

**Evaluating EFL students' reading comprehension skills
with reference to the Department of English at Zawia
University, Libya**

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Declaration

This submission is my own work and contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of the University or other institute of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text, in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Signature_____

Date_____

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Abstract

This study investigated the main challenges that faced Libyan students in reading comprehension within the English language programme at Zawia University, Libya, through the perceptions of lecturers and students at the Department of English. This study also evaluated the current teaching practices of reading comprehension at the Department of English at Zawia University. It also identified the key causal factors that contributed to the students' inadequate reading comprehension performance.

Reading comprehension as a research topic has been extensively researched and it is still of current interest. The key literature in this study is polarised around two streams. The first stream presents different aspects of reading: definitions, importance, complexity, purposes of reading, types of reading and approaches to reading. The second stream is related to various issues about the three main components of the reading comprehension module: learners, teachers and reading material.

The philosophical paradigm underpinning this study is predominantly positivist; thus, eight hundred questionnaires were distributed to reach as many students as possible in order to find out the answer to an inquiry through numerical evidence. After distributing the questionnaires, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gauge the lecturers' viewpoints about the teaching and learning of reading comprehension. Four hundred and forty nine students filled up the questionnaires, which were analysed using SPSS while seven lecturers participated in the interviews that were analysed through content analysis.

Findings revealed that students at the Department of English at Zawia University lack the reading skills and the culture of reading and face difficulties in English reading comprehension. Many lecturers are not aware of reading skills and they teach reading comprehension in a traditional way with over-emphasis on decoding and accuracy. The insufficient learning environment at the department has a negative impact on the process of learning and teaching because of the lack of facilities and library resources, overcrowded classes, and limited time allocated to reading classes.

This study has added a theoretical contribution through expanding the literature, which brings about academic benefits for future researchers in education in the Arab world, particularly in Libya. Future researchers can use the conceptual model for reading comprehension that is designed by the researcher to investigate what factors influence this process.

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List of Abbreviations

EFL	English as a foreign language
L1	First language (mother tongue)
L2	Second language (target language)
RR	Repeated reading
DIY	Do it yourself
MM	Mixed methods
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Science
IT	International technology
GDP	Gross domestic product
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

Chapter One:

Introduction

1. Introduction

This chapter presents the aim of the study and formulates the problem to be addressed and the rationale for undertaking this study. It also provides the background of the study and highlights the key literature. In addition, it sets the research questions and research objectives. The final section outlines the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Aim of the study

This study investigates the main challenges that face Libyan students in reading comprehension within the English language programme at Zawia University, Libya, through the perceptions of lecturers and students at the Department of English. This study also evaluates the current teaching practices of reading comprehension at the Department of English at Zawia University, and based on the findings, recommendations on how to enhance students' comprehension skills are made.

1.2.1 Background of the study

Although reading comprehension as a research topic has been extensively debated, it is still of current interest because of the great importance and impact of comprehension skills on students' performance. It is commonly recognised that reading comprehension is an important life skill as it is one of the most important fields in education for being the best predictor of success in higher education and job performance.

Reading comprehension is essential for conveying ideas and updating general knowledge throughout the world. Grabe (2009) and Chang and Millett (2013) state that the need for effective reading skills and strategies has increased to cope with the large quantities of information made available due to the advent of the computer and the Internet. It is important for students to develop the necessary reading skills so that they become effective readers. Field (2000) points out that in order for students to become better readers, they need to become aware of how they are reading and what they could do to improve their comprehension skills. This point is particularly pertinent as it fits within the broad aim of this study which attempts to find out the constraints that hinder Libyan students' reading comprehension performance.

1.2.2 Key literature

Out of the four language skills, reading comprehension is probably the most extensively and the most widely debated research topic area in second language teaching. Much of the debate on reading comprehension is polarised around two key issues: research that aims at trying to understand the nature of reading comprehension and how to read effectively; and research that focuses on the skills involved in reading comprehension and how to develop them in reading classes.

Although linguists agree that reading is centrally a comprehending process, they have different arguments on how comprehension is approached. These arguments fall mainly into two categories. They follow either the bottom-up approach or the top-down approach to reading. The bottom-up approach

focuses on decoding as a means of text understanding while the top-down approach regards readers' prior knowledge as essential to fully comprehend a text. In the Libyan context, where English culture is not popular, teachers and learners usually emphasise decoding to understand a text.

Considerable research on reading comprehension focuses both on the effective reading strategies that increase readers' comprehension skills and on the most effective approach to reading. However, there is still no consensus about methods, approaches, and strategies of reading. The approaches to reading are western-oriented and were basically designed for English as a first language. This means that the current approaches might need adaptation to suit reading in English as a second language. Thus, despite the breadth and diversity of research about reading comprehension, it has had a modest impact on the practice of reading comprehension.

