

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The present study aims to analyse the grade twelve reading curriculum of the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Oman to determine how it prepares students for the suitable level of academic reading skills required by a university. This chapter reviews the major approaches to the foreign language (L2) instruction and L2 reading instruction and the relevant SLA theories to the selected curriculum. It also reviews the theories underlying L2 reading instructional approaches, such as bottom-up theories, top-down theories, and interactive theories. Finally, the chapter discusses the EFL educational policy of Oman, the approaches to the Omani EFL secondary curriculum, and reading issues within Oman at university and secondary levels.

2.1 Theories and Approaches to Second Language Instruction

The Omani EFL grade twelve English language curriculum has been identified as a communicative curriculum as stated in the Omani EFL textbooks. For this reason, the approaches and theories of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and SLA are reviewed.

With regards to CLT, this section discusses the instructional approaches of CLT, being a task-based instruction (TBI), content-based instruction (CBI), cooperative language learning (CLL), the natural approach (NA), and the genre-based instructional approach (GBIA). Also, based on the review of studies in the Omani setting, other instructional methods, such as audio-lingual approaches and other alternative approaches that might be reflected in the curriculum, is also reviewed in this section.

2.1.1 Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Since its launching in the 1970s, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has served as a primary source of inspiration in language teaching practice around the world. Many recommendations raised by communicative teaching methodology are still applicable today, although teachers who are comparatively new to the career may not be familiar with them (Richards, 2006). Today, when most language teachers are asked to determine the strategy they exploit in their classrooms, they mention communicative as the chosen strategy. However, when requested to give more details of what they meant by communicative, their explanations vary widely (Richards, 2006). According to Richards (2006), CLT is defined as a group of rules associated with the purposes of language teaching, the ways of learning a language, the kinds of activities that facilitate learning in the classroom, and the role of teachers and students in the classroom.

CLT is described as an approach rather than a method (Richards and Rodgers, 1986). Within methodology, there is a difference between methods and approaches; methods refer to fixed teaching systems with certain practices and techniques, while approaches refer to philosophies of language teaching that can be understood and applied in different ways in the classroom (Rodgers, 2001). Richards and Rodgers (2001) considered CLT as an approach to teaching language. As such, CLT suggests a specific model, research model, or theory (Celce-Murcia, 2001). CLT is based on the theory that the primary purpose of language use is communication. Its' main goal is for learners to increase communicative competence (Hymes, 1971). In other words, it strives to make use of real-life situations that demand communication.

Richards (2006) states that one goal of CLT is to improve using language fluently. He defines fluency as a natural language taking place when a speaker engages in expressive communication and maintains comprehensible and constant communication without limitations in their communicative proficiency. He categorised the CLT trends into three phases according to their activities in the last 50 years. The phases are: (a) a traditional approach up to the late 1960s; (b) a classic CLT approach from the 1970s to the 1990s; and (c) the current CLT approach from the end of the 1990s to the present. Traditional approaches to language teaching are chiefly concerned with grammatical competence as the foundation of language proficiency (Richards, 2006).

Classic CLT questions the supremacy of grammar in language education and learning. In this model, communicative competence is defined as the ability of language learners to interrelate with other speakers and to make meaning of their communication (Martinez, 2013; Jin, 2012; Brown, 1996; Nunan, 1988; Savignon, 1972). Classic CLT came about as a reaction to the traditional approaches concerned with grammatically-correct sentences. In this model, attention shifted to the knowledge and skills required to use grammar and other phases of language which are necessary to use language communicatively (Richards, 2006). According to (Nunan 1988; Brandl 2007b; Xia 2010; Mullamaa 2010), a strong point of CLT is that language ability should be developed through stimulating activity toward the target language performance. Nunan (1988) further asserts that teaching and learning should be developed through activities that require learners to act in the classroom as they would outside. Likewise, (Quinn 1984; Xia 2010; Mullamaa 2010; Chang 2011) suggests that the communicative approach is held on the basis of what language items

the learners need to know to apply them in real-life situations emphasising content, meaning, and interest (cited in Nunan, 1988). Current CLT, according to Richards (2006), can be defined as a set of rules driving language goals. Similarly, how students learn a language, the types of classroom activities that facilitate learning in the best way, and teachers' roles in the classroom are also features of CLT.

Richards (2006) provides an example of current CLT classroom activity: a teacher acts as a facilitator who provides the chances for learners to use and practice the language through collaboration and activities such as problem-solving, information sharing and role-plays. Richards (2006) argued that the existence of CLT as a teaching paradigm supported the teacher's ability to assist students to achieve communicative competence through the "collaborative nature of negotiating meaning or making meaning" (Savignon, 1991: 261). Sung (2010) indicated that CLT assisted students to apply the learned language to accomplish tasks.

2.1.1.1 Task-Based Instruction (TBI)

Instructors in language teaching commonly use Task-Based Instruction (TBI) to provide a meaningful learning process for learners. Its close association with the CLT approach provides a production focus in a structural framework in language learning (Choo & Too, 2012). TBI is different from other more traditional strategies of language teaching. Lessons are created depending on the language needed to complete certain tasks, not depending on language characteristics, such as vocabulary and structures (Richards, 2005).

The synthetic and analytical approaches to language teaching should be considered when defining task-based instruction (TBI). In the synthetic approach to

language teaching, language is divided into basic parts that are moved from teacher to learner (Mullamaa, 2010). Forms of this approach to language learning include audio-lingual, grammar translation, and even CLT as realised by the ubiquitous PPP (presentation, practice, and produce) routine.

Task-Based Instruction have similar elements: that the target language is divided into small, discrete items, that the actions of the teacher are central to choosing which items are to be learned and that teachers play a crucial role in conveying those items to the student (Ducker, 2012).

The tasks and activities are introduced as central to meaningful language. This is called Task-Based Instruction (TBI), as mentioned by Nunan (2004). Providing the learners with language that matches their requirements and suits their context and familiarity is the goal of TBI (Ellis, 2003). The main objective of the TBI teaching and learning activities is to involve learners as the problem solvers who must fulfil a specified real-world task in respect to the instructional goals or learning results (Prabhu, 1987; Rahimpour & Magsoudpour 2011; Serrano & Eugenia, 2014).

When reading required communicative activities for the problem-solving process of the text, to form an intellectual representation of the text as requested by the author, readers participate as readers seeking the meaning of the text, as learners dealing with the grammatical forms explained in the tasks as they are monitoring their learning, and as risk-takers who must experience the target language through creating language innovation like restating, paraphrasing, using paralinguistic signs, and so forth. This happens when learners lack L2 knowledge or control (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Ionin, Zubizarreta & Maldonado, 2008; Erçetin & Alptekin 2013). The social

interaction reflection showed that the types of interaction supply appropriate scaffolding for the learning of new linguistic forms.

Thus, the interaction within the context of reading L2, not only helps to develop a better understanding of the meaning of the text but also helps in the development of the linguistic aspects of a second language (Heo et al., 2011). Several researchers suggested TBI as an appropriate and practical instructional approach for second and foreign language learning. This is so because it promotes real-time communication and learning as meaning-centred and encouraged the use of TBI in second language learning because it helps to improve the learner's ability to engage in real-time communication and to learn in a meaningful situation (Basturkmen, 2006; Van Lier, 2004; Wesche & Skehan, 2002).

2.1.1.2 Content-Based Instruction (CBI)

EFL learners at universities face many challenges in their academic study. One such difficulty is using English as the instruction language, particularly at the beginning of the academic study. Research into English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has shown that these students need to be competent in certain language areas and skills, one of which is reading, to be able to deal with academic requirements (Chou, 2009; Cumming, 1994; Nakatani, 2005; Stepp, 2008). For this reason, CBI has gained extensive recognition in second and foreign language teaching (Tsiplakides, 2011).

