

# Omani Student's Awareness and Application of Reading Strategies in the IELTS-Based Reading Exams

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**Abstract**—Students who know the exam format and the reading strategies of the IELTS or IELTS-based reading exams are at an advantage. They can quickly locate answers that are not explicitly stated in complex texts. Consequently, they get good scores, which help students secure a place in higher education. According to the British Council report, Omani students score below Band 5 in IELTS reading exams. Similarly, not many Omani students score high in the IELTS-based reading exams at the branches of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS), Oman. Hence, this study seeks to answer the research questions of whether Omani students studying at level four are aware of the reading exam format and apply general and task-based reading strategies in the IELTS-based reading exams. The study adopted a quantitative research method, and data was collected from students (N=78) studying at level four in the preparatory studies center of UTAS-Ibra. This study is significant because it has implications for students, teachers, and policy-makers. The study findings confirm that students are aware of the exam format and apply general and task-based reading strategies in the IELTS-based reading exams.

**Index Terms**—awareness, IELTS-based reading exam, Omani students, reading comprehension, reading strategies

## I. INTRODUCTION

The IELTS (International English Language Testing System) is a widely used test for education and migration. Researchers have conducted extensive research to establish its validity, recognizing it worldwide for academic placements and migration purposes (Williams et al., 2011). In Oman, like many other countries, a good IELTS score is essential to secure a place in higher education and the job market. In addition, English plays a predominant role in sectors such as tourism and healthcare (Al-Issa, 2020). Therefore, Omani students require assistance to achieve the required band score to secure a place in higher education. Additionally, newly qualified Omani English teachers, who are expected to have reached a band score of 4.5-5.0 by the start of their undergraduate English major program, still require assistance to achieve the desired band 6 (Holi et al., 2020). Nevertheless, it is essential to determine the factors that affect Omani students' performance in IELTS or IELTS-based exams.

Studies reveal that, of the four skills, Omani students face more difficulty in reading skills. According to Wahyono (2019), developing reading skills is crucial for comprehending information conveyed through written materials. It also plays a vital role in the decision-making of one's personal and professional life. However, reading comprehension plays a crucial role in IELTS and IELTS-based reading tests concerning band scores. According to the IELTS Handbook (2007), test-takers must read three passages of 1500-2500 words. In this section, 38-42 questions should be answered in 60 minutes, and the difficulty level of texts and tasks increases throughout the paper. In addition to time, other factors contribute to the difficulty level of reading skills, such as the absence of decoding, fluency, and vocabulary skills. Along these lines, the need for more awareness of reading exam format, general reading strategies, and task-based reading strategies decreases the chances of scoring the required band score in reading exams.

In Oman, the University of Technology and Applied Sciences conducts IELTS-based exams at level 4 in the preparatory studies center. The administration uses the results in decision-making concerning students' admission to a bachelor's degree. Consequently, the percentage of students who score above 75% to get admission to a Bachelor's degree is only some. The critical reason for this is Reading skills. According to the British Council, most Omani students score below band 5 in IELTS exams. Likewise, the level 4 students score less than the required marks in the reading skill. As a result, they score less than 75% and fail to take advantage of the opportunity to study for a Bachelor's degree. This is mainly because most students are from a rural background and have few opportunities to use the English

language in their everyday social context (Chinnathambi et al., 2021, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2023). Only a few research studies have been carried out concerning this in UTAS branches in Oman. Hence, this study aims to fill the research gap. The study results are significant because they affect the stakeholders and policy-makers. This study provides an overview of students' awareness of the general IELTS-based reading format, general reading strategies, and task-based reading strategies.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading and understanding texts are critical academic as well as professional skills. According to Meniado (2016), reading comprehension is one of the most fundamental study skills at higher levels of learning. Ahmadian et al. (2016) pointed out that the reader actively constructs meaning and tests hypotheses based on their background knowledge of the content and language system. Similarly, Ghanizadeh, Pour, and Hosseini (2017) stated that reading comprehension encompasses the ability to read the lines and between the lines. This implies the need to enhance critical thinking skills, crucial in achieving positive performance results in high-stakes tests such as IELTS. According to Fahim et al. (2010), a significant positive relationship exists between critical thinking and reading comprehension. Bachman and Palmer (1996) and Rogers and Harley (1999), as cited by Mui and Quyen (2021), posited that competent and critical reading and thinking strategies need to be sufficiently used in order to be successful or to achieve the best possible score in the test (IELTS). Ghanizadehli et al. (2017) analyzed the impact of critical thinking's two subcomponents using two tools: 1. The reading comprehension part of the 2015 academic IELTS exam. 2. The Watson and Glaser Critical Thinking Assessment, Form A. Based on the study results, they claimed a positive relationship between IELTS reading scores and EFL learners' inference-making and evaluation of an argument. Among the two variables, inference-making is the more important predictor of IELTS reading achievement. Hosseini et al. (2012) explored the relationship between critical thinking, reading comprehension, and reading strategies of English University students in Iran. They inferred from the results of their study that there was a significant positive relationship between readers' critical thinking ability and reading strategy use and that, along with critical thinking ability, cognitive and affective strategies appear to be the best predictors of reading comprehension.

