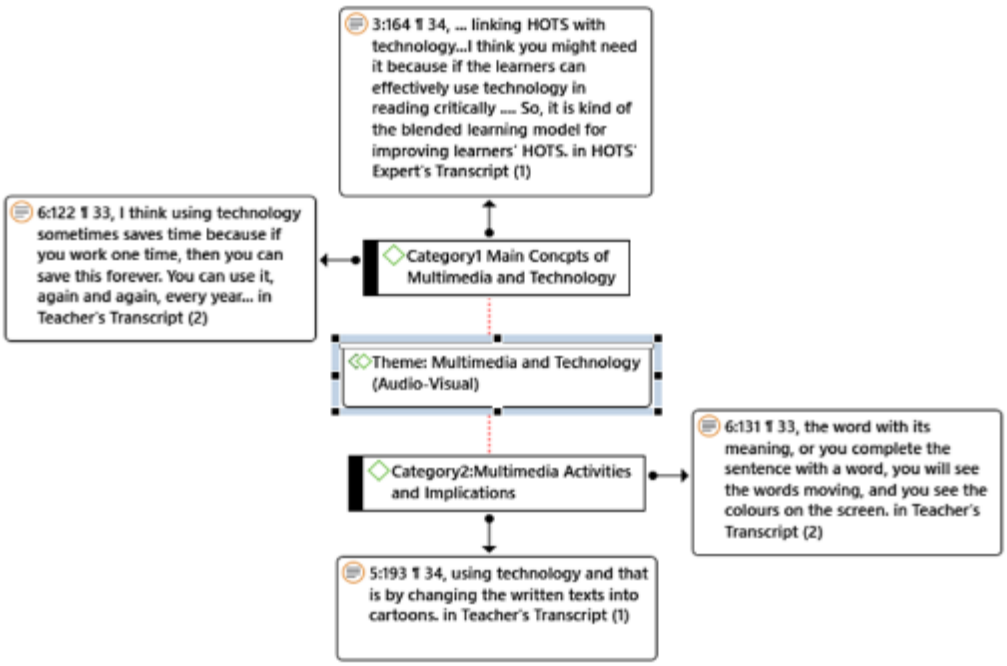

Figure 5: Multimedia and Technology Tools

Theme 6: Collaborative Work (Interactive Strategy)

The majority of interviewees think that group work strategy is an engaging way to help students with HOTS and reading comprehension. Their thoughts may be helpful for teachers' and students' strategies for enhancing and strengthening higher-order thinking abilities. According to HOTS Exprts1,

> "… a very powerful technique for teachers and learners… to collaboratively work with colleagues and improve their understanding and applications of HOTS within that school-based community…"

Group work could also promote students' different language skills and raise respect for one another. This was articulated by Curriculum Designer 1, "…group work or pair work is very important…, it develops students' skills in speaking and listening….it trains students to listen to others, respect their opinion..."

Working as a team also helps them grow as individuals and boosts their self-esteem. Additionally, it could foster a feeling of community among students. As Teacher 1 echoed, "Everyone participates, they feel that they have success together or either fail together…." Teacher 2 believed in such a strategy it is a time saving as she said, "It is also timesaving when we use group work. We depended on this strategy." Curriculum Designer 2 added: "It's very useful if the teacher allows students to be engaged with the discussion task."

Three interviewees put forth the idea of implementing collaborative work in the classroom, expressing similar opinions about the kinds of collaborative assignments that may be given to the students. Assignments to summarize are provided to students during group projects. Students were able to share information, clarify material, and support one another through collaborative work. Teachers help students build their personalities. As a facilitator, the teacher assists pupils in developing their personalities. Students could show their work, summarize the material, and express their opinions with the assistance of their teachers. Teacher 1 recommended, "The teacher gives students chances to present their work."

Furthermore, Curriculum Designer 2 summarized the tasks of collaborative work by proposing that the students in the group, "they ask, for example, discuss different things or different ideas." This was shared by Curriculum Designer 1 who assured, "Students can discuss the text." It was also supported by Teacher 1 who explained:

> "They (students) summarized each other ideas and the teacher's role there was as a facilitator who is moving from one group to another to take their work."