One of the problems posed to L2 learners is learning academic English language skills (Jung, 2011; Gray et al., 1996). The L2 communicative instructional method seems to assist students in their academic areas [called Content-Based

Instruction (CBI)]. However, according to Koda (2005), CBI depends on both information processing cognitive theories of SLA and sociocultural theories. Also, the information processing theory of SLA uses linguistic information processing, textual information processing, and text information synthesis (Stepp, 2008). Textual information processing is related to the comprehension process involving building a mental representation of the propositional content for understanding the author's message. Gathering text information and prior knowledge processing consist of cognitive processes such as inference, reasoning, and remembering. On the other hand, CBI concentrates on developing students' information processing abilities via comprehensible, yet challenging content information in a foreign language (Heo, 2006).

The socio-cognitive theory suggests that one's language acquisition is learned via their context of social interaction as well as through interaction with their environment (Atkinson, 2002). Thus, an individual's environment and changes in that environment influence the person's thought processes, which in turn influences the development of his or her language acquisition. Within the range of L2 reading, socio-cognitive reading activities in Content-Based English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction may be reflected in activities reflecting speech based on information and content-based text in the content area (Jung, 2011). Despite similarities between socio-cognitive theory and sociocultural theory, the former does not encourage communicative competence as an essential element in language activities (Khatib and Shakouri, 2013).

Moreover, CBI adapts CLT by encouraging learners to be involved in great communicative interaction around cognitive activities or the activities referred to

learners' psychological aspects, such as the reading processes in the mind of an individual reader (Madrid, 2001; Jung, 2011). Therefore, reading tasks for CBI are influenced by reflecting information processing theories of SLA, that textual information processing appears through meaningful communicative interaction, but it is different in the case of reading passages where research suggests that academic content can be expository (Tsai & Shang, 2010).

CBI is designed around the content or information besides the discourse of the content that is intended for learners to obtain. Besides helping students acquire the ability to read grade level texts, CBI may help to develop the process of second language proficiency (Horn, 2011). It was claimed that depending on the functional theory of language can enhance a student's ability in mapping specific linguistic features to the meaning of the text that makes linguistic improvement central to learning. The sociocultural theory of SLA shows language as a vital instrument for thinking processes and an essential means of intervention for one's cognition (Ahmed, 2013). Therefore, CBI highlights that cognitive activity refers to text information processing and communicative activity. Thus, the objective of CBI is preparing learners for general L2 proficiency and strong L2 academic language in their content areas through the communicative negotiation of meaning (Genesee & Lindholm-Leary, 2013).

However, some researchers claim that content-based and task-based approaches do not seem suitable in certain EFL contexts due to factors such as contact hours and resources (Dickinson, 2010).

2.1.1.3 Cooperative Language Learning (CLL)

Cooperative language teaching is one effective instructional means to enhance the cognitive and linguistic growth for those who learn English as a foreign language (Archibald et al., 2008). CLL is a process that allows students with different abilities, nationalities, gender, and various stages of social skills to perform their learning development via operating in small groups and assisting each other. In other words, CLL is the pedagogical use of small groups that permits students to maximise both their own and others' learning (Bolukbas et al., 2011). It was argued that working in small groups is considered an important principle of CLL, where during small group activities, the learners are involved in significant and authentic language use (Özsevik, 2010).

Moreover, CLL could be utilised as an implement to mediate the interaction-oriented language learning development, as it constructs the sociocultural view of language (Brandl, 2008). Therefore, social interaction has a crucial role in CLL that is learner-centred in language instruction. CLL aims to advance communicative functions and give learners natural L2 acquisition (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). According to Zhang (2010), CLL emphasises the interaction and communication between students themselves and students with the teacher, where the teacher works as a guide, negotiator, and facilitator in the classroom.

The benefits of CLL include, among others: providing the chances of input and output; creating an effective climate; increasing a variety of language functions, and fostering learner responsibility and independence. Also, the researcher found that CLL enhances productivity and achievement and provides more chances for

communication. To achieve the purpose of CLL, learners should work collaboratively where CLL is used for L2 instruction to help students in L2 reading development (Eljana, 2009). It was shown that CLL is effective in improving L2 development. Since Omani schools have students from different nations (Al-Issa, 2006), the CLL is an effective way to be used. Also, Omani students have diverse cultures and their cooperation with each other will affect their English language learning. Ghaith and El-Malak (2004) aimed to examine the impact of the cooperative Jigsaw II method on promoting higher order reading comprehension and literacy in (EFL). The results suggested that CLL affected the literal, higher order, and overall L2 reading comprehension. This suggests that CLL could improve the reading comprehension of Omani students.

2.1.1.4 The Natural Approach (NA)

To become proficient in English, and more specifically in academic English, is a difficult, complicated, and long process. Thus, learners progress by a regular sequence, no matter their native language (Virginia Department of Education, 2006). In some cases, there may be sub-levels among the sequence for learners who have some first language background while other learners may progress at slower or faster rates depending on a variety of factors such as age, native language, and curriculum (Chuunga, 2013).

Cooperative Language Learning is another form of CLT, that aimed to encourages naturalistic language acquisition and is also a natural approach to L2 instruction. Krashen and Terrell (1983) stated that studying activities is a kind of practices, such as the ones recommended by the Audio-Lingual method that aimed to

encourage communicative abilities through communicative exchanges. Therefore, the natural approach encouraged by Krashen and Terrell (1983) is also called 'the Creative Construction approach'. The natural approach is founded on five interconnected theories such as qualify the learning tasks to include sub-conscious learning, comprehensible input, a non-threatening learning environment, and serial language learning that are introduced in levels based on its sequence (Sidek, 2010; Dai & Liu, 2013; Haley, Steeley & Salahshoor, 2013). The natural approach involves the development of language knowledge implicitly, where this knowledge was acquired mainly through communication. This was contended by Scheffler (2008), based on the belief that adults use their problem-solving mechanisms when to acquire cognitive skills. According to Morales-Jones (2011), the natural approach to L2 instruction focuses on providing learners with the opportunity to acquire language rather than learning it. This method involves many opportunities for students for speaking and listening. In addition, the natural method requires teachers to provide comprehensible input at all times such as gestures, visuals (pictures, graphs, objects), and demonstrations.

The natural approach was investigated by previous studies from different aspects. For instance, Vilaseca and Rio (2004) investigated language acquisition by children with Down syndrome through using a naturalistic approach to assist language acquisition. The study attempted to improve the language and communication skills in children with special educational needs through naturalistic intervention. The results showed positive changes in the targeted language components of three children with Down syndrome. Such results confirm that the natural approach in L2 instruction

focused on providing learners with the opportunity to acquire language rather than learning it.

Meanwhile, Norris and Ortega (2000) investigated the effectiveness of L2 instruction through using a quantitative meta-analysis. The study results showed that explicit types of instruction are more effective than implicit types, which means that this method involved the development of language knowledge implicitly, where this knowledge was acquired mainly through communication.

2.1.1.5 The Genre-Based Instructional Approach (GBIA)

One of the biggest problems confronting L2 learners is teaching academic English language skills (Morales-Jones, 2011). The L2 communicative instructional method is used to help students in their academic fields. It is also called content-based instruction (CBI) (Morales-Jones, 2011). Moreover, the information processing theory of SLA utilises textual information processing, text information synthesis, and linguistic information processing (Yoshida, 2011).

In addition, textual information processing is associated with comprehension processes that require constructing a mental representation of language (Woolley, 2011). Collecting text information and prior knowledge processing comprises cognitive processes such as reasoning, remembering, and inference (Allen et al., 2014). On the other hand, CBI concentrates on developing students' information processing capabilities through comprehensible, yet challenging content information in a foreign language (Khatib & Shakouri, 2013; Tsai & Shang, 2010).