Mui and Quyen's (2021) study using multiple methods (e.g., broad survey questionnaire, interview) revealed a close correlation between reading strategies and the test takers' performance. It concluded that test-taking strategies develop test performance in one way or another. Similar studies conducted by Motallebzadeh (2009), Zare and Othman (2013), and Zare (2013) showed a significant correlation between reading strategies and reading test performance.

A study on the relationship between students' choice of reading strategies and their task-based test performance conducted by Motallebzadeh (2009) showed a significant correlation between participants' IELTS scores and the reading strategies used: 'remember the content of the text' and 'when encountering difficulty'. Marjerison et al. (2020) found that high-scoring participants employed expeditious reading strategies to find information, and more thorough reading strategies to find answers to question tasks. Also, a good grasp of reading question type and question format is beneficial to understanding its contents (Yathip & Chanyoo, 2022) and using the most appropriate strategy. Nosrati (2015) conducted a study on IELTS reading test-taking strategies. His study showed that candidates used 15 strategies classified into three stages: Pre-reading, Reading, and Post-reading. Based on the results, he (Nosrati) posited: "Test-takers used certain strategies differently, depending on the type of task".

The role of metacognitive reading strategies and reading motivation in improving reading comprehension has gained recognition recently. Ahmadian et al. (2016), using the think-aloud procedures, found a significant difference between the high-scoring and low-scoring IELTS candidates using compensation and meta-cognitive strategies. The former used the strategies mentioned above more frequently than the latter. Meniado (2016) claimed that no significant relationship exists between the students' use of metacognitive reading strategies and their reading comprehension performance. He inferred that the respondents moderately use metacognitive reading strategies when reading academic texts. He further implied that moderate use can be ascribed to students' unawareness of metacognitive reading strategies. Should reading strategies be explicitly taught? Familiarity with the steps to go about any academic task type is crucial for achieving better reading comprehension test performance. Fahim et al. (2010) recommended including critical reading strategy training in reading preparatory courses and other EFL reading programs. Teaching reading strategies has helpful effects on the students' reading comprehension (Jamshidi & Moghaddam, 2013; Soleimani et al., 2014; Lofti & Ghafournia, 2017). Test preparation programs should consider dynamic Assessment (DA) (Shobeiry, 2021). This recommendation was based on the pretest-treatment-posttest quasi-experimental research that was conducted within Poehner's (2008) framework for integrating assessment and instruction in promoting learners' abilities and used Mokhtari and Richard's (2002) awareness for reading strategy questionnaire, which was administered at the beginning and the end of the study. The study showed a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups in their metacognitive awareness of reading strategies, and the former outdid the latter in reading comprehension development.

Personality traits play a significant role in reading strategies and reading comprehension classes (Haradasht et al., 2021). Based on their experimental study on the effect of collaborative strategic reading (CRS) and metacognitive reading strategy (MRS) on extrovert and introvert EFL learners' reading comprehension, Haradasht et al. (2021) claimed that introverts with MRS would do better than extrovert with MRS, introvert and extrovert with CRS, and those who were conventionally taught reading comprehension.

According to Zare and Othman (2013), there were significant differences between male and female ESL learners' use of reading strategies. On the other hand, Zare (2013) revealed no significant difference in the use of reading strategies between male and female EFL learners. Despite the differences, both studies found that reading strategies positively correlated with reading comprehension achievement. The two research studies were conducted in the same year and location. However, they generated conflicting results, hence the vagueness in the relationship between language learning strategies and Gender, which entails further studies.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### A. Research Questions

1. Are Level 4 Omani students aware of the format of the IELTS-based reading examination?
2. Do Level 4 Omani students employ general and task-specific reading strategies when tackling IELTS-based reading exams?