Reading comprehension has been tackled from different angles such as defining it, suggesting teaching techniques and arguing how to improve students' reading comprehension skills. Thus, it might be assumed that there is nothing left to say, but within the context of Libya and the Arab world, reading comprehension is still a topic of interest because it has not been extensively researched. Besides, research has shown that L2 reading comprehension skills are complex and problematic for students to develop. Thus, more research is needed to find out suitable ways for facilitating reading comprehension for Arabic students.

1.3 Statement of the problem

For most EFL learners, reading comprehension is a serious challenge;

nonetheless, little attention has been devoted to empirical investigations in this respect (Zoghi et al., 2010 and 2011). It is well-documented that many Arabic-speaking students of English face difficulties in learning English, particularly reading comprehension. In spite of the growing interest to investigate ways of improving students' reading skills, Arab EFL students' reading skills remain under-researched (Nezami, 2012).

According to Rajendran (2010) and Elmadwi and Shepherd (2014), most Libyan university-students have serious problems with understanding English texts. Similarly, many students in the Department of English at Zawia University in Libya have difficulty with reading comprehension. There is not enough research on issues related to Libyan EFL students and the challenges they face in reading comprehension.

While Zoghi et al. (2011) argue that many EFL students encounter difficulty in L2 reading because they lack the reading strategies and skills when reading English texts, Elmadwi and Shepherd (2014) blame the teachers' poor knowledge of teaching strategies and ineffective practices when teaching reading. This study takes the view that the learning environment in Libya is partly to blame as it is not conducive to learning English. In addition, the whole educational system needs reform and students as well as teachers are negatively affected by the weaknesses and flaws in this system.

1.4 Justification of the study

Improving Libyan students' reading proficiency in English has become a necessity in today's globalised world. It is essential for Libyan universities to produce graduates of an international standard. It is necessary for many

Libyans to have a good command of English to meet the growing needs in a developing country like Libya (Soliman, 2013). In view of the present state of teaching and learning of English in Libya, bringing about huge changes will take time.

In the light of regime change, new hopes to reform the system of education have emerged. This study has a practical value as it will benefit the stakeholders (decision-makers, teachers and students). This study also adds a theoretical value through expanding the literature. It will benefit future research in education because it tackles an important issue in EFL in the Arab world, focusing particularly on Libya.

1.5 Research Questions

In order to achieve the aim of this study, the following questions are formulated:

1. What are the views and perceptions of the students and lecturers in the Department of English at Zawia University concerning the challenges of learning and teaching of reading comprehension?
2. How is English reading comprehension taught in the Department of English at Zawia University?
3. How can the quality of learning and teaching of reading comprehension in the Department of English at Zawia University be improved?

1.6 Research objectives

In order to answer the research questions, this study has set the following objectives:

1. To critically review the literature related to reading comprehension.

2. To assess the views of the students and lecturers at the Department of English at Zawia University concerning the challenges and problems that face students in reading comprehension.
3. To investigate how English reading comprehension is taught in the Department of English at Zawia University.
4. To determine the factors which impact directly on the quality of learning and teaching of reading comprehension in the Department of English at Zawia University.
5. To make recommendations for improving the quality of teaching of reading comprehension in the Department of English at Zawia University based on the findings of this study.

1.7 Structure of the study

This study consists of six chapters that aim to identify the key issues that are related to EFL students' reading skills in order to gauge the problems faced by Libyan students in reading comprehension.

Chapter One outlines the overall aim and justification of the study. It also provides the background of the study and statement of the problem and highlights the research questions and objectives set by this study.

Chapter Two provides a brief background and a general picture of the Libyan educational context and some information regarding the economic, political and social systems in order to understand the factors that influence EFL teaching and learning, especially reading comprehension skill development at the university level in Libya.

Chapter Three critically reviews the relevant literature concerning the contextual issues, arguments and concepts of EFL reading comprehension and related issues such as reading skills, learning strategies and teaching techniques to understand the potential causes behind Libyan students' poor reading comprehension. It also identifies the gaps within the relevant literature.

Chapter Four discusses the methodological approach and methods that are best suited to the study. It explores the various methods and processes used to collect and analyse data, and highlights the data collection techniques that are used within the study. It also determines what consideration and justification are made for the research philosophy, design and approach in order to produce the most effective output for recommendations and conclusions within the subject area.

Chapter Five presents the data gathered through the students' questionnaires and the semi-structured interviews with lecturers. The main concern of this chapter is to analyse, interpret and discuss the results obtained from the collected data.

Chapter Six presents the conclusions drawn from the study in relation to the research questions and objectives identified in Chapter One. Recommendations are based upon these findings to inform further research within the subject area. Contribution to knowledge, limitations and areas for future research are highlighted.