Many recent studies examined the effect of the genre-based approach on many aspects. For instance, Qi and Rui-ying (2004) conducted an experimental study to evaluate the effects of genre-based reading instruction on Chinese learners in an EFL context. A comparison of the results revealed that the students in the experimental group improved noticeably regarding reading speed and their understanding of genre features (the structure, style, and communicative purpose of the genres), however, their comprehension of the content was similar to the controlled group. The study assured that genre-based instruction was an effective approach to improve students' reading speed and an overall understanding of the discourse. Such outcomes confirm the importance of developing students' information processing capabilities through the straightforward yet difficult content in a foreign language.

Minaabad and Khoshkholgh (2012) investigated the effect of genre-based pedagogy on ESP learners' reading comprehension. It was found that genre-based pedagogy had a significant effect on ESP learners' reading comprehension and proved the interaction between ESP learners' achievement and their general English proficiency. This confirms that one's language acquisition is learned through the context of social interaction as well as by interaction with the environment.

Meanwhile, Elashri and Ibrahim (2013) investigated the effect of genre-based approach to teaching writing on EFL Alazhar secondary students. It was found that the genre-based approach is effective in developing writing performance and attitudes toward writing of secondary students. These results refer to how textual information processing is associated with comprehension processes that require constructing a mental representation and collecting text information and prior knowledge processing comprises cognitive processes such as reasoning, remembering, and inference.

Sadeghi et al. (2013) investigated the effects of genre-based instruction on ESP learners' reading comprehension. The results of the reading comprehension test suggested teaching based on genre had a significant role in enhancing ESP learners' reading comprehension ability and that learners improved significantly in reading comprehension compared with that of the non-genre-group. Such results assured that genre-based instruction is an effective approach to improve students' reading speed and overall understanding of the discourse.

The findings of previous studies imply that Omani students could benefit from the genre-based instruction approach to improving their reading comprehension since they study English as a foreign language.

2.1.2 Audio-lingual Instructional Approaches and Related Theories

The EFL Omani curriculum has officially adopted the communicative language approach. Its aim is to have learners develop oral fluency and accuracy within specified functional areas and with acceptable standards of pronunciation (Omani Ministry of Education, 2010). This suggests that the Omani curriculum might have characteristics of the audio-lingual instructional approach. In this section, the audio-lingual instructional approaches and related theories are discussed below.

2.1.2.1 Audio-Lingual Method (ALM)

The audio-lingual instructional approach is linked to the use of oral-aural skills as the fundamental mechanism in L2 instruction. This instructional approach was widely adopted before the emergence of communicative practices. Audio-lingual approaches to SLA are framed on behaviourist theories of foreign language learning.

Behaviourist theories speculate that to acquire a language, one needs to acquire the forms of the language, which are best taught using accession or repetitive practices (Prator & Celce-Murcia, 1979).

Reinforcement of responses to particular stimuli is believed to form the desired learning behaviours. Typical language instruction within the behaviourist theory often involves activities such as rote memorisation and drills (Weegar & Pacis, 2012).

2.1.2.2 Total Physical Response (TPR)

Total Physical Response (TPR) is grammar-based in nature, in line with the behaviourist stimulus-response view of learning theory. TPR is one of the first instructional approaches to L2. It is a language teaching approach based on the arrangement of speech and action (Asher, 1982). Learning tasks involve learners listening to a stimulus and response using motor activities (Conroy, 1999; Lin, 2010). The objective is to teach oral proficiency for beginners through active listening (Asher, 2003), which is expected to lead to linguistic proficiency (Finnochiaro & Brumfit, 1983). Cognitive activities that are activities associated with psychological properties such as dialogue organisation, study skills, and vocabulary development (Stoller, 1997), are hardly within the Listen-Understand-React-Memorise learning chain, which can be categorised as a low-level cognitive task. Studies have shown that TPR could be effective for developing L2 acquisition at the word, phrase, or simple sentence level in a formulaic manner (e.g., Elliott & Yountchi, 1999; Lin, 2010; Colombo 2011; Hwang et al., 2014). Learning tasks occupy individual patterns of learner groupings with the teacher-influencing student learning in a one-way direction

of instructional communication (Sidek, 2010; Jolla, 2010; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012; Wentzel and Brophy, 2014).

Within the L2 reading domain, due to its characteristics, TPR does not furnish learners' needs to develop information-processing skills above word recognition (Sidek, 2010). As discussed earlier in the CLT approaches section, studies have shown that CLT approaches are first-rate to TPR (e.g. Furuhata, 1999; Brandl, 2007a). The majority of studies in TPR were conducted in the 1960s. Recent studies such as those by Kariuki and Bush (2008) and Omari (2001) on TPR have shown positive results in L2 areas such as the acquisition of vocabulary which suggest that TPR is beneficial for lower-level languages processing skills such as at the phonological level, word recognition, and word identification (Asher, 1966; Kunihiro and Asher, 1965).

2.1.2.3 Oral Approach (OA)

The oral approach to L2 instruction is an approach framed on the behaviourist theory. Thus, it depends on bottom-up processing to develop learners' lower-level language processing skills, such as phonological processing skills, word recognition and word identification (Ellis, 2005). Learners merely listen, repeat what the teacher speaks, and only answer the teacher's questions and commands; thus, the learners have no control over the learning content (Chatti, Jarke, & Specht, 2010). This instructional approach focuses on the role of vocabulary and grammar in language learning based on the theory that speech is the basis for language and structure is necessary for speaking ability. This approach is framed on behaviourist habit-learning theories. Knowledge of structure is always considered to link to situations because speech is exhibited for a purpose (Richards & Rodgers, 2007). Therefore, the oral

approach to L2 instruction is also known as the structural-situational instructional approach or situational language teaching (Ellis, 2005). Learning activities involve the offering of new sentence patterns with drilling as the primary vehicle to reinforce the new arrangements. These drills are consistently skill-based and based on a bottom-up process (Wentzel & Brophy, 2014). Language activities typically require lower cognitive skills, such as recall and memorisation. This instructional approach is criticised regarding its assumption that simply focusing on the grammatical form via oral practice will lead to language acquisition (e.g., Ellis, 2005; Kamhuber, 2010). Reinforcement in the structure of acquiring language may not produce learners who can use language proficiently.

This section described the major approaches and methods in language teaching, such as grammar translation, audio-lingualism, CLT, and the natural approach. The text examines each approach and method regarding its theory of language and language learning, goals, syllabus, teaching activities, teacher and learner's roles, materials, and classroom techniques. These approaches and methods in language teaching serve as references for the analysis of the grade twelve reading curriculum in the Sultanate of Oman.

2.2 Theories and Instructional Approaches to L2 Reading

Numerous theories and approaches have been formulated to help explain or suggest the most efficient way for L2 English language reading. These are based on the myriad of factors that facilitate or obscure L2 acquisition ranging from internal aptitude factors within teacher and learner to more formal pedagogical approaches to teaching. Below is a brief introduction to some of these theories and approaches:

2.2.1 Bottom-up Theories

Bottom-up theories of reading are text-driven in quality and emphasise the lower-level ingredients of the reading process such as phonological treatment, recognising the word, and identifying the word (Shahnazari & Dabaghi, 2014). Comprehension is perceived to be dependent on linguistic skills or decrypting skills (Carrell, 1988), which reflects a structuralist view of language learning.

2.2.1.1 L2 Grammar Translation Reading Instruction

In this method, grammar is seen as a starting point for reading instruction. One of the key elements of the Grammar Translation (GT) method is its concentration on studying grammar rules in detail, which then becomes the application of those standards in translation exercises into the foreign language first and then back into the first language. The GT method focuses on writing and reading skills. The most important feature of this method is accuracy, where students were supposed to reach high standards in translating sentences (Richards & Rodgers, 2007). In an EFL classroom, GT consists of the teacher translating the English text, explaining grammar rules, and focusing on vocabulary (Wang, 2009).