The study has formulated six null hypotheses to answer the research questions of whether Level 4 Omani students are aware of the exam format, general reading strategies, and task-based reading strategies in the IELTS-based reading exams.

1. There is no awareness of the IELTS-based reading exam format among level 4 Omani students.
2. There is no effective application of general and task-based reading strategies in the IELTS-based reading exams by Level 4 Omani students.
1. There is no significant difference between male and female opinions regarding awareness of IELTS-based reading exams and the application of general and task-based reading strategies.
2. There is no significant difference between the mean score of the two factors.
3. There is no significant difference between Gender and location.
4. There is no correlation between factors of reading strategies.

#### B. Method

The study adopted a quantitative research method. As this method was suitable to answer the research question, a self-prepared questionnaire was distributed via Moodle to students to collect numerical data.

#### C. Participants

The survey was conducted with students from the General Foundation Program (GFP) at the English Language Centre, University of Technology and Applied Sciences-Ibra in the Sultanate of Oman. A total of 78 Level Four students from the Sharqiyah region participated in the survey. All participants shared similar regional, cultural, and educational backgrounds. The population was found to be normally distributed based on the Shapiro-Wilk normality test.

#### D. Research Instruments

To collect data for the study, a self-prepared questionnaire with close-ended questions was used. The questions were based on classroom experience and aimed to answer the research questions. A random sampling method was applied to collect the data. The questionnaire was validated and proven reliable before it was distributed to the study participants. The collected data was analyzed and interpreted using the Scientific Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

#### E. Terms and Definitions

CS-Sentence Completion; GS-General Reading Strategies; LA-Level of Awareness; MC-Multiple Choice Questions; MH-Match the Headings to the Paragraphs; SA-Short Answer Questions; SC-Summary Completion; TF-True or False or Not Given.

### IV. RESULTS

TABLE 1  
FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF MALE AND FEMALE RESPONDENTS (GENDER)

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Male	55	70.51
	Female	23	29.49
	Total	78	100

TABLE 2  
FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS HAVING DIFFERENT AGE CATEGORY

		Frequency	Percent
	18	11	14.10
	19	31	39.74
	20	32	41.03
	Above 20	4	5.13
	Total	78	100

TABLE 3  
FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS FROM DIFFERENT LOCATIONS

		Frequency	Percent
Location	North Sharqiyah	46	58.97
	South Sharqiyah	32	41.03
	Total	78	100

TABLE 4  
MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION

Factors	Mean	Std. Deviation
CS	7.025641	1.947188
GS	21.397436	4.396988
LA	17.551282	4.189187
MC	7.320513	1.970520
MH	10.923077	2.627375
SA	7.333333	1.806674
SC	14.179487	3.379632
TF	13.974359	3.290973
Total	99.705128	18.958676

TABLE 5  
QUARTILES OF RESILIENCE OF RESPONDENTS

Factor	Percentile 25(Q1)	Median (Q2)	Percentile 75 (Q3)
Resilience	86.25	99	114.75

Based on the score in Table 5, the factors are converted into Low, Moderate, and High levels and are presented in the following tables.

TABLE 6  
FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF LEVEL OF RESPONDENTS

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Low	20	25.64
	Moderate	38	48.72
	High	20	25.64
	Total	78	100.0

According to the Shapiro-Wilk normality test, the population is normally distributed ( $W = 0.9868$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.6028$ )

TABLE 7  
MEAN SCORE ON STATEMENTS ON LEVEL 4 STUDENTS' AWARENESS OF READING STRATEGIES

Statements on Students' Awareness of the L4 Reading Exam	Mean	SD	t value	P value
LA1	3.34	1.23	2.47	< 0.001**
LA2	3.32	1.35	2.09	< 0.001*
LA3	3.61	1.05	5.12	< 0.001**
LA4	3.82	1.11	6.50	< 0.001**
LA5	3.44	1.10	3.60	< 0.001**

According to Table 7, the mean score of all five statements related to students' awareness of the L4 reading exam is above the standard value ( $\mu$ ) of 3. The data in the table shows that the probability ( $p\text{-value}$ ) is less than 0.001. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected at a 1% significance level. The result indicates that students' awareness of the general rule of taking IELTS IELTS-based reading exam is above average, which means students face the exam with more confidence as they are aware of the general rule. The result in the table signposts that students are well prepared before taking the exam. Based on the t value, the Level 4 Reading exam has two reading passages (LA 3), and the Level 4 Reading exam has a total of 25 questions to answer (LA 4); significantly, the awareness level of these two statements is very high which is 5.12 and 6.50 respectively. Overall, the result shows that students are continuously instructed to pay close attention to the format of the reading exam, which is essential to completing the task efficiently and effectively.

TABLE 8  
MEAN SCORES ON STATEMENTS ON L4 STUDENT'S APPLICATION OF READING STRATEGIES

Statements on Reading Strategies	Mean	SD	t value	P value
CS1	3.60	1.06	5.01	< 0.001**
CS2	3.42	1.15	3.23	< 0.001**
GS1	3.61	1.04	5.18	< 0.001**
GS2	3.73	0.96	6.70	< 0.001**
GS3	3.58	1.04	4.84	< 0.001**
GS4	3.32	1.15	2.44	< 0.001**
GS5	3.70	1.03	6.02	< 0.001**
GS6	3.43	1.08	3.53	< 0.001**
MC1	3.69	1.03	5.90	< 0.001**
MC2	3.62	1.11	4.96	< 0.001**
MH1	3.69	1.01	6.05	< 0.001**
MH2	3.66	1.08	5.40	< 0.001**
MH3	3.56	1.13	4.38	< 0.001**
SA1	3.60	1.04	5.07	< 0.001**
SA2	3.73	1.05	6.13	< 0.001**
SC1	3.57	1.13	4.49	< 0.001**
SC2	3.65	1.00	5.75	< 0.001**
SC3	3.51	1.10	4.11	< 0.001**
SC4	3.43	1.05	3.66	< 0.001**
TF1	3.73	1.01	6.35	< 0.001**
TF2	3.58	1.09	4.74	< 0.001**
TF3	3.24	1.09	1.96	0.053
TF4	3.41	1.17	3.07	< 0.001**

Note: \*\* denotes significance at a 1% level

According to Table 8, the mean score of all statements related to general and more specific strategies to be followed during the L4 reading exam is above the mean standard value ( $\mu$ ) of 3. The data in the table shows a probability (p-value) less than 0.001 in most cases. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected at a 1% significance level. However, one result, TF3, shows that the null hypothesis is accepted at a 5% significance level. However, its mean score is above the mean value. Based on the t value, except one, all other values range from high to very high. This connotes that students benefit significantly from applying the reading strategies while answering the L4 reading exam. The scientific result suggests that a high awareness and application level can help students succeed in the L4 reading exam.

TABLE 9  
SIGNIFICANCE OF DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GENDER AND FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO ACHIEVING SUCCESS IN THE L4 READING EXAM

Factors	Gender				t value	P value
	Male		Female			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Sentence Completion	6.74	1.78	7.69	2.18	1.84	0.07
General Reading Strategies	20.70	3.68	23.04	5.51	1.86	0.07
Level of Awareness	17.56	4.23	17.52	4.17	0.04	0.96
Multiple Choice	7.12	1.90	7.78	2.08	1.34	0.18
Match Headings	10.69	2.33	11.47	3.21	1.21	0.22
Short Answer	7.00	1.69	8.13	1.84	2.61	<0.01**
Summary Completion	13.65	3.21	15.43	3.50	2.17	<0.05*
True or False	13.56	3.10	14.95	3.57	1.72	0.08
(Total)	97.05	16.49	106.04	23.02	1.69	0.09

Note: 1. \*\* denotes significance at a 1% level

2. \* denotes significance at a 5% level

From the data given in Table 9, for all factors except two factors (short answer and summary completion), the p-value is more than 1% and 5% level of significance, so the null hypothesis is accepted. This shows that there are no significant differences in the opinions between male and female students. Thus, the factors mentioned in the table help them achieve success in the L4 Reading Exam. However, the p-value is less than 1% and 5% significance level in two cases, so the null hypothesis is rejected. The data shows significant differences between male and female students. Based on the mean score, the female students followed the strategy better than the male students. This difference is because female students are more vigilant in using the strategy to find answers.

TABLE 10  
SIGNIFICANCE OF DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE MEAN OF TWO FACTORS

Two Factors	Mean	SD	t-Value	P-Value
GSAvg	21.39744	4.396988	34.768	<0.001**
CSAvg	7.025641	1.947188		
GSAvg	21.39744	4.396988	8.3504	<0.001**
LAAvg	17.55128	4.189187		
GSAvg	21.39744	4.396988	37.696	<0.001**
MCAvg	7.320513	1.97052		
GSAvg	21.39744	4.396988	29.731	<0.001**
MHAvg	10.92308	2.627375		
GSAvg	21.39744	4.396988	36.118	<0.001**
SAAvg	7.333333	1.806674		
GSAvg	21.39744	4.396988	19.06	<0.001**
SCAvg	14.17949	3.379632		
GSAvg	21.39744	4.396988	21.248	<0.001**
TFAvg	13.97436	3.290973		
CSAvg	7.025641	1.947188	15.43	<0.001**
MHAvg	10.92308	2.627375		
CSAvg	7.025641	1.947188	1.4869	0.14
MCAvg	7.320513	1.97052		
CSAvg	7.025641	1.947188	1.692	0.09
SAAvg	7.333333	1.806674		
CSAvg	7.025641	1.947188	24.94	<0.001**
SCAvg	14.17949	3.379632		
CSAvg	7.025641	1.947188	22.06	<0.001**
TFAvg	13.97436	3.290973		
MHAvg	10.92308	2.627375	16.48	<0.001**
MCAvg	7.320513	1.97052		
MHAvg	10.92308	2.627375	14.36	<0.001**
SAAvg	7.333333	1.806674		
MHAvg	10.92308	2.627375	9.83	<0.001**
SCAvg	14.17949	3.379632		
MHAvg	10.92308	2.627375	10.41	<0.001**
TFAvg	13.97436	3.290973		
SAAvg	7.333333	1.806674	20.84	<0.001**
SCAvg	14.17949	3.379632		
SAAvg	7.333333	1.806674	22.19	<0.001**
TFAvg	13.97436	3.290973		

The Table 10 shows that the mean scores of CSAvg and MCAvg and CSAvg and SAAvg show that the difference between them is statistically insignificant. This is confirmed by the p-value, which is above the significance value of 0.05%. On the other hand, the mean score of all other pairs shows a statistically significant difference; this results in a p-value of 0.01. The mean score of the general strategies (GSAvg) is more significant than all other factors. This indicates that students are aware of and apply the general strategies more often than others. Also, the mean scores of CSAvg, MCAvg, and SAAvg are almost equal. However, the mean scores of MHAvg, SCavg, and TFAvg are greater than CSAvg. This difference in mean score suggests that students are more aware of matching the headings, summary completion, and true or false or not given questions than sentence completion questions.

TABLE 11  
SIGNIFICANCE OF DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TWO GROUPS

Factor	Group	North Sharqia	South Sharqia	F Value	P Value
LA	Gender	16.59	18.91	0.0000	0.99
	Location	(4.18)	(3.99)	3.2087	0.07
	Gender*Location	17.42 (4.43)	17.66 (4.00)	0.9741	0.32
GS	Gender	20.46	21.04	5.0631	0.02
	Location	(3.75)	(3.63)	2.0364	0.15
	Gender*Location	21.71 (5.59)	25.11 (4.98)	1.7190	0.19
CS	Gender	6.84	6.60	4.0337	0.48
	Location	(1.83)	(1.75)	0.0976	0.75
	Gender*Location	7.28 (2.39)	8.33 (1.73)	1.7491	0.19
MC	Gender	6.93	7.39	1.8778	0.17
	Location	(2.12)	(1.55)	1.3780	0.24
	Gender*Location	7.50 (2.44)	8.22 (1.39)	0.0724	0.78
MH	Gender	10.25	11.30	1.6713	0.20
	Location	(2.19)	(2.42)	4.9701	0.02
	Gender*Location	10.71 (3.47)	12.66 (2.50)	0.4776	0.49
SA	Gender	6.96	7.04	6.8084	0.01
	Location	(1.53)	(1.94)	0.4011	0.52
	Gender*Location	7.85 (1.74)	8.55 (2.00)	0.4910	0.48
SC	Gender	13.53	13.82	4.6902	0.03
	Location	(3.27)	(3.20)	0.3893	0.53
	Gender*Location	15.07 (3.47)	16.00 (3.67)	0.1405	0.70
TF	Gender	13.59	13.52	2.9332	0.09
	Location	(3.43)	(2.66)	0.0577	0.81
	Gender*Location	14.64 (4.16)	15.44 (2.55)	0.2748	0.60

Table 11 shows that the p-value of LA, CS, MC, and TF regarding Gender, location, and interaction between Gender and location is above 5% significance, which results in accepting the null hypothesis. However, a significant difference is seen in Gender for factors GS, SA, and SC. In these cases, the p-value is less than 0.01% and has a 0.05% significance level. In the case of MH, the p-value of location is less than 0.05% significance. Looking at GS, SA, and SC, male and female students of North Sharqiyah and South Sharqiyah differ in their opinions. The p-value confirms that female students understand and execute these strategies more significantly than male students. On the other hand, location and interaction between Gender and location do not show any differences in their opinions since the confidence interval is above 5%.

TABLE 12  
CORRELATION BETWEEN FACTORS OF READING STRATEGIES

Factors of Reading Strategies	CS	GS	LA	MC	MH	SA	SC	TF
Sentence Completion (CS)	1.000	0.57**	0.32*	0.60**	0.55**	0.63**	0.66**	0.53**
General Reading Strategies	0.57**	1.000	0.55**	0.71**	0.71**	0.67**	0.65**	0.71**
Level of Awareness	0.32*	0.55**	1.000	0.56**	0.50**	0.32*	0.45**	0.48**
Multiple Choice	0.60**	0.71**	0.56**	1.000	0.68**	0.60**	0.70**	0.72**
Match Headings	0.55**	0.71**	0.50**	0.68**	1.000	0.55**	0.55**	0.63**
Short Answer	0.63**	0.67**	0.32*	0.60**	0.55**	1.000	0.51**	0.59**
Summary Completion	0.66**	0.65**	0.45**	0.70**	0.55**	0.51**	1.000	0.69**
True or False	0.53**	0.71**	0.48**	0.72**	0.63**	0.59**	0.69**	1.000

Note: \*\* denotes significance at a 1% level

As shown in Table 12, there are three types of correlation between the factors. The table shows a strong positive correlation (values above 0.7), moderate positive correlation (values from 0.5 to 0.69), and low positive correlation (values from 0.49 to 0.3). In addition, the correlation is statistically significant. This result reveals that the low positive correlated factors need more attention.

V. DISCUSSION

The study is significant because the results reveal the awareness level of seventy-eight students studying at Level Four concerning the IELTS-based reading exam format and the application of general reading strategies and task-based reading strategies while taking the test. The study findings show that students are aware of and employ specific strategies to help them deal with reading comprehension difficulties. The general reading strategies and task-based reading strategies stated in this study are consistent with various other studies (e.g., Ahmadian, Poulaki & Farahani, 2016; Wahyono, 2019). The study results also suggest that students highly benefit from the application of reading strategies and do better in reading exams. This confirms Mokhtari and Richard's (2002) study findings that students who are aware of reading strategies can perform better than others. However, the test of 'significance of the difference between gender and factors contributing to achieving success in Level four reading exam' shows a significant difference between male and female students. Female students apply the reading strategies more than male students and perform better in exams. This confirms the study results of Zare and Othman (2013) that there were significant differences between male and female ESL learners' use of reading strategies. Overall, the study shows that Omani students are aware of the exam format, general reading strategies, and task-based reading strategies. However, the mean score of the 'sentence completion question' is low compared to the mean scores of other factors. Hence, it is recommended to give more opportunities for students to apply the strategies related to this task in classroom practices.

While this study successfully achieved its goals, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The research was conducted with a sample size of only 78 students, which means that the findings cannot be generalized to all Omani students who take the IELTS-based reading test. Therefore, it is possible that these results may not accurately reflect the experiences of other Omani students in similar situations. Another limitation of the study is the methodology. The study adopted a quantitative research method only. Qualitative or mixed methods should be used to check the validity of the results. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct similar studies in other higher education institutes to derive a valid conclusion that can be generalized.

## VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study aimed to investigate whether Omani students studying at level four are aware of the IELTS-based reading exam format and apply the general and task-based reading strategies in the IELTS-based reading exams. Based on the study findings, Omani students studying at level four in the UTAS-Ibra are aware of the format of the IELTS-based reading exam, and they highly benefit from applying the general and task-based reading strategies while taking the exam. Hence, the practice of creating awareness among students regarding the exam format and reading strategies should be sustained. It is recommended that similar studies be conducted in other higher educational institutions to make policy-related decisions.

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