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EFL Low-Achieving Learners and Effectiveness of Remedial Instruction

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Abstract

Many institutes conduct extra English classes to allow weaker students to improve their English proficiency and cope with institutions' language demands. The study, therefore, sought to discover English as a Foreign Language (EFL) low-achieving learners' perceptions and motivation toward the English remedial program. The study also investigated the gender difference among the participants regarding the remedial classes. Forty-five Omani elementary-level students were selected as the population of this study. To collect the data, a questionnaire adapted from Salami (2019) was used along with the interview sessions using six open-ended questions. The study's results revealed that Omani students were strongly motivated to enroll in English remedial classes. Moreover, they had positive perceptions toward English remedial courses. The findings also revealed that Omani female students were slightly more interested in English remedial courses. Therefore, the study will significantly motivate teachers and institutions to focus on providing English remedial classes for their low-achieving students.

Keywords: *EFL Low-Achievers, Perceptions, Motivation, Remedial Classes, Oman*

Introduction

English has a high status in Oman compared with other countries in the Middle East (Al-Jarrah & Al-Ahmad, 2013; Naghdipour, 2021). English is the primary channel for various communicative and educational purposes in Oman. This aligns with the steps taken toward developing policies to modernize the country and improve the residents' social, professional, and economic status (Al-Issa, 2014; Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018).

English Language Teaching (ELT) was introduced to Oman in 1970, followed by global recognition, and has gained more attention in Oman. This urged the government to provide a situation to implement ELT better needs in Oman to cover broader challenges and demands for the future in both local and global markets. This led to better arrangements of ELT conferences at national and international levels, conduction of webinars, seminars, and workshops. In

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addition, many academicians worldwide were invited to evaluate the existing materials, design, and implement news to move forward on this national plan. In the mid-1980s, experts visited different areas in Oman to do a need analysis. This led to a policy that functioned as a guide for syllabus designers in Oman to cope with the needs of ELT at the national level (Al-Issa, 2020). Like the countries located near Oman, such as Qatar (Mitchell & Pessoa, 2019) and Saudi Arabia (Gaffas, 2019), English is the accepted language to be used as the medium of instruction in Oman. Some universities and colleges have affiliated with plenty of universities in North America, Europe, and Australia, where students are supposed to achieve high ability in essential literacy and English knowledge to advance their studies (Naghdi-pour, 2021).

Al-Jardani (2011) stated that English in Oman is considered a remarkable foreign language in governmental and private's environments, applicable more to private organizations due to their connectivity with the global context. This is why Omani learning society should focus on language learning more often. So, English should be taught at a level that meets society's expectations and stakeholders such as parents. For better preparation of learners to work in industries such as business, media, and education with good language proficiency, English is being taught in governmental schools at grade one. In contrast, it has been taught in nursery schools in the private sector. Later on, English has become the language of teaching in higher education environments in Oman (Al-Busaidi, 1995; Al-Issa, 2005). For Al-Issa (2002), English is seen as the primary, effective, and practical tool for innovations in education. To this end, political and economic efforts were made to improve English language instruction in Oman. Learning English can facilitate the Omanisation procedure, which targets the replacement of expats with qualified Omanis (Al-Issa, 2002); it helps job seekers in finding White-collar jobs (Al-Busaidi, 1995; Al-Issa, 2002), it is the focused language of continued development which assists with extending the communication with international communities too (Nunan et al., 1987). Al-Jardani (2011) stated that the government had recognized the need for English competencies to be engaged in the global economy. English is the common language of international business and trade; it also plays a vital role in some fields of study, such as banking and aviation (Al-Issa, 2005).

In Oman, a considerable number of students pass high school and move toward the higher education system every year. But the problem is that, after graduating from their secondary level education, many candidates cannot meet the requirements of colleges, especially in English and Mathematics (Al'Adawi, 2020). These students will spend one academic year studying such courses to prepare for college requirements (Samaranayake et al., 2022); however, many candidates struggle to properly use English and mathematics. Huang (2010) stated that university students have problems getting the success rate of moving to other levels by meeting the college requirements; simultaneously, they understand the importance of achieving acceptable language competencies to fulfill the job requirements. However, these students believed they could not find the right strategies to improve their language knowledge. Problems such as time limitations in classes and a high number of students are the obstacles to achieving the goal.