According to Shin (2013), in EFL reading the main activity in the classroom was a translation into the native language, and the main concerns for developing reading competence were the grammar and linguistic forms the GT method is derived from, audio-lingual positions, and teacher emphasis on purposed instruction on the certain structures and vocabulary. The audio-lingual programme needs skilled

teaching to sustain high levels of motivation because the students' tasks are not often genuinely communicative. Thus, teachers control reading instruction in the classroom.

Learners are often instructed to read the text, and their attention is usually directed to learning grammar rules and vocabulary (Hunt & Beglar, 2005), which results in an individual pattern of learner grouping. This form-focused instructional approach for reading has been criticised for centring on the teacher, involving substantial drilling and disregarding the role of meaning (Morales-Jones, 2011).

Nevertheless, some studies found that GT is essential to acquire English as a foreign language and to understand every word in the context and grammar structure (Wang, 2013), which refers to the linguistic competence that L2 readers also need for text processing at the word level.

2.2.2 Top-down Reading Theories

Learners process texts by using a top-down and/or a bottom-up approach. A top-down approach focuses on the meaning of what is read through using previously acquired knowledge of the topic in the text to make sense of what is written (Rae, 2012). Top-down theories of L2 reading focus on higher level text processing skills, such as contextual and background knowledge sources, based on the idea that "readers' ability to use linguistic and semantic hints atone their lack of graphic cues" (Nassaji, 2003: 262). Contrary to the bottom-up model of L2 reading, as exemplified by the grammar-translation instructional approach, the top-down model bolsters approaches such as the whole language, signifies the importance of higher level text processing skills (e.g., semantics), and de-emphasises the functions of lower-level text processing techniques (e.g., word recognition). In contrast to the grammar translation

instructional approach, the complete language access to L2 reading instruction is a contemporary approach to L1 and L2 literacy education in which reading is considered a process of constructing meaning from whole to part.

Many recent studies discussed the effectiveness of top-down theories in regards to L2 reading instruction. For instance, Angosto et al. (2013) examined the top-down processing in reading comprehension of children. The study found a duality between the bottom-up approach and the top-down approach. The results suggested that top-down processing is present from an early age, begins to develop around the second year of primary school and that its effectiveness is comparable to that of bottom-up processing in later school years. These results are expected because, as explained above, a top-down approach focuses on the meaning of what is read through using previously acquired knowledge of the topic in the text to make sense of what is written. Top-down theories of L2 reading focus on higher level text processing skills, such as contextual and background knowledge sources based on the idea that readers' ability to use linguistic and semantic hints atone for their lack of graphic cues.

Haradasht and Baradaran (2013) conducted a study to investigate the effect of top-down and bottom-up processing on the reading comprehension of extrovert and introvert EFL learners' reading comprehension. The results showed that while learners benefitted more from the bottom-up processing setting compared to the top-down processing one, the extrovert group was better off receiving top-down instruction. Fatemi et al. (2014) explored the effects of top-down/bottom-up processing and field-dependent/field-independent cognitive style on Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension. The results revealed that FI learners outperformed their FD counterparts in the bottom-up group. Moreover, the results showed that FD learners

were more successful than FI ones when taught through the top-down reading instruction model.

2.2.2.1 Whole Language Approaches (WLA) to L2 Reading Instructions

WLA is derived from a student-centred concept, where students can choose what to learn, the way of learning, when to learn, and the rate of learning the target language. For designing a whole language curriculum, any material that is interesting, real, and natural should be included (Cheng, 1998). The WLA curriculum is characterised by flexibility and varies according to students' interests, skills, and knowledge. It combines traditional subjects and field-of-life situations and problem-solving.

Within the GT method, students concentrate on the meaning of each word and sentence alone and put less emphasis on the meaning of the whole text. Also, the meaning is often obtained from the first language and not from English. Nevertheless, to obtain reading comprehension, reading should be an interactive process between reader and the text (Krashen, 2002). Since the GT method concentrates on translation, EFL students use transliteration and do not learn to read. Because of that, students do not become proficient readers in English, but they become proficient in translating their native language into English. According to Richard (2004), fluent readers in English can generate the meaning from a text as a whole. Thus, the GT method to L2 reading makes it difficult for students to grasp meaning in English. On the other hand, Freeman and Freeman (1992) asserted that teachers should provide class activities to know how well students learn.

According to Kuzborska (2011), the WLA was believed to simplify the acquisition of reading skills, since it presents reading as a meaning comprehension process, concentrates on the teaching of meaningful interaction with texts, and teaches how to read meaningfully. The WLA emphasises natural language acquisition and significant communication inside and outside of the classroom. Among the innovative teaching methodologies, WLA is the most popular and practical because it addresses language learning holistically, and draws ideas from psychology, linguistics, sociology, philosophy, and literacy (Krashen, 2002). Kuzborska (2011) found that the WLA might create a foundation for collaborative learning and student selection of tasks and materials. In addition, it can activate and build on students' background knowledge and support authentic communication.

In a recent study, Ling (2012) introduced the whole language theory and examined its application to the teaching of English reading. The research reveals that the whole language theory can be used to improve the teaching of English in general and English reading in particular. In addition, its' advantages can be summarised as follows: it becomes possible for the student to understand the whole text in an easier way and it adopts a general assessment, which leads the student to achieve a more objective score. It has disadvantages, but its' advantages outweigh the negatives.

In addition, it has been argued that students can learn more effectively in schools if they are involved in authentic activities, instead of being drilled in grammar exercises. Moreover, Stahl et al. (1996) indicated the disadvantages of WLA as it permits students to select material with which they feel comfortable. A focus on self-confidence, not achievement, is beneficial. It was found that students choose simple material to read, thus inhibiting their language development. However, it can be

concluded that the WLA has advantages and disadvantages; teachers can benefit from the WLA, taking into account the possible pitfalls.

2.2.3 Interactive Reading Theories

The interactive theory considers reading an interactive process between the reader and the text, where the reader uses his knowledge base to take in the textual information. Reading as an interactive process involves the communication of several skills in simultaneous operation; the interaction of these cognitive skills results in fluent reading comprehension (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). According to Bernhardt (2005), the interactive theory of L2 reading involved a combination of lower-level rapid, automatic identification skills and higher level interpretation or comprehension skills. In addition, it has been argued that readers reconstruct the meaning from text depending on two things: new information existing in the text and what is relevant to prior knowledge, opinions, and feelings of the reader.

However, within the present decade, L2 reading researchers have started to shift their focus toward the importance of having students actively involved in the text by linking social context and cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1987). Thus, the interactive theory of L2 reading has been broadened to include communicative theories of SLA, especially sociocultural theory. Similar to sociocultural theory, socio-cognitive theory, and the communicative approach, the interactional theory of L2 reading supports proficiency of conversation around text information by employing language as an instrument in a process that is socially mediated (Vygotsky, 1978) and as a crucial tool for the improvement of intellectual processes. This may help enhance L2 reading processing. The growing interest in the communicative

instructional approach has developed the interactive theory of L2 reading so that it now includes the interaction among the reader, the text, and the reading context.

Among the other communicative theories of L2 reading instructional approaches, which are based on interactive theories and SCT, is CBI. In contrast to the grammar translation instructional approach, reading within Content-Based ESL Instruction, which is a communicative approach to L2 instruction, is used simultaneously to train learners for foreign language skills as well as academic-related subject matter (Hyland & Hamps-Lyon, 2002). It can be concluded that CBI to L2 reading represents an interactive theory, as it is concerned with language skills and meaning construction.

CBI and other communicative instructional approaches to L2 reading that are rooted in interactive and sociocultural theories focus on collective and communicative text-based discussion as ways to enhance students' engagement with texts and to support student's understanding. The communicative characteristic of CBI is mirrored in the pattern of learner groupings, such as learning tasks that are designed in pairs or groups. Such learner collaboration enables learners to learn not only from the teacher but also from peers and teaching resources (Sidek, 2010).