1.8 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has presented the aim of the study and the background of the study. It has provided an overview of the key literature, statement of the problem, research questions and research objectives. It has also justified the rationale for undertaking this study. The structure of the thesis has been outlined in the last section. The following chapter presents the research context.

Chapter Two:

Research Context

2. Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the research context. It highlights key background information that is directly linked to the study. Context consists of factors and elements that are non-linguistic and non-textual, which directly affect the language teaching and learning process (Celce-Murica and Olshtain, 2000). There are some elements and factors that shape the Libyan context. The chapter also discusses the economic, political and social aspects, which have a direct bearing upon the educational system in Libya.

2.1 A general overview of the Libyan context

Libya is an Arab Islamic North-African country. It has a long coastline on the Mediterranean Sea, where the majority of the population lives. The population of Libya is about 6.5 million.

2.1.1 Financial perspective in Libya

Before discovering oil in the second half of the last century, Libya used to be a poor country with a small illiterate population and very few schools. Under the Gaddafi regime, Libya was considered as a relatively stable state with more than 90% of the economy based on oil. The Libyan economy received billions of dollars from oil exports. The relatively small population and high oil revenues placed Libya at the top of the list of GDP per capita among African countries, but little of this income flowed to the lower order of society. Gaddafi's family had outright personal control over the state funds invested in the Libyan Investment Authority. Gaddafi firmly believed that Libya's wealth

was his own and he made no distinction between his personal assets and the resources of the country (El-Farjani and Menacere, 2014). Logically thinking, the wealthier the economy is, the better the educational system should be; that is, the educational system is influenced by the economy and based on the resources available to improve the standard of its infrastructure, equipment, various facilities and development and training of the teaching staff. Libyan universities should be in a much healthier position.

2.1.2 The influence of politics on the educational system

The Libyan educational system followed a top-down decision-making pattern that resulted in politicising education. This policy restricted authority and decision-making to a specific group of people who were selected according to their level of loyalty and blood relation to Gaddafi. Everything started and stopped within the Gaddafi closed circle. Most of the decision-makers were insufficiently qualified. This led to many poor decisions that negatively affected the educational system.

The Gaddafi regime was accused of being involved in several terrorist actions, which led to Libya's period of international isolation as a result of the USA embargo (1981-2004) followed by the UN embargo (1992-2003) because of the Lockerbie disaster. In addition, the shooting of the British police officer by a person in the Libyan embassy in 1984 led to the severing of diplomatic ties between Libya and the UK. Therefore, for political reasons, and under a plan to curb foreign influence, the inclusion of foreign languages in the Libyan school curricula was rejected by the government. The teaching of English and French was banned from schools and universities across the

country for about a decade (starting from 1986), which meant that a whole generation grew up with no exposure to foreign languages. Moreover, no access to the Internet was possible until 2002, which limited people's knowledge of other educational systems and cultures around the world.

In the mid-nineties, the Libyan government started to fully reintroduce English language teaching into its educational system without a clear strategy. This process was overwhelmed by many challenges and problems and the consequences of excluding English language started to emerge. There was a shortage of Libyan English language teachers due to the closure of English language departments and English language training institutions for years. Besides, it was difficult for many Libyan teachers of English to restart teaching English language because they lacked practice. Moreover, many students who were at the time at university level had to study English with little basic knowledge. Consequently, when they graduated, they became teachers of English but with a limited command of English. The state of English language teaching during this period was summarised in the following report by UNESCO (1996:22-23):

- *The communicative approach to English language learning has not yet reached the Jamahiriya (Libya).*
- *Schools lack the use of educational media; there is even no use of tape recorders and no testing of oral skills. Some schools have overhead projectors, but it seems that teachers do not have printed or blank transparencies or suitable pens to use them.*
- *...There are no language laboratories or even specialist English teaching rooms.*

As a response to this situation, the educational policy makers introduced a new curriculum for both primary and high school levels in 2000. Unlike the

previous curriculum in which the focus was on grammar, memorisation and reading aloud, the new curriculum was, in theory, organised around activities based on communicative principles focusing on students' interactive work in class and promoting meaningful and purposeful language use. However, in practice, the learning objectives and teaching practices were far from being communicative because the environment and infrastructure were inadequate. For instance, reading work was supposed to involve pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities; however, it was taught in a traditional way. It could thus be observed by academics that there were considerable differences between the intentions of the curriculum objectives and its implementation by teachers.