Furthermore, allocating the role among students within a group is very crucial as Teacher 1 suggested:

> "… in reciprocal teaching, especially for reading questions, we have a clarifier, and we have the one who predicts what is going to happen next. So, I provided the students with some material and gave each student a role."

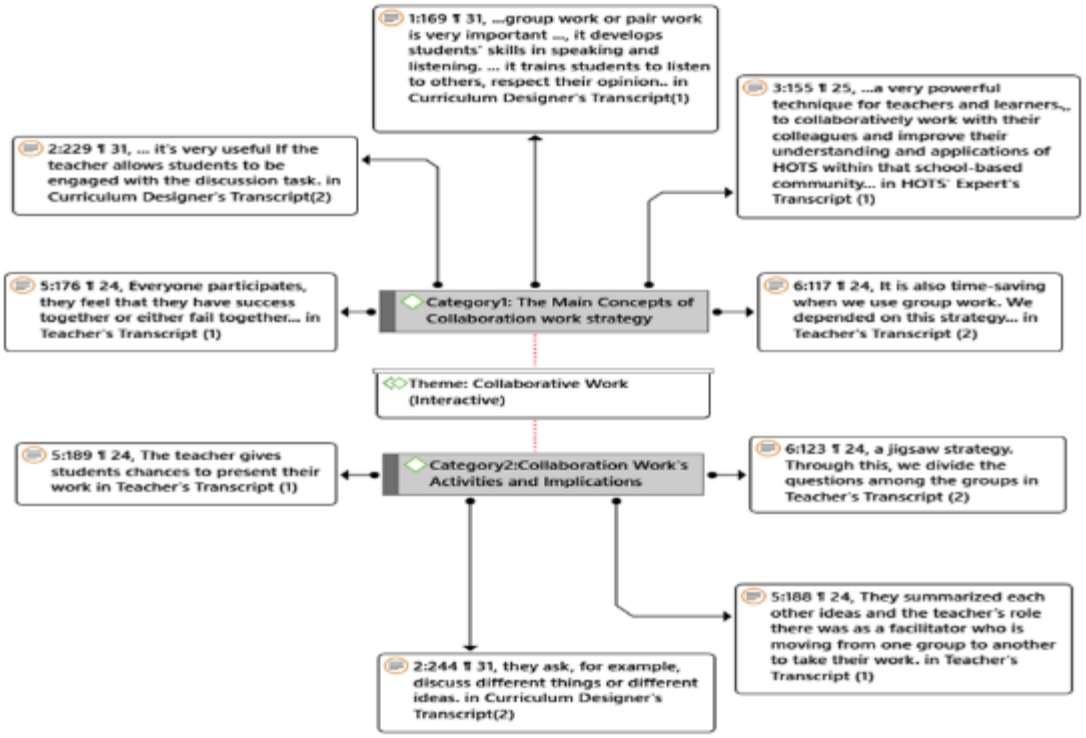

Figure 6: Collaborative Work Strategy

The thematic analysis interview research identified six HOTS-M strategies: 1) Questioning Strategies, 2) Graphic Organizers, 3) Collaboration Work, 4) Critical Reading, 5) Inference, and 6) Using Technology and Multimedia Approaches that may be suitable for developing HOTS-M. Regarding the importance of utilizing Bloom's Taxonomy in the education setting Stevani et al. (2022), HOTS Expert 1 recommended utilizing Bloom's Taxonomy while developing the module, whereas HOTS Expert 2 suggested relating reading comprehension to writing. Therefore, the revised Bloom's taxonomy has been considered while developing the HOTS-M module and by giving great emphasis on higher-order thinking skills, creating, evaluating, and analyzing. Based on that, the experts' suggested activities were considered in developing the proposed HOTS-M. Such activities can be distributed among Bloom's HOTS: analyze, evaluate, and create. Obtaining these HOTS skills is critical for both learners' academic success and lifelong success.