Content-Based ESL Instruction is usually practised in English for Academic Purpose (EAP) courses and in general, ESL or EFL programmes. Therefore, Content-Based ESL Instruction is also usually used in EFL reading lessons using content-based texts such as Science and History (e.g., Shang, 2006) for students to learn new ideas presented in L2. The objective of Content-Based ESL Instruction is to entertain students with academic literacy in content areas as well as to raise students' genre

knowledge in the expository type of texts for academic success (Song, 2001). Content-based texts are texts of avant-garde literacy that require more intellectual demands regarding knowledge and language (Schleppegrell, 2001).

Within L2 reading theories, the limitations of bottom-up and top-down theories were the reason behind producing the interactive theory (Oyetunji, 2011). According to the interactive theory, reading comprehension results from an active correlation between the bottom-up and top-down theories, between the reader's knowledge base and the text information, and between decoding and interpretation of text information (Lee, 2009).

In general, the interactive theory includes different elements being processed at the same time in the reader's cognition using different reading models to comprehend the text (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). According to Astika (2005), the interactive theory is effective in supplying the students with the required skills to overcome the reading challenges they faced at the tertiary level through engaging them in an interactive reading process.

As an example of previous studies that examined the interactive theories, Astika (2005) examined an approach to teaching reading to students who have specialised needs. This method was dependent on the principles of TBI and the interactive theories of L2 reading. It was found that group work and classroom discussion were beneficial, as students helped each other and got information from other students. Also, on the individual level, students were able to learn complex words in context and to separate sophisticated sentences into meaningful parts. Moreover, Hameed (2009) conducted a study dealing with testing the effect of the

contribution of interactive approach and cognitive approach to enhancing students' level of reading comprehension. Based on a pre-test, two homogeneous classes from the College of Basic Education were chosen as the subjects. To verify the effectiveness of either approach on promoting students' reading comprehension, one group (experimental) was taught by the interactive approach and the other group (control) was taught by the cognitive approach. After ten sessions of class work, the subjects participated in a post-test. From data analysis via a t-test calculation, it became clear that the first group outperformed the second.

Therefore, it was soundly concluded that the interactive approach was more effective than the cognitive approach. In addition, Tsai and Shang (2010) investigated the impact of CBI on EFL students' reading comprehension. It was found that the utilisation of content-based language instruction in literature classes can enhance students' reading comprehension as well as critical thinking abilities.

In moving forward, these approaches and methods (bottom-up theories, top-down reading theories, and interactive reading theories) will be subjected to analysis along with the curriculum framework and classroom observation.

2.3 Lexical Diversity

Lexical richness includes four dimensions, which are lexical density, lexical diversity, lexical sophistication, and proportion of errors between the words that are used by an L2 learner, in this section focuses on lexical diversity (Read, 2000). However, it is possible to measure lexical density as the proportion of semantically full words (or lexical words) as opposed to functional words. Lexical diversity is determined by the Type-Token Ratio (TTR), which represents a ratio between the

number of different words (types) and the number of total words (token). Lexical diversity both in oral speech and writing has been found to differ due to age and L2 proficiency. However, the main challenge with TTR is its sensitivity to text length (Lindqvist, Gudmundson, Bardel, 2013). As shown by McCarthy and Jarvis (2007), a text with more words (tokens) is less likely to introduce new words (types). In the case where a text is very long, certain words may be repeated, so, high-frequency words will be repeated more often as compared to low-frequency words, and this tendency will increase the length of the text.

Many different measures were suggested for solving this problem concerning length of the text. For example, the index of Guiraud (Guiraud, 1954) is a type/token-based measure designed to be text length independent. Dividing the number of types by the square root of the number of tokens produces the index of Guiraud. In the case of long texts, this approach will result in a higher lexical richness than what would have been obtained with a simple TTR. However, as shown by Daller, Van Hout and Treffers-Daller (2003) TTR and the index of Guiraud are not valid measures of lexical richness at later stages of L2 acquisition. A development of the Guiraud index is the advanced Guiraud, which takes in frequency as a factor (Daller et al., 2003). It was proposed that words are learned in rough order of frequency, wherein the difficulty of words as measured by their frequency must be taken into consideration when measuring the lexical richness of L2 learners (Vermeer, 2004).

Lexical Frequency Profile (LFP) is an approach that relies on the raw frequency of words in the target language (Laufer & Nation, 1995). LFP denotes the ratio between the proportions of high-frequency words versus the percentage of low-frequency words in a written text. Moreover, all the words are divided into several

classes, which are established based on frequency bands referring to written language corpora. Vocab-profile is defined as a programme that aims to execute this classification according to the following frequency bands as shown by Coxhead (2000): the 1000 most frequent word families, the next 1000 most frequent word families, and the Academic Wordlist, which contains the 570 most frequent word families drawn from academic texts. The not-in-the-lists category is the list of words that do not appear in any of these categories.

Malvern, Richards, Chipere & Durán (2004) proposed the *D* measure, which is freely available in CHILDES, namely the *vocd* programme. *D_tools* is a programme that calculates a statistic displaying the lexical richness of a text, which is based on work by Malvern et al. (2004). The difference between the *vocd* programme and *D_tools* is that dealing with the latter is easier than with the former, as *vocd* requires the data to be formatted corresponding to the standards given by CHILDES system (MacWhinney, 2000); *D_tools* permits users to work directly with raw text. Moreover, the standards provided by CHILDES need some learning effort, in contrary to *D_tools* that can be used by the ordinary researcher. Therefore, in the current study, the researcher will use the *D_tools* software to obtain the lexical diversity of grade twelve reading texts in the Omani EFL curriculum by calculating the *D* measure.

Many previous studies have measured and examined lexical diversity. For example, the study of Durán et al. (2004) proposed an approach based on mathematical modelling that generates a measure of lexical diversity. The study claimed that lexical diversity measurements are often difficult to interpret. The research clarified those problems and proposed a valid index, *D*, which is computed even for short transcripts with solid reliability and can be applied to foreign language

learners. Koizumi (2012) investigated the effect of text length on four lexical diversity measures across 50 to 200 token texts. The researchers found that the Measure of Text Lexical Diversity (MTLD) was less affected by text length, where this measure must be used with texts of at least 100 tokens.

The study of To, Fan and Thomas (2013) examined the lexical density and readability of four texts from English textbooks at four levels: elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate and upper-intermediate. The result showed that there were three reading texts of high lexical density, apart from the text for the upper-intermediate level. In addition, Šišková (2012) compared different measures of lexical richness in narratives written by Czech EFL learners. The focus is on three groups of lexical richness measures: measures of lexical diversity (saying how many different words are used), lexical sophistication (saying how many advanced words are used) and lexical density (saying what the proportion of content words in the text is). The results showed that the strongest correlations were between measures of lexical diversity and sophistication.

Wang (2014) examined the lexical dimension of EFL writing by discovering the relationship between lexical diversity and EFL writing proficiency. However, the relationship was discovered via analysing the 45 email texts written by Chinese high school students, which have been taken from a Chinese National Matriculation English Test (NMET) practice-writing test. Type-Token Ratio (TTR) and D measure (a measurement of lexical diversity through curve fitting) depended on to create guides of lexical diversity. The findings indicated that the lexical diversity of email texts categorised at higher proficiency levels was not significantly different from the lexical diversity of email texts graded at lower proficiency levels. Neither the TTR nor

the D measures had a statistically significant relationship with participants' writing scores. These findings confirmed that lexical diversity measures do not usually give a reliable basis for differentiating between writing proficiency levels.

2.4 Omani Educational Policy

The educational system in Oman has been informal throughout its history. Its modern educational system began in 1970 under the wise guidance of H.M. Sultan Qaboos bin Said (Al-Belushi et al., 1999). This section presents the Omani EFL educational policy regarding the school level, higher and university education (HUE), the approaches to Omani EFL/ESP secondary curriculum, and reading issues at the Omani upper high school level.