2.1.3 The social influence on the educational system

In the past, during the Italian colonial period from 1912 to 1943, Italian was the language of education in all Libyan schools while Arabic was taught as one of the school subjects. Thus, most Libyan parents refused to enrol their children in these schools because the focus was on the Italian culture and language. As a result, the Italian language did not take root in Libya to the extent that the French language did in the neighbouring countries like Tunisia and Algeria. This might have contributed to the situation that many of the older generation (parents and grandparents of the new generation) were not able to read or write. Consequently, even reading in Arabic is not popular with the following generation. According to Al-Musalli (2014), many Arab students have no interest in reading because of the influence of peers who do not promote reading, and because they associate reading with school where they are burdened with much homework and therefore, they have no

time to read for pleasure. Generally, the reading habit in the Arab world is not on the agenda and even less of a hobby for most people. Lau et al. (2011) indicate that oral learning traditions are more culturally embedded than reading ones in the Arab countries. This is particularly true in Libya where the tribal and Bedouin life style still prevails. As commented upon by Al-Musalli (2014), a UN survey in 2008 found that in the Middle East, the average Arab person reads four pages a year whereas the average American reads eleven books and the average British person reads eight books a year. There should be efforts by the Arab educational systems to increase and promote the level of reading in the Arab world.

Factors such as little exposure to English books and media contribute to students' poor comprehension skills. In Libya, textbooks are usually the only medium for practising reading both in Arabic and English. The media does not encourage reading; even the Arabic newspapers are owned by the regime. In addition, there are no libraries in schools. Some public libraries are available in large cities; however, the majority of books are old. Bookstores, where books are very expensive, are not available in most towns. Many expatriates have noticed that Arab students lack interest in general knowledge and that the shortage of public libraries is an obstacle to the reading habit in Arab countries (Al-Musalli, 2014). Such an environment has also resulted in the situation where people rarely read in spite of the great influence of the Islamic religion where people are encouraged to read. Thus, some of the main factors behind the Libyan students' low proficiency in English are summarised by Soliman (2013:126) as follows:

the English curricula, the excessive use of Arabic in instruction, the small number of hours of instruction per week, limited use of the media, over-dependence on the board and the textbook, and the use of traditional teaching methods...which do not enhance communication.

It can be argued that the teaching of English in Libya is in need of improvement. Thorough research is required to gain a deeper understanding of the source of difficulties and put down the foundations for raising students' proficiency in English.

2.2 Education key stages

The Libyan school programme consists of six years of primary school, three years of intermediate (junior high) school, three years of secondary school, and four to six years at university level, depending on the field of study. Education in Libya is free for citizens up to and including undergraduate university courses. Primary and high school is mandatory.

English is introduced to students in Year Five in primary school. From Year Five up to the last year of secondary school, students are taught English for three hours a week, divided into four classes of forty five minutes each. At university level, students at all departments have to take English classes once a week in their first year. However, in these English classes including reading classes, Arabic is usually the medium of instruction and student interaction, which does not help students to improve their English or develop any of the four skills efficiently.

2.2.1 Higher Education in Libya

University is one of the main stages of education in human society. Libyan universities are set up mainly for undergraduate students. Some universities have recently started opening postgraduate studies in limited departments such as humanities, Arabic language and Islamic culture. However, for many other departments, for example, medicine, pharmacy, and foreign languages, universities grant scholarships for graduates who pursue their postgraduate studies to achieve a Master and/or a Doctoral degree from overseas universities in the UK, USA, Canada and a few other countries.

Few studies have been conducted on the problems facing the higher education system in Libya (Tamtam et al., 2011). Furthermore, Libyan universities do not usually follow strategic priorities to make scientific research paramount, which has resulted in little research production by Libyan universities' academic staff. Lecturers would probably be more motivated and committed if they felt supported by their institutions. The Libyan higher education sector faces the challenge of significant reform. According to Bukhatowa et al. (2010), some of the differences between Libyan universities and Western universities lie in Internet access, the use of e-learning systems and the variety of software available, which can enhance learning processes and teaching experiences. In addition, Higher Education in Libya suffers from the limited infrastructure, funding and expertise availability. Professional development in using computers and other technological devices for instructional purposes is required to increase teachers' awareness of what can be achieved through integrating technology in English language teaching classrooms.

2.2.1.1 Zawia University

Zawia city is located in the western region of Libya, about 40 km west of Tripoli. Zawia University is the third largest university in Libya. It was established in 1983 as a branch of the Faculty of Education at Tripoli University. In 1988, Zawia University became a governmental independent institution. Zawia University offers bachelor and master degrees. According to its website, the number of the academic staff is about 2124 and the number of teaching assistants about 972. The number of undergraduate students is about 47322 while there are about 1746 postgraduate students. Zawia University covers many fields of study such as agricultural sciences, architecture and regional planning, art and design, business studies and management science, education and teacher training, engineering and technology, geography and geology, humanities, languages, law, mathematics and computer science, medical sciences, natural sciences, social sciences, communication and information sciences, and physical education.