Different learning strategies are necessary to improve learners' reading comprehension and enhance students' creativity and critical reading skills (Wulandari et al., 2014; Zafarani & Kabgani, 2014). Based on the analysis, the leading strategies and their related implications to determine the content of the HOTS-M module have been integrated systematically. Questioning incorporates different types of questions generated by teachers or students in discussion or answering reading comprehension tasks. Such a variety of questions could stimulate learners' higher-order thinking skills. A graphic organizer is a visual tool that helps

the students think deeply, analyze the work, and organize it into different shapes, such as mind maps, Venn diagrams, and flow charts. By doing this, the students will be able to analyze the work in an easy way, and the complex concepts will be simplified and easy to understand. Collaborative learning plays a crucial role in enhancing students critical thinking skills and solving problems and that is by involving students working together in groups. It helps to share diverse ideas and enhance social and communicative skills. Critical reading helps the students analyze beyond the texts' service meaning and go deeply to understand and evaluate different concepts and opinions. The inference strategy encourages the students to read between the lines, draw conclusions based on evidence, and understand different concepts implicitly rather than explicitly. It is also critical to cultivate students' critical thinking skills and comprehension. Technology and multimedia in teaching and learning can really enhance students' reading comprehension and critical thinking skills. Teachers can use technology and internet-based programs to facilitate implementing such activities in HOTS-M. Through this, Students' vocabulary will be improved and provide more excitement in the reading comprehension classroom (Maduabuchi & Emechebe, 2016). Hence, embedding these strategies into the curriculum will improve students' reading comprehension competencies and their higher-order thinking skills. Teachers will be able to create a learning environment that consistently promotes reading comprehension and higher-order thinking skills.

Conclusion

In conclusion, one of the significant steps toward meeting the demands of 21st-century education is the development of a HOTS-M for EFL learners in grade 10 in Oman. This approach has the potential to dramatically enhance students' reading comprehension competency by incorporating HOTS. This module will be a valuable instrument for educators and curriculum designers that can also benefit educational policymakers, teachers, and, most importantly, the students themselves. The module, developed qualitatively, incorporates needs analysis from expert interviews to lay a solid foundation. It caters to precise EFL learners' needs by extracting indispensable strategies and activities to foster more effective and engaging learning experiences. Thus, the paper sheds light on the techniques and actions necessary to develop the HOTS-M successfully by drawing from insights obtained from expert interviews and the findings of a comprehensive literature review. By highlighting HOTS in EFL instruction, this module has the potential to contribute to the overall improvement of reading comprehension among grade 10 students to align education in Oman with the demands of the 21st century. Thus, it will be a valuable resource for educators and policymakers committed to enhancing the quality of English language education in Oman and beyond. The implication of this module is to give policymakers and curriculum designers in the Ministry of Education a chance to consider it. They can go back through the status of the current curriculum and educational methods and try to fix or change any needed issues. This study aimed to avoid the methods of teaching that depend heavily on a teacher-centered dynamic where the students' role only receive knowledge from the teacher.

The study on improving EFL learners' reading comprehension via the development of a Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS-M) module for Grade 10 students in Oman is a substantial theoretical and contextual advancement in language instruction. It is by conforming to the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy, Ausubel Advance Organizers Theory, Schema

Theory and Social Constructivism Theory. In language education, this framework highlights the value of developing analytical, evaluative, and creative skills. It proposes a move away from memorization and toward critical interaction with texts. In terms of context, the HOTS-M curriculum integrates culturally appropriate themes and resources, enabling Omani students to relate to the information on a personal level. In a varied learning environment where academic achievement is heavily reliant on English fluency, this relevance not only increases engagement but also improves reading comprehension. Furthermore, there is concrete proof from the study that students who participate in HOTS-based activities can perform better than their counterparts on conventional reading tasks. This research supports the need to use higher order thinking in reading instruction and motivates teachers to use comparable techniques in their own teaching. In the end, the HOTS-M module fills the educational need in Omani EFL situations by giving students the cognitive skills they need to evaluate texts critically. By showing the significant advantages of contextually relevant, higher-order thinking techniques in improving reading comprehension and general academic achievement, this study adds to the body of knowledge already in existence.

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