2.4.1 The School Level

Development in the educational system in Oman can be classified into three stages as follows (Rassekh, 2004):

1. The first stage is characterised by the fast quantitative development of education in Oman from 1969-1970 where there were three schools in Oman, but during 1980-1981, the number of schools increased to 3895. However, these schools did not have appropriate infrastructure, due to the widespread and quick development of educational services during the 1970s. It was impossible to construct all of the required buildings thoroughly.

2. In the second stage, which began in the early 1980s, the Ministry of Education introduced efforts to improve the education quality; all educational systems were reviewed with the help of experts, including teaching materials and methods, teacher education, and curricula.
3. The third stage was from 1995 to 2003 when a number of reforms were presented to deal with the educational requirements of the future. The requirement that all children go through ten years of basic education to be prepared to face future challenges was established in this era.

During the period from 1980-1995, the school structure was traditional as in many countries: primary education for six years, preparatory education of three years, and secondary education of three years. The concept of basic education for a duration of ten years for all did not yet exist. The pace of quantitative expansion of schools occurred alongside the introduction of qualitative measures. The qualitative measures introduced in this period included constructing adequate buildings equipped for students; eliminating the double shift arrangement, better training of teachers; providing necessary science teaching equipment, and providing adequate textbooks. In addition to these reforms, reforms sought to equalise education between girls and boys (Al-Belushi et al., 1999).

The Department of Curriculum Evaluation was established as a part of the Ministry of Education in 2005 (Omani Ministry of Education, 2012). This department plays a significant role in developing the curriculum based on the learning objectives in Oman, the learners' type, societal, and workplace needs (Directorate General of Curriculum Development, 2011). In addition to that, there is a need to introduce a clear and planned approach to developing and evaluating the curriculum and to avoid

treating it in a vague way. Each year, the curriculum section of each subject proposes the grade that the Department of Curriculum Evaluation will work on.

There can be more than one grade suggested; however, it seems one grade is sufficient, considering the shortage of members in the Curriculum Evaluation Department (Al-Jardani 2011). This department uses different curriculum officers in all subjects. It also uses the supervision departments and teachers to evaluate the books. For instance, if selecting a grade one Arabic language course book, the members of the Arabic language department in the curriculum evaluation must plan the complete process of the assessment, but can use members of the Arabic curriculum section, supervisors of the Arabic language, Arabic teachers in schools, and others if necessary. The process takes nearly a year, including covering document, field notes analysis, and using other instruments, such as observation, interviews and questionnaires. This involves various schools in diverse regions, as well as teachers, students of the grade evaluated, and sometimes parents. This coverage contributed toward helping provide a clear picture of the evaluated course book. An example of an evaluation report was one published in 2011 in the grade eight English. By analysing the book and incorporating discussion with 13 teachers of that grade, the commission drafted a final analysis report on this subject (Al-Jardani, 2012).

2.4.2 Higher Education in Oman

Higher education has been determined as “all forms of tertiary education, whether university or any other type of education concerned with education, training or research accredited by the authorised State as higher education institutions” (Al-Manthri, 2000, 29).

It is based on the International Declaration of the Higher Education Conference that took place in Paris in 1998 under the auspices of UNESCO. Consequently, higher education strives to develop, publish, and preserve local culture, encourage scientific and technological research and maintain community values and ideals of Omani society while spreading knowledge through education, benefiting from scholarships abroad, calling for fraternity and peace, and nurturing future educated generations (Al-Manthri, 2000).

The first higher education institution (HEI) and the premier university in Oman was Sultan Qaboos University, established in 1986 with an enrolment of only a few hundred students. From that time, Oman's system of higher education has developed quickly. Moreover, phenomenal national growth over the past 23 years has raised the enrolment number by tens of thousands, so that the total number of students in Higher Education in Oman was about 80,000 students in 2009 (Al Shmeli, 2009). The development of a private system of higher education began with one college in 1995 and increased to 24 private universities and colleges, with registration in private HEIs at about 33,521 as of March 2009. Around 12,000 Omani students are currently studying abroad. There are five private universities, including the University of Dhofar, Sohar University, the Arab Open University, the German University of Technology in Oman, and the University of Nizwa. There are three newly Oman-based private universities in the planning stages, just like university in the Sharqiyah (Eastern) Region, the University of Buraimi, and Muscat University (Al Shmeli, 2009).

Pendergrass et al. (2001) found that integrating English into engineering, science, and math courses is an effective way to improve the performance of engineering students in oral and written communication. It follows that Omani students' academic performance in engineering programmes hinges on their ability to learn via English. According to Al-Jardani (2012), in many of the professional institutes, one of the key performance indicators is the employability of students. The effectiveness of teaching is translated into skills that the students acquire, and in turn this is reflected in the employability of the students.

The scene that emerged after this survey was that a considerable percentage of students did not understand the classes delivered in English. This presented a major problem, especially in professional colleges where the students need to exhibit their understanding of fundamental technical concepts in the fields. According to Sivaraman et al. (2014), the teachers had a major role to play in making the students understand the technical subjects, and motivating the students to participate in class discussions and providing additional examples that suit the Omani context can make them understand the concepts better. The study revealed that students still lack English language communication skills. It was recommended to introduce innovative schemes by the Ministry of Higher Education and college authorities to encourage the students so that they will accept the challenge to become more proficient in English (Sivaraman et al., 2014).

Al-Jahwari and Al-Humaidi (2015) conducted a study to investigate three most important aspects related to prior knowledge in EFL reading comprehension in Oman: teachers' view of the role of prior knowledge, the instructional strategies they use for activating students' prior knowledge, and the difficulties they face when activating

students' prior knowledge. It was concluded that Omani EFL teachers might be aware of the importance of the role of prior knowledge in reading comprehension, but they have limited awareness of its instructional implications. They relied on the presence of prior knowledge in their students and on their reading competence. Therefore, the low level of the students had an adverse impact on teachers' ability to activate students' prior knowledge. This was justified by the argument that teachers lack training on a variety of techniques for activating students' prior knowledge.

It also appeared that Omani EFL teachers did not get enough training opportunities to develop an adequate understanding of prior knowledge and its implications. Moreover, English language teachers at Omani schools need to have a more complex view of prior knowledge and of how they can use their students' prior knowledge effectively. Another justification for English language teachers at Omani schools was that the Teacher's Book does not equip teachers with enough information or strategies to help them deal with students' prior knowledge to enhance text comprehension. It should also take into consideration the different abilities of teachers, as there are new teachers who have limited experience (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2010).

2.4.3 Approaches to the Omani EFL/ESP Secondary Curriculum

The Sultanate of Oman faces the challenge of preparing its youth for life and work in the new conditions created by the modern global economy. These conditions require a high degree of adaptability and a strong background in math, science, technology, and languages to deal with rapidly-changing technologies and developing international business opportunities. The English language curriculum is designed to

provide students with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that Oman's youth need to succeed in this modernising society (Omani Ministry of Education, 2010).

The English curriculum reflects maturational degrees at each level of studying and students' conceptual development. Thus, there are three stages of the curriculum: the first stage consists of grades one to four, the second stage consists of grades five to seven, and the last stage includes grades eight to twelve (Omani Ministry of Education, 2010).

The English curriculum shows planned and ongoing changes across the social and educational spectrums, which have an undeniable impact on the future of language teaching in Oman. These include changes in educational philosophy; the role of English in society (tourism, business, etc.); students and parents' expectations; and an increased level of student awareness regarding knowledge of the outside world. In grades eight to twelve, the curriculum requires advanced linguistic skills and a broader knowledge of the linguistic systems of English. At this stage, the approach of English as a tool for communication and functional use is balanced with a more analytical mode of learning (Omani Ministry of Education, 2010).

The English curriculum framework supposes that learners should be able to select appropriate reading strategies when reading for different purposes, by previewing and predicting, generating focus questions, reading for specific information (scanning), reading for main ideas (skimming), and guessing the meaning from context. Learners should be able to use strategies to improve reading speed and effectiveness, and make efficient use of dictionaries. The emphasis throughout the curriculum is in purposeful and meaningful teaching and learning, leading to the

acquisition of skills that can be transferred and used by learners with different backgrounds and interests in a variety of situations. Teachers and students are encouraged to see the goals of learning beyond the specific activities, texts, and content they encounter in school. At the same time, it is important for students to develop their language through enjoyable activities. In developing objectives for each skill area, an appropriate conceptual framework is employed to identify outcomes regarding target performance (Omani Ministry of Education, 2010).

The curriculum (with its approach and objectives) for the teaching of English, as well as approaches to teacher training and learner assessment, reflect expectations for higher levels of achievement from the school programme, acknowledgement of learner-centred methodology, less dependence on transmission-oriented modes of teaching, less dependence on textbooks as the primary source of teaching and learning. There is less emphasis on a linguistic ‘product’ as the outcome of every lesson, greater emphasis on the role of English in continuing technological and economic development, and increased promotion of world knowledge. In light of the above considerations, the content domains are used as the basis for developing general objectives for the grade twelve English curriculum. The two different types of objectives are those that address: 1) language learning, 2) those that address sociocultural and attitudinal dimensions of learning. Linguistic objectives are recommended in the domains of vocabulary, grammar, and other linguistic skills, as well as non-linguistic objectives related to culture, learning strategies, attitudes, and motivation (Omani Ministry of Education, 2010).

For Omani students to be competent users of English, the curriculum must address the four main language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. The

curriculum identifies appropriate target levels for each skill and aims to help students gain functional abilities in each area. The emphasis throughout the curriculum is in purposeful and meaningful teaching and learning, leading to the acquisition of skills, which can be transferred and used by learners with different backgrounds and interests in a variety of situations. Teachers and students are encouraged to see the goals of learning beyond the specific activities, texts, and content they encounter in school.

At the same time, students can develop their language through activities that are enjoyable and pleasurable. An integrated, topic and skills-based approach to curriculum has been implemented, as well as a communicative teaching methodology aligned to the context of Omani classrooms (Omani Ministry of Education, 2010).

The English language curriculum *English for Me* (Grade 1-10) and *Engage with English* (Grades 11-12) aim to expose students to a wider range of vocabulary and encourage utilising these words in a variety of contexts. The curriculum intends to develop students' understanding of high-frequency words used in different styles and genres. It also develops reasonable content words related to each topic presented. The content words are selected, presented and practised carefully to suit each level. In some cases, the content words have been recycled in similar topics in later grades, e.g., vocabulary associated with travel, tourism, and media. Opportunities are created to help students make their receptive vocabulary productive through the process of spiralling and recycling (Omani Ministry of Education, 2010).

Students are exposed to word building and 'word-attack' activities, which develop their skills to work out the meaning of unknown vocabulary using clues through context, cohesive devices, and word endings. Within applied linguistics and

foreign/SLA in the last 40 years, considerable discussion has taken place about the role of grammar in language learning. This discussion has revolved around two main points: whether deductive (explicit teaching of rules to be applied to language) or inductive (discovery-based inducement of rules from language) approaches to grammar teaching should be used and what the appropriate form of a grammatical syllabus should be. The professional consensus is that grammar cannot be ignored, and ways must be sought to integrate grammar into the English curriculum in a manner which enhance its' role in facilitating the development of second language proficiency, and which are compatible with a communicative orientation to language teaching (Omani Ministry of Education, 2010). The curriculum aims to give students a firm grounding in the core grammatical features of English since grammar is a major component in the development of receptive and productive skills in reading, writing, listening and speaking. Grammatical competence, however, should not become an end in and of itself. Existing resources for the development of a grammatical syllabus (e.g. Threshold Level) have been consulted, as well as successful international ESL/EFL courses, to develop appropriate grammatical items as a basis for a grammatical component of the curriculum at both basic and post-basic education levels. Care is taken not to overload the curriculum with terms of grammatical items, but to recycle grammatical items to ensure that they are re-introduced throughout the curriculum (Omani Ministry of Education, 2010).

Part of the focus of the educational reform proposals is on education as a means of expanding students' understanding of the world. Cultural awareness is an essential element of this process. Since languages are vehicles for the expression of a culture and its values, the English curriculum includes a cultural dimension. It seeks to

present English as a window to the outside world, while at the same time serving to reinforce the students' own cultural values and traditions. This includes developing awareness of some of the cultural patterns and differences between the Omani culture and other cultures (e.g. differences in food, schooling, sports, domestic life, etc.), as well as differences in communication patterns across cultures (such as awareness of differences in conversational interaction, greetings, small talk, etc.). In developing a cultural component to the curriculum, care is taken to ensure that an Omani/Arab perspective on cultural values is emphasised in the curriculum (Omani Ministry of Education, 2012).

Given the philosophy of the educational reform, the curriculum aims not only to develop and promote students' linguistic knowledge and skills but also to improve their capacity for effective and independent learning (Omani Ministry of Education, 2012). The curriculum supposes that by the end of grade twelve, students should be able to carry out the following:

- Use English in preparation for work or for further studies and as a means of communication with the outside world.
- Have functional skills for reading, writing, listening, and speaking; demonstrate strong moral beliefs, principles, behaviour and pride in their country, the Gulf heritage, and the Arab world.
- Use English as a medium for learning about their own culture and other cultures valuing the diversity of the world's peoples, cultures, and ecosystems.
- Understand and actively promote equity, justice, peace, and the protection of the environment in their community, Oman, and the world.

- Demonstrate an awareness of learning strategies and study skills, such as planning and organisational skills and to apply them for furthering their English learning.
- Use English grammar accurately in a variety of contexts.
- Use English to communicate accurately in a wide range of situations; and use higher order thinking skills, such as analysis and deduction (Omani Ministry of Education, 2010).

Moreover, the curriculum framework expects that learners, after finishing the curriculum, should be able to do the following:

- Co-operate with others in pairs and group work; demonstrate the ability to work independentl.
- Sequence events and processes; compare and contrast information.
- Apply prior knowledge; classify and categorise given information.
- Rank, list, and order given information.
- Monitor and reflect on their own learning .
- Infer meaning from context; and reason deductively and inductively.

In addition to the linguistic objectives, there is also a range of non-linguistic objectives embedded in the curriculum. The learning materials provide opportunities for students to become familiar with self-help strategies, the appropriate use of a range of resources for independent learning, and reflection and monitoring strategies.

Study skills are a key feature of the curriculum that helps students become more self-directed and self-motivated. Basic study skills, such as dictionary skills, library and research skills, paraphrasing, referencing and making an accurate citation

of sources are built into class materials. Students learn general planning, organisational skills, and self-monitoring skills in addition to more specific organisational skills. For example, students are encouraged to plan, draft, check, and re-draft pieces of writing until they are satisfied with a final draft. English is presented as an international language that provides a means of communicating with other users of English, both inside and outside Oman (Omani Ministry of Education, 2010).

2.4.4 Reading Issues at Omani Schools and Universities

Learners of English in Oman often do not have opportunities to speak English outside of the classroom, and for many of them, the coursebook is the only chance to use English (Al-Zedjali, 2009). The issue of EFL reading at the upper school level has been the focus in many countries, including Oman. The difficulty in comprehension when reading in EFL among school students is a vital issue within the Omani context. According to Brashdi (2002), studies of the problem of reading in English as a foreign language at the Language Centre at Sultan Qaboos University provided data that the average readability score for EFL reading the two texts for 50 students of Sultan Qaboos University was about (61.4%) for the story and (26.3%) for the comprehension passage. It is clear that the comprehension passage seems to be harder than the story. Thus, based on previously mentioned data provided by the Sultan Qaboos University of Omani in EFL reading, in general, the central tendency of EFL students' reading performance is often less than satisfactory.

Reading is critical for Omani college students because they are expected to read widely for their projects and pass examinations in English at the foundation level. They are very slow at reading and show a lack of understanding and motivation.

Learners often miss the main ideas because they are focusing on the syntactic features of a text, which prevents them from reading fluently with comprehension. It also slows down the pace in the class, which makes the acquisition of this skill even more important (Rae, 2012).

Skilful readers have linguistic competence, schematic knowledge, and ability to interpret texts (Abu Shihab, 2011). They also have reasons for reading, whether they are instrumental or pleasurable. Instrumental reasons are reading to help achieve a clear aim. Pleasurable reading occurs because one enjoys reading. All of these factors stimulate comprehension. However, Omani learners experience problems in this skill because they read word by word, focus too much on form at the expense of meaning, possess a limited reading vocabulary and are unable to guess meanings from context (Kiranmayi, 2012). Furthermore, they have limited background knowledge. One of the reasons for having problems in reading comprehension is that some Omani students come from remote rural areas, and some do not have cable TV. Other causes for learners' problems could be the result of teachers using bottom-up approaches to reading and intensive reading strategies. Other factors might be that learners have little exposure to reading 'authentic materials' at school and home, or they simply lack the motivation and interest to read. Teachers can also help learners by carefully choosing materials, which are motivating and stimulating, encouraging further reading and providing activities that engage learners fully (Berardo, 2006).

Using top-down approaches - for example, predicting and anticipating the content of the text and deducing the meaning of difficult words - can help learners comprehend texts without a highly developed linguistic competence (Rae, 2012).

Several studies have highlighted reading issues at Omani schools and universities.

Kiranmayi (2012) concluded that application of TBLT has contributed to fostering a positive attitude toward reading in the students. The study conducted an experimental study to discuss an ESL teacher's reflections on the utilisation of traditional methodology for teaching and the advantages of applying the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) Methodology for improving the reading skills of Omani students in the setting of foundation programme. 50 students were selected from Oman and were divided into two sections with 25 students in each section. The duration of the project was two semesters (roughly one year). It was found that TBLT is an effective methodology in stimulating language learning in reading classes, giving the students more power in deciding their roles in-group activities, encouraging students to practice their language within the classroom, and managing meaning for the purpose of language learning. Additionally, this method allows teachers to adapt the textbooks to suit the level of the students.

Moreover, Al-Issa (2006) conducted qualitative research to discuss three foci of the economic, political, and cultural aspects of ELT, with particular attention toward the Sultanate of Oman. These foci are English in Oman, ELT inside the Omani education system, and ELT outside of the Omani education system. The study was based on triangulation data from various official texts and relevant literature. It concluded that Oman has embraced English and placed it at the heart of its educational planning. It also found, however, that teachers graduating from Sultan Qaboos University lack the language and methodological competence. Moreover, it indicated that resources apportioned to foreign language education at present are below satisfactory and hinder communicative language learning and teaching largely.

However, there is a decent number of well-equipped private universities and colleges in Oman at present. Unfortunately, none of these institutes is accredited.

Furthermore, El-Okda (2005) conducted a descriptive study to shed light on EFL student teachers' thoughts about teaching reading. A total of 57 student teachers of English were selected from Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) in the sixth semester of their teacher preparation programme and were interviewed. It was found that student teachers' believe that reading texts in ELT textbooks are only there to contextualise language items and not to practice reading sub-skills. It was also found that student teachers of English believe that reading novels help in learning words and structures. Moreover, the majority of student teachers do not believe that presenting the letters of the alphabet confuses young children. Additionally, student teachers seem to believe that learners need to understand the meaning of all the words in a text. The research found that student teachers of English believe that reading novels are for learning words and structures. Finally, the study result indicated that self-initiated practical arguments for or against each decision are relatively infrequent despite all attempts made to encourage them to write as many practical arguments as possible in each section.

Moreover, Al Barwani and Al-Mekhlafi (2014) conducted a quasi-experimental study to investigate the effect of service learning on EFL student teachers' English language proficiency in a pre-service teacher education programme at Sultan Qaboos University. A total of 61 student teachers were selected from the College of Education at Sultan Qaboos University and were divided into experimental and control groups. The findings show that the student teachers in the experimental group outperform those in the contrast group in all language components tested by the

TOEFL and the oral examination. It was also found that comparison of the experimental group results in both tests between pre and post-intervention reveals a significant improvement that can be attributed to the service learning experience. Al the study concluded that there is an overall improvement in the language performance of the student teachers as a result of the service learning intervention.

Al-Jahwari and Al-Humaidi (2015) conducted a descriptive study to investigate three most important aspects related to prior knowledge in EFL reading comprehension in Oman: teachers' view of the role of prior knowledge, the instructional strategies they use for activating students' prior knowledge, and the difficulties they face when activating students' prior knowledge. A total of 217 EFL Omani teachers were selected from sixth and seventh-grade basic education teachers in Batinah North Region for the academic year 2009-2010 and were interviewed using a questionnaire, an observation checklist, and a semi-structured interview. The result of the study showed a strong agreement of the role of prior knowledge in text comprehension, a heavy reliance on a limited number of techniques and a clear attribution of the difficulties to sources such as students' limited linguistic competence and lack of adequate teacher training on schema theory and its instructional techniques. In light of the findings, some implications for EFL teachers, in-service teachers training, and for curriculum development are given.

Al-Issa (2014) conducted a descriptive study to investigate the factors that influence EFL motivation in the Sultanate of Oman from a critical perspective. It triangulates data from semi-structured interviews made with different informants involved in the Omani English language teaching (ELT) system and representing different social, cultural, and academic backgrounds, the Philosophy and Guidelines

for the Omani English Language School Curriculum. The result of this study has their direct and important implications for other similar F/EL planning and policy contexts.

Al-Mahrooqi (2012) conducted an exploratory research design to understand why public school graduates are poor in English since this will reduce investment in foundation programs and produce higher education graduates with a level of proficiency required by the local and international job market. The study sample was 100 tertiary education students were selected from Sultan Qaboos University and interviewed using a qualitative questionnaire. The study concluded that instructors must encourage students to learn English by showing them its international status and its importance for their future education and employment.

Thus, it can be concluded that the previous studies agreed on the fact that most students at Omani schools and universities are confronted with difficulties in EFL reading. Therefore, the Ministry of Education in Oman should analyse the grade twelve reading curriculum and its theoretical grounding alignment to investigate how it prepares students for the appropriate level of academic reading skills required at the university level as well as investigate the alignment of the theoretical grounding of the curriculum. All previous studies did not look into these issues in Oman. However, it is urgently necessary to do so, particularly in Oman EFL grade twelve, as the Sultanate of Oman is a developing country that has highly judged the importance of English as an international language and an achievement tool for various purposes.

2.4.5 Summary

This section described the English language curriculum for government schools in the Sultanate of Oman since 1998. The curriculum for grades one to ten is

called *English for me* and grades eleven to twelve *engage with English*. It is periodically revised to incorporate changes in educational philosophy and government policy. The purpose of this document is to:

- Provide rationale for English language curriculum development in the Sultanate of Oman.
- Outline the aims and objectives of English language curriculum in the basic and post-basic education system.
- Outline the progression and continuity in the development of linguistic and non-linguistic skills and concepts in the English language curriculum from grades one to twelve.
- Act as a framework for subsequent detailed curriculum development for each grade level.
- Provide a background for educators and other policymakers to assist in making decisions about future policies.

The curriculum framework is the basis for the coursebook design. Therefore, it was considered as of value to analyse the reading curriculum by examining its objectives and outcomes to be able to decide whether it prepares students for the university level.

This section has review literature that investigated the issues associated with reading issues at Omani schools and universities. The research concentrates on Omani EFL educational policy regarding the school level, the higher and university education (HUE), the approaches to Omani EFL/ESP secondary curriculum, and reading issues at the Omani upper high school level. The literature pointed out that most of the university students at Omani universities are confronted with difficulties in EFL reading.