Meanwhile, considering the textbooks, some are beyond the understanding level of such low-achievers. Under these conditions, low-achievers cannot understand the materials and end up their attempts in the learning process. This is the time to provide necessary and practical

additional support called remedial instructions for such students (Ben Khalifa et al., 2023; Sheu et al., 2007; Yu, 2009).

Literature Review

Remedial Education

Huang (2010) states that remedial education intends to academically assist the candidates behind their peers. These instructions are inseparable parts of the training in some countries, such as the USA, Canada, and Japan (Zhang et al., 2008). At the beginning of higher education, some of the students face difficulty in comprehending the lectures presented by the teachers (Attewell et al., 2006), so remedial classes will assist them in acquiring the necessary skills to achieve this goal (Weissman et al., 1997, cited in Zhai & Skerl, 2001).

Extra teaching given outside the usual teaching hours for students, known as remedial instruction, is usually aimed at students who are generally weaker in understanding the lesson taught in class (Cashdan et al., 1971; Melton, 2008; Panlilio, 2012). Remedial instruction takes place to help students improve their learning from their regular classes. According to Tseng (2008), remedial instruction is a spiral assessment-teaching-reassessment process. It is designed to help learners who find it difficult to understand what is being taught by the educator in a usual classroom setting. To Hunag (2010), remedial instruction is considered clinical teaching. Tseng (2008) considers remedial instruction a cycle of assessment, giving instruction, and re-assess. The design of remedial classes should be developed after the teacher diagnoses students' needs. In the next step, the teachers offer the instruction followed by some evaluation during and after the remedies to measure the practicality of the instructions and materials (Huang, 2010).

Selvarajan (2022) suggested that tutoring extra classes is one of the best acceptable methods for low-achieving learners. Huang (2010) mentioned that the ultimate objective of having additional classes is to guide weaker students to be stronger in a subject, which should make them meet the minimum academic score required to pass that subject. Santhi (2011) stated that usually, students who end up needing extra remedial lessons are the ones who are weaker in learning English during the early hours of the day. Remedial classes do not teach new information to students, but they focus on revising what has been taught in class previously.

Remedial classes aim to bridge the gap between what students know and what they are supposed to know. The remedial class provides extra support to learners who are weaker and unable to catch up in lessons compared to the rest of their classmates in certain subjects. Hence, these students try their best to learn according to their abilities and later return to the level of their original classes. Education can be reinforced by giving extra chances to study and further strengthening education in remedial classes (Schwartz, 2012).

Remedial classes can have different forms of academic conveyance, like individualized education (Cooledge & Wurster, 1985; Wasik & Slavin, 1993; Wilks & Clarke, 1988), supporting learners with additional academic sessions, which is known as double-dosing, and remedial classes offered during students' free time or holidays or after school hours (Cooper et al., 2000). Based on Grubb's (2001) definition, remediation is a class, task, or activity considered to meet the needs of students who mainly do not have the required skills, experience, or orientation to carry out at a level that the institutions or teachers realize as regular for those learners.

Balfanz et al. (2002) stated that many research studies approved that assisting students academically somewhere after normal class time will help them achieve success. These supports, in the beginning, targeted the academically at-risk students to perform better in their studies and to help them to follow their peers smoothly. Tutoring can be considered one of those remedies for students. Students are diagnosed with weaknesses in these situations based on their prior history and testing (Ben Khalifa et al., 2023).