2.3 Summary of the chapter

This chapter has shed light on the research context. It has discussed the economic, political and social situation, which has a direct bearing and influence on the educational system in Libya. In the following chapter, the literature related to reading comprehension is critically reviewed.

Chapter Three:

Literature Review

3. Introduction

This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the arguments and concepts of EFL reading comprehension and related issues like reading skills, learning strategies and teaching techniques of reading comprehension. This review critically analyses key approaches and views about EFL reading comprehension in line with the research objectives set by this study. The purpose of the current review is to analyse and evaluate the reading comprehension strategies to find out the extent to which this information and insights can benefit the decision-making at Zawia University. It also aims to identify any gaps within the literature that offer support to undertaking this study.

The key literature in this study is polarised around two streams. The first stream presents different aspects of reading: definitions, importance, complexity, purposes of reading, types of reading and approaches to reading. The second stream is related to various issues about the three main components of the reading comprehension module: learners, teachers and reading material. The last section of this chapter presents the summary and the gaps that have been found in the literature.

3.1 Defining reading and reading comprehension

The proliferation of reading comprehension research has generated many definitions and provided many interesting ideas on which many authors seem to agree. In the past and present, authors define reading comprehension

based on their beliefs about the process of reading. Thus, the definitions of reading comprehension lie either under the bottom-up approach or under top-down approach to reading.

Some linguists such as Gough (1972) and Carroll (1964) regarded reading as a passive decoding process (bottom-up): graphemes are perceived as forming words, words as forming sentences, and sentences as forming paragraphs and so on. Grabe and Stoller (2002) also indicate that reading comprehension is processing words, forming a representation of general main ideas, and integrating it into a new understanding. Another definition of reading is mentioned by Clapham (2009:11) where reading is viewed as:

the ability to make sense of written or printed symbols. The reader uses the symbols to guide the recovery of the information from his or her memory and subsequently uses this information to construct a plausible interpretation of the writer's message.

On the other hand, other linguists such as Goodman (1976) and Smith (1971) argue that the process of reading is a "top-down" one: the reader starts with a general idea (schema) of what should be in the text. This is derived from the previously acquired knowledge by the reader who uses this schema in perceiving and in interpreting graphic cues. Hudson (2007:38) also gives a definition that associates reading with a top-down approach where it is claimed that "*reading is a selective process. It involves partial use of available minimal language cues selected from perceptual input on the basis of the reader's expectation*". Klingner et al. (2007) also argue that as a process of constructing meaning, reading can be achieved through dynamic instruction using the following aspects: the reader's prior knowledge, the

information suggested by the text, and the context of the reading situation.

Reading involves at least two people: the writer and the reader. The reader has to decode the writer's words to understand his/her message and construct meaning from text. Definitions of reading often include the concept of understanding or comprehension. A number of researchers such as Lipka and Siegel (2012), Russell (2013), McLean (2014), Turkyilmaz et al. (2014) and Akyol et al. (2014) emphasise that the main goal of reading is comprehension. Reading without comprehension is pointless. Grabe (2009:14) states that *"reading is centrally a comprehending process"*. Readers read to understand what is intended to be conveyed in writing. Ahmadi et al. (2013:238) refer to reading comprehension as *"the ability of readers to understand the surface and the hidden meanings of the text using meta-cognitive reading strategies"*. Reading comprehension is *"the process of unlocking meaning from connected text"* (Zoghi et al., 2010:439). According to Yogurtcu (2013:376), *"the process of reading comprehension provides a link between thinking, textual content, and the reader's level of readiness, expectations and objectives of reading"*. Reading comprehension from a psychological viewpoint as mentioned by Rivers (2000:70) is *"a problem-solving behaviour that actively involves the reader in the process of deriving and assigning meaning...drawing on contextual information...Readers decode print semantically and syntactically"*. In line with this definition, Russell (2013:7) asserts that *"it requires the reader to develop an efficient system for solving problems during reading. The reading process requires intentional thinking and reflecting"*. In other words, to understand a text efficiently requires the reader to be critical and reflective.

Therefore, comprehension is identified as an acquired skill that focuses on input understanding. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2010), comprehension is “*the action or fact of comprehending with the mind; understanding; ... grasping with the mind, power of receiving and containing ideas*”. It is “*the process of receiving language; listening or reading; input*” (Brown, 2007: 379). Comprehension is the ability to take in information, analyse it, and come up with an understanding of the input in a cohesive and accurate manner. Well developed comprehension abilities involve interactive strategy use to come up with a meaningful understanding of the input (Lin, 2010). However, comprehension may not be exclusively devoted to input alone; it may also affect the fluency of a learner’s output (Hill, 2011). Fluency is a combination of competence (one’s underlying knowledge) and performance (one’s overt, external actions or behaviours) and it can be identified as an aspect of comprehension, as it can transfer comprehensible information to other aspects of language proficiency such as writing and speaking with little attentional effort (Brown, 2007; Grabe, 2010).

Snowling and Hulme (2005) identify three levels of understanding in the comprehension process: word level, sentence level and text level. Browne (2004) explains that word-level skills include phonic and graphic knowledge and words recognition, sentence-level skills include grammatical knowledge, and text-level skills include contextual understanding. According to Nuttall (2005:21), every sentence used in a text has four kinds of meaning: “*conceptual, propositional, contextual and pragmatic*”. The conceptual meaning is “*the meaning a word can have on its own*”; the propositional

meaning is *“the meaning a sentence can have on its own”*; the contextual meaning is *“the meaning a sentence can have only when in context”*; and the pragmatic meaning is *“the meaning a sentence has only as part of the interaction between writer and reader”*. Each one of these levels of meanings is important to guarantee reading comprehension.

Brantmeier (2003:4) claims that there *“is not one true comprehension, but a range of comprehension”*. Day and Park (2005) classify reading comprehension into six different types of comprehension that can work together in parallel and/or in a linear fashion: literal comprehension, reorganisation, inference, prediction, evaluation, and personal response. Literal comprehension is understanding the direct meaning of the text, which means that any answers to questions coming from a text would be explicitly outlined in the reading. Reorganisation occurs when readers find various pieces of information from a reading and combine them for additional understanding. In this way, readers still use literal comprehension, but it is applied to several areas of text in order to answer more specific questions related to the text. Inference requires learners to go a step beyond literal understanding and to combine and use their own knowledge in order to come up with answers to implicitly stated information. Prediction combines a reader's prior knowledge with his or her understanding of a passage in order to guess what happens next; but it must be supported by the text in order to be valid. Evaluation requires a learner to have a general knowledge of the topic of a text and an understanding of the reading material so as to give judgment or opinion about the text. Personal response is an open-ended type

of comprehension used by readers in order to provide their feelings about the topic.

Each classification of these types has its own weaknesses; literal comprehension cannot account for abstract information such as irony; reorganisation is simply an extension of this, being literal in its own right; and evaluation, prediction, personal experience, and inference are not possible without an adequate knowledge of the subject matter. However, when they are used in parallel with each other, these types of comprehension work very well as an overall approach to many different aspects of reading (Hill, 2011). Overall, there is no doubt that the plethora of reading comprehension definitions provided some useful arguments; however, they appear to overlap in form and content. Despite the growing attention given to reading in general and reading comprehension in particular by both academics and educationalists, the majority of studies lack universal practice implication and application. They are deeply influenced by cultural, economic and political backgrounds that make their models and strategies difficult to implement in other settings such as Libya. Thus, many studies are descriptive in nature and lack empirical evidence. These studies also lack universally accepted definitions. Some critics argue that reading comprehension focuses mainly on decoding and others debate that a reader's prior knowledge is crucial for comprehension.

Several different views have attempted to define L2 reading comprehension; however, none of these accounts for cultural factors, which can be problematic when trying to look at L2 reading patterns across various cultures

because readers from different cultures may read the same passage and gain different interpretations of the text (Hill, 2011). Taking into consideration the above-mentioned definitions of reading comprehension and the Libyan context, this study defines L2 reading comprehension as a strategic process of extracting meaning from text after decoding it syntactically and semantically.

3.2 The importance of reading comprehension

English is widely recognised as the universal language across the world. It is also significant for students' academic success (Azeroual, 2013) and has become essential in higher education (Najeeb, 2013). Reading is associated with academic success (Logan et al., 2011; Dabarera et al., 2014) because a great deal of formal education depends upon being able to read with understanding (Hulme and Snowling, 2011). Consequently, reading efficiently in English has become a necessity for many people, especially EFL students (Lo et al., 2013). Attarzadeh (2011) points out that reading in English enables people to receive the published information.

Reading is an important skill (Cain, 2010). According to Phantharakphong and Pothitha (2014:497), "*Reading is the single most important fundamental skill a person can acquire*". Reading is the foundation for effective learning (Cogmen and Saracaloglu, 2009; Moreillon, 2012) and reading skills are essential in the academic context (Solak and Altay, 2014). In foreign language learning, reading is the most important skill as a way of getting information, and exploring and broadening academic knowledge (McDonough and Shaw, 2003; Talebi, 2013 and Azeroual, 2013). Similarly,

Levine et al. (2000:1) state that

The ability to read academic texts is considered one of the most important skills that university students of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) need to acquire.

In addition, reading comprehension offers a tool for judging the level of text understanding (Ahmadi et al., 2013; Naidu et al., 2013). Therefore, reading comprehension has started to receive a special focus in foreign language teaching (Ahmadi and Ismail, 2012).

Some authors such as Nassaji (2011), Chen (2012) and Sidek (2012) point out that the reading skill is not only necessary for comprehension purposes and getting information but also for linguistic competence development. Reading comprehension has a cross-sectional nature as it affects the whole academic learning process (Gayo et al., 2014). For example, reading comprehension represents a source of enriching the vocabulary and improving other language skills such as speaking and writing (Patesan et al., 2014). Thus, reading comprehension should be emphasised at different levels of education.

It is noteworthy that English reading comprehension is increasingly important in creating a successful society because English is the language of information in science, technology and medicine (Lo et al., 2013) and it is also the main language of books, academic conferences, international business, diplomacy and sport (Najeeb, 2013). In fact, reading comprehension is a core component of being a successful individual (Vorstius et al., 2013). Reading effectively is essential for both educational

and professional success of people (Karasakaloglu, 2012). Similarly, Hogan et al. (2011:1) argue that “*skilled reading comprehension is critical for modern life; success in education, productivity in society, and almost all types of employment*”. This indicates that poor comprehension can lead to school failure (Lipka and Siegel, 2012) and may negatively affect EFL students' lives in finding employment or a better job (Ahmadi et al., 2013). In other words, reading difficulties will certainly create educational difficulties, which are a major source of economic and social disadvantage (Hulme and Snowling, 2011).

Thus, many studies throughout the history of teaching and learning of foreign languages emphasise the importance of reading comprehension and suggest various methods for reading comprehension instruction and different techniques for acquiring and developing adequate reading skills. However, in spite of the importance of reading comprehension in English, a large number of EFL Libyan students read below a basic level of competence and suffer from poor reading comprehension. This study tries to benefit students' performance in the reading domain.

3.3 Complexity of reading comprehension

Research has shown that L2 reading comprehension is complex and challenging for students to develop. This is stated by many researchers such as Grabe and Stoller (2002), Hudson (2007), Alkhawaldeh (2010), Zoghi et al. (2011), Lipka and Siegel (2012), Ahmadi et al. (2013), Hollenbeck (2013), Sahin (2013), Yogurtcu (2013), Norris (2013), Wyatt (2014) and Patesan et al. (2014). Similarly, Ahmadi and Gilakjani (2012) assume that L2 reading

comprehension is complex and multi-dimensional. This viewpoint is consonant with Nassaji's (2011:173) argument that reading is:

a complex cognitive skill involving many sub skills, processes...ranging from basic lower level visual processes involved in decoding the print to higher level skills involving syntax, semantics, and discourse... to skills of text comprehension.

According to Brown and Broemmel (2011), reading comprehension presents one of the most serious problems for EFL learners, especially those who are below level. Learners of English as a foreign language can have difficulties in understanding texts. Yeganeh (2013) attributes this difficulty to the limited exposure and input of L2. Lipka and Siegel (2012) distinguish two types of comprehension difficulties: difficulties at the word level, and difficulties at the text level. Readers need to develop their reading skills to manage constructing meaning out of texts. Yoshida (2012:1) explains that reading comprehension in a second language requires readers to be “*more actively involved with the text than when reading in the first language*” because, when reading in the first language, many lower-level processes like decoding are automatically activated which is not the case when reading in a second or foreign language. This is in line with the debate of Grabe and Stoller (2002) and (Nassaji, 2011) who emphasise that second languages differ from first languages in their way of creating meaning, which makes L2 reading more complex than L1 reading. Similarly, most of the Libyan EFL learners regard reading comprehension as a difficult module (Pathan, 2012).

3.3.1 Factors that affect L2 comprehension

The gap between L1 and L2 readers is large and distinct (Grabe and Stoller, 2002). Hill (2011) highlights some of the significant factors that influence L2 reading comprehension, which include lexical processing (how the brain makes meaning out of input), eye movements, cultural familiarity, and first language effects. Such factors play enormous roles in reading comprehension as clarified below.

Lexical processing is a sequence of processes that are consciously utilised for L2 learners to recognise and access the meanings of word forms in a text (Tily et al., 2010). In order to gain automatic access to words and their meanings, processing has to be practised to a point that the lexical information contained in words takes less cognitive attention as it is easily recognised at surface value (Hill, 2011). Therefore, many researchers support training learners to become automatic in word recognition to increase fluency (Chang, 2010), as automatic word recognition is crucial to fluent L2 reading comprehension (Grabe, 2010). Tily et al. (2010) assert that high-frequency verbs are recognised and comprehended faster than low-frequency verbs because of ease of lexical access (i.e., how quickly one can access the meanings of these verbs in the brain). According to Laufer and Ravenhorst-Kalovski (2010), higher levels of L2 reading comprehension are demonstrable through more fluent reading of frequent words, and through a higher proficiency of lexical decoding that lower-level readers do not possess because of a more limited vocabulary capacity.

Eye-tracking has become an important topic in learning how the eyes contribute to information processing at a surface level before taking comprehension into account (Hill, 2011). Different kinds of rapid eye movements encode visual information that is related to reading (Dussias, 2010). Text must be recognised quickly during eye movement, or else the eyes continue to the next piece of text without fully processing the word left behind (Rayner and Clifton, 2009; Dussias, 2010). It is worth mentioning that the way Arabic-speakers' eyes shift when reading in Arabic is the opposite to the way English language is read.

Cultural familiarity is another factor that shapes reading comprehension as the interpretation of a text may vary from culture to culture (Brantmeier, 2003). A number of researchers (Brantmeier, 2003; Erten and Razi, 2009; Keshavarz et al. 2007) argue that there is a positive relationship between cultural familiarity and reading comprehension. That is, the more a reader is culturally familiar with a culturally-oriented text, the more likely an L2 reader is going to be able to comprehend it (Hill, 2011). L2 learners tend to make different judgments on the level of reading difficulty of a text depending on how familiar the cultural content is to the reader (Brantmeier, 2003). Thus, when reading texts with unfamiliar cultural patterns, L2 readers often return to their own cultural norms in an attempt to interpret the text, which may result in unsuccessful comprehension (Erten and Razi, 2009).

L1 plays a role in L2 reading comprehension either positively or negatively. According to Seng and Hashim (2006), the use of L1 is beneficial at all levels to L2 learners and L1 mental translation is an important part of the L2 reading

comprehension process. However, there are some cautions of L1 interference in L2 learning where “*a previous item is incorrectly transferred or incorrectly associated with an item to be learned*” (Brown, 2007:102). Interference can play a negative role to varying degrees during the reading process such as the use of L1 syntax in L2 production (Hill, 2011). Overcoming such interference may require extensive lexical training.

These factors should be taken into account when designing a reading comprehension module and selecting reading texts and tasks for EFL learners.

3.4 Purposes of Reading

Reading serves different purposes and people read for a variety of reasons. They read for pleasure, to get specific information, or to understand the meaning of a text as a whole. Many people read to gather information from written texts. Students are taught to read to improve their language and to develop the understanding of the meaning of texts. Furthermore, seeking pleasure from a text makes readers read more, which leads them towards a better understanding and enrichment of vocabulary, and it ultimately helps them to develop the overall skills in reading. Harmer (2002:200) divides the reasons for reading into two broad categories: “*instrumental*” and “*pleasurable*”. In other words, readers read because they have an instrumental purpose in mind to achieve some clear aim, but sometimes they read for pleasure. According to Grabe and Stoller (2002), the purpose of reading can be: to read for general information, to learn from texts, to search for simple information, and to integrate information and critique texts.

Reading can be for academic purposes or non-academic purposes. In the academic context where students are bound to read texts because of the syllabus and for passing examinations, reading a given text effectively and meaningfully and understanding it are crucial for a student to answer any kind of questions set in the examinations. However, in the non-academic life, students/readers get the opportunity to choose from a vast range of written sources according to their interests and the time available for them to spend in reading. The purpose of non-academic reading is reading for pleasure (Grellet, 2010). Still, Taylor (2011) stresses that reading for pleasure benefits educational achievement and academic progress.

McDonough and Shaw (2003:99) state that *“teachers should provide students with a purpose for reading by supplying materials that stimulate interest and do not have an overfamiliar content”*. This is because teachers' goals when teaching reading classes and their perceptions about their students' purposes of reading affect their material selections. Sometimes these goals and perceptions of teachers contradict students' purposes of reading, and this can be one of the factors that impact directly on the quality of teaching and learning of reading comprehension. In addition, different students usually have different purposes of reading; and this issue can be more influential in the overcrowded classes in the Libyan universities. Still, teachers need to make their students aware of a clear purpose of reading materials.

3.5 Types of Reading

There are different types of reading. Grellet (2010) distinguishes four main ways to categorise reading which are skimming, scanning, extensive reading

and intensive reading although she points out that these ways are not mutually exclusive. In the extensive reading, students are encouraged to choose what they prefer to read for pleasure and general language improvement whereas, in the intensive reading, teachers choose and direct the reading process which is designed to enable students to develop specific skills. Skimming and scanning are considered to be skills as well as ways of reading; they will be discussed with the skills. Both intensive and extensive readings are important and necessary for effective reading. In order to benefit from their reading, students need to have opportunities for both intensive and extensive reading (Harmer, 2002; Nuttall, 2005).

3.5.1 Intensive Reading

Intensive reading is a process for reading short texts in order to extract specific information. Grellet (2010:4) terms it as “*an accuracy activity*” that involves reading in detail. According to Rashidi and Piran (2011), intensive reading deals with