Empirical Studies regarding Remedial Education

Zhai and Skerl (2001) conducted a study to measure the impact of remedial instruction on students' performance. These students could not achieve the required placement test level, so they were in remedial classes. The study results revealed that such training prepared the candidates for regular English classes, and the students succeeded academically. Aragon (2004) investigated the effect of remedial training on students' writing performances. The results showed that the learners achieved higher cumulative and English grades than those not participating in this training. Sheu et al. (2007) investigated the effect of remedial classes on first-year students with lower proficiency levels. The treatment was given for eight weeks focusing on pronunciation, grammar, and sentence structure. The results showed better performance in the experimental group than their counterparts in the control group. The experimental group participants reported improvements in their essential English skills and showed a positive attitude toward remedial classes too. According to Selamat et al. (2012), remedial activities help increase the status and image of the learning institution by providing a positive learning environment for students and helping them to excel in their studies. This leads to higher motivation which deems necessary for academic success. Hayikaleng et al. (2016) stated that motivation is an essential factor that makes learners successful in learning English. Motivation can also be defined as learners' direction to behavior or what makes them want to repeat a behavior (Alizadeh, 2016).

Ubat (2020) investigated the impact of extra remedial instruction for English on students' motivation. This study was conducted to identify the factors that motivate students to take English remedial classes. The results showed that English remedial classes increase students' motivation. This proves that students' motivation to learn increases by taking extra English classes, which indicates that teachers must have employed unique ways to conduct the classes. Salami (2019) stated that most students who attended extra classes after school hours to learn English seemed more motivated and confident in speaking English. As Spolsky (1989) found, there are some distinctive differences in both genders in speech: verbal abilities, self-confidence, usage of vocabulary, and so on. Salami (2019) studied EFL learners and concluded that female students who attended the extra English classes spoke English more fluently than males. Other students became even more dedicated to learning English as they have seen improvement in their English results. Wardhaugh and Fuller (2021) found that female students had a higher motivation than male students compared to most classes. In addition, the percentage of motivation between both genders showed a significant difference. Females were more motivated to learn English, especially after following up with remedial instruction for English lessons than males. Tatarintseva (2002) found that female students are more motivated to learn English than male students after attending remedial classes. The findings also showed that the motivation level of students in English remedial classes is different, as some argued

that remedial instruction did not improve their English skills. Still, instead, they considered the remedial instruction boring and not fun.

Some other studies focused on the perception of students toward English remedial classes. Aldaihani et al. (2020) conducted a study to determine the perceptions of 155 Kuwaiti EFL learners on the efficiency of the English remedial course 099 at the College of Technology. The data analysis showed the participants' positive perceptions towards the remedial class; most benefited from this course, and their language skills improved. A study by Armita (2019) investigated the impact of English remedial courses on students' perceptions. This study aimed to find out students' perceptions of an English club, which is an extracurricular activity. The result showed that students positively perceive the English club in practicing speaking. All students who participated agreed that the English club helped them practice speaking English. Yulindasari and Kusriandi (2018) looked into students' perception of an English club as an extracurricular activity to practice speaking. The study found that students had a positive response to it. They mentioned that the English club brought them closer while improving their speaking ability, building confidence, and improving motivation. This proves that the English club is another alternative to a language learning program that aims to enhance students' confidence and communication skills. Rahma (2021) investigated students' perceptions of English remedial classes. Students were in extra classes to prepare for their national examination (UN) in English. The findings revealed that extra classes for English after school helped improve their English skills and scores. In addition, the researcher found positive effects for English remedial classes because students were enthusiastic about learning and understanding English.

Since the number of universities has increased, this indirectly decreases the demand for high school graduates to perform exceptionally well in their academic exams. Hence, some students find it hard to cope with university assignments and understand lectures as their theoretical knowledge is not up to par (Attewell et al., 2006). Following this, remedial instruction is given to help improve these students' performance and comprehension. These students would not have ordinarily excelled academically as they should have without enrolling in such classes. This is to achieve the essential skills to complete college-level courses and academic programs (Weissman et al., 1997, as cited in Zhai & Skerl, 2001). Prinsloo (2008) stated that all students have different abilities to acquire knowledge; some are slower than others. Therefore, one solution is to give extra English classes for students to develop more knowledge and understanding of the English language.

In addition, various studies focusing on the effectiveness of remedial education found different results. Shields and O'Dwyer (2017) stated that remedial education has a negative effect on students with the Bachelor's degree, while Bettinger and Long (2009) approved the positive effect of Bachelor's degree attainment. Meanwhile, Martorell and McFarlin (2011) stated that remedial classes don't have either a positive or negative impact.

Based on the rationale given above, this study aimed to discover students' perceptions and motivation toward English remedial classes among Omani students. This study has a gap, where previous research has not discussed many students' perspectives and motivations towards English remedial classes among EFL learners. This study is set to investigate the motivation and perception of EFL low-achieving learners toward English remedial classes. The

answers to the following research questions eventually determine whether English remedial programs should be encouraged or avoided:

RQ1: To what extent are Omani low-achieving students motivated by English remedial classes?

RQ2: What is the statistically significant difference between Omani male and female low-achieving students' motivation levels for the English remedial classes?

RQ3: How do the Omani low-achieving students perceive English remedial classes?

Method

Participants

A total of 45 Omani elementary EFL students (20 males and 25 females) formed the population of the study through convenient sampling. Their ages ranged between 18 and 19 years; they were all native Arabic speakers. They were studying English, Mathematics, and IT at the Foundation Program. For the interview section, 15 students (8 females and 7 males) participated in the sessions voluntarily.

Instruments

Motivation Questionnaire

The Motivation Questionnaire used in this study was adapted from Salami (2019) and included 30 questions on a five-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Neutral (3), Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1). Students were asked to choose the best option to show their reactions to the statements. To use the questionnaire confidently, the reliability was piloted beforehand using 30 items and 45 Omani participants. The Cronbach Alpha reliability revealed 0.91 showing an acceptable reliability index according to the Guilford rule of thumb. Two Ph.D. holders also validated the questions in Applied Linguistics.

Interview

There were six questions adapted from Koch et al. (2012) to measure the learner perceptions toward remedial classes. The required data were collected in interview sessions and included six open questions. To ensure the validity of the questions, as mentioned above, two Ph.D. holders of Applied Linguistics were engaged accordingly.

Procedure

Based on some criteria which each institution introduces, the teacher of the class is responsible for selecting the low-achievers accordingly. In the present study, the students were selected based on their class performance and results from both formative and summative assessments. The selected students were placed into different remedial classes to practice similar learning materials more frequently. The number of students in each class was 15. A timetable of English remedial classes was given for the period of six weeks. All students were informed of the importance of English remedial classes to motivate low-achieving students to attend the classes, highlight the program's reputation, and develop their performance. In the English remedial program, low-achieving students studied four English skills: listening, reading, writing, and grammar. The classes were held for 4 hours daily. Nine English trainees were included in the program to teach students the four skills, and they were taught only 1-2 skills

only. They used the same materials explained in the students` regular classes. Multiple activities and direct feedback were provided for all the students over six weeks. After the short training period, the final step was to administer the motivation questionnaire and interviews to measure students' perceptions through Google Forms. Data were collected and analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The researcher obtained the department's approval to conduct the study. In addition, the participants were instructed to read the instructions carefully at the beginning of the questionnaire and interview. As it was rightly stated, their participation was voluntary, and no second or third party exerted any force or pressure on them. Only the researcher had access to the information they supplied, which was kept private before and after the study.

Results

This section presents the detailed results of the study. Before analyzing the data collected, the instrument's reliability for Motivation Questionnaire was computed. Table 1 shows the reliability result of the instrument, which was checked with 30 items.

Table 1

The Result of the Reliability Analysis for the Motivation Questionnaire

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.91	30

As Table 1 shows, the Cronbach Alpha reliability of the questionnaire was found to be .91, which shows a high-reliability index. The first research question attempted to answer the extent to which Omani low-achieving students were motivated for English remedial classes. Table 2 indicates the scores of the 45 learners as to their motivation.

Table 2

The Overall Descriptive Statistics of the Motivation Questionnaire

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total	45	81.00	120.00	101.288	12.061
Valid N (listwise)	45				

Table 2 depicts the descriptive statistics of the whole questionnaire. The mean and standard deviation of the questionnaire in total were 101.28 and 12.06, respectively.

Table 3

The Result of the Students' Motivation Questionnaire in Remedial Classes

No.	N	Descriptive Statistics			Mean	Status
		Min	Max			
1	45	2	4	3.56	High	
2	45	2	4	3.73	High	
3	45	2	4	3.76	High	
4	45	2	4	3.58	High	
5	45	2	4	3.76	High	
6	45	1	4	3.71	High	
7	45	1	4	3.42	High	
8	45	3	4	3.60	High	
9	45	2	4	3.53	High	

10	45	3	4	3.44	High
11	45	2	4	3.38	High
12	45	2	4	3.33	High
13	45	2	4	3.78	High
14	45	1	4	2.89	High
15	45	1	4	3.36	High
16	45	2	4	3.53	High
17	45	2	4	3.62	High
18	45	3	4	3.71	High
19	45	2	4	3.67	High
20	45	3	4	3.56	High
21	45	3	4	3.53	High
22	45	3	4	3.47	High
23	45	2	4	3.22	High
24	45	2	4	3.76	High
25	45	2	4	3.69	High
26	45	1	4	2.80	High
27	45	1	4	2.58	Average
28	45	1	4	2.56	Average
29	45	1	4	2.40	Average
30	45	1	4	2.38	Average
Valid N (listwise)	45				

The scores ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Scores up to 1.3 show low motivation, from 1.4 to 2.6 show average motivation, and from 2.7 to 3 show high motivation. Based on Table 3, items 1 to 26 show high motivation for the participants, and items 27 to 30 show average motivation. Hence, learners were motivated to receive training and feedback through remedial classes. The second research question investigated whether there was any statistically significant difference between Omani male and female low-achieving students in their motivation and perception in English remedial classes. To run the appropriate test for the gender difference, the researcher had to meet the assumption of a normal distribution of data. Table 4 shows the normality test for the two sets of scores.

Table 4

The Result of the Normality Test for the Comparison of Males and Females

	Sex	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a		
		Statistic	df	Sig.
Total	Male	.242	20	.003
	Female	.182	25	.032

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality results shows that the data were not normally distributed for the two sets of scores ($P < .05$). Therefore, the Mann-Whitney U test should be used for mean comparison. The descriptive statistics of the two groups are shown in Table 5.

Table 5*The Descriptive Statistics for the Motivation Level of Males and Females*

	Sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Total	Male	20	96.500	10.961	2.451
	Female	25	105.120	11.712	2.342

The mean and standard deviation of the male and female groups are 96.50, 10.96, 105.12, and 11.71, respectively. Table 6 shows the result of the inferential test.

Table 6*The Result of the Mann-Whitney U Test for the Comparison of Males and Females*

	Total
Mann-Whitney U	143.000
Wilcoxon W	353.000
Z	-2.461
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.014

Based on Table 6, Omani female learners were significantly better than male participants in terms of motivation level, $U = 143$, $P < .05$. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected, meaning that there was a statistically significant difference between Omani male and female EFL learners' motivation level for the English remedial classes.

The third research question was an attempt to explore the Omani low-achieving students' perceptions towards English remedial classes. To answer this research question, 15 students (8 females and 7 males) were interviewed based on their interests and willingness. After analyzing the collected data, ten significant themes emerged as the participants' perceptions toward the use and usefulness of English remedial classes. All themes showed learners' positive perceptions of this extra instruction. The first and second themes (an excellent experience and more practice) were the two first and most cited themes. Table 7 shows the extracted themes and their frequency as well as the state of the theme.

Table 7*Results of the Thematic Analysis to Respond to the Third Research Question*

No	Theme definition	State of the Theme	Frequency
1	An excellent experience	Positive	15
2	More practice	Positive	13
3	Better understanding	Positive	12
4	Better performance	Positive	10
5	Getting good results	Positive	9
6	More time for learning	Positive	7
7	More chance to speak	Positive	7
8	More feedback	Positive	6
9	A few number of students	Positive	5
10	More self-confidence	Positive	3

The answers to the interview questions indicated that all participants were in favor of English remedial classes. Table 7 clearly shows that all the interviewees' attitudes toward these classes were positive. They stated that these classes were excellent, interesting, and very useful. Most students stated that the small number of students in these classes and the time allocated (more time for learning) indicated they had more chances to practice the lessons. During these classes, the students had better performance and got good results. The interviewees stated that they could speak with more self-confidence since they got more feedback.

Discussion

The researcher used a questionnaire and interview sessions to answer the posited research questions to explore the Omani low-achieving students' perceptions and motivation toward English remedial classes. Regarding motivation, results showed high motivation toward using English remedial classes. Only four items (27, 28, 29, and 30) gained learners' average motivation. The results show that learners were eager to participate in these classes to improve their speaking skills. They knew that these classes supported them in increasing their learning achievement. Since they provided materials following the materials taught during their university hours, learners had more time and chance to practice with the materials.

The findings of this study support those reported by Ubat (2020). The results showed that extra English classes increased students' motivation to learn English. The findings were in line with a study by Salami (2019). Salami indicated that learners had more motivation and became even more confident in speaking English after taking the remedial instructions. Yolak et al. (2019) found that remedial classes had academic, psychological, social, career development, and economic effects on learners' lives. The results of a study conducted by Boatman and Long (2018) showed that remedial courses positively affect students with lower levels of academic preparation. The findings suggest that remedial classes can help or hinder learners differently based on their incoming levels of academic preparedness. The results also align with the findings of Sheu et al. (2007) in which students expressed improvements in their motivational level after eight weeks of remedial education. However, the results do not agree with the research carried out by Al Othman and Shuqair (2013), who noticed that remedial instruction was counterproductive as learners were demotivated. A few students indicated significant improvement in their exam results after participating in the remedial courses. This low achievement, added to low motivation levels, makes some feel that remedial classes should be eliminated. Huang (2010) also stated that the candidates who participated in his study based on providing remedial classes for low-achievers seemed to be passive about language learning, and their responses toward the motivational part of remedial education were evasive. In addition, the study by Chen et al. (2013) showed similar results as those students who were engaged in remedial classes could not show significant improvements. It seemed like wasting of time in providing and preparing such courses.

The results of the second research question revealed that Omani female learners were significantly more motivated than male learners. Female learners generally had more positive attitudes toward L2 learning. The findings of this study were in agreement with the findings of a study conducted by Wardhaugh and Fuller (2021). The results were consistent with those reported by Tatarintseva (2002), who showed that female students gained higher scores than males while learning their second language. Considering the third research question, all the

low-achieving students positively perceived English remedial classes. The findings of this research support those reported by Obeidat (2020). He indicated that participants expected the course could improve their communication skills and language's grammatical and structural aspects. In addition, the results of the current study are supported by Huang (2010), who stated that 79.3 % of his participants agreed that remedial courses helped them to improve their English skills.

Conclusion

As stated, the current study investigated Omani low-achieving students' perceptions and motivation toward English remedial classes. This study attempted to draw teachers' attention to the low-achieving learners' need for screening and follow-up instructions. It should be emphasized that students felt more at ease and motivated when participating in remedial classes than in ordinary classrooms. These students found not feel safe in regular classrooms. Lack of self-efficacy and the fact that other students were more capable of learning terrified them. In remedial classes, low-achieving learners seek a supportive teacher and a comfort zone shared with other pupils in a similar problematic situation. In addition, learners' main objective of passing exams formed the content and pace of the remedial lessons. Accordingly, the responses made by the participants to the questionnaire and the interview questions indicated that they had a positive attitude toward the provided activities in remedial classes. It can be due to students' ambition to improve their language skills and insufficient practice of such activities at school. Certain limitations in the current study might limit how far the results can be applied. The present study was conducted on Omani elementary EFL learners, which decreases generalizability, so it can be suggested that more studies could be developed to measure the role of remedial classes on other proficiency-level students. It can be further advised that other researchers in various institutions implement similar studies to gain a comprehensive map of remedial classes all over Oman.

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Ethics Declarations

Competing Interests

No, there are no conflicting interests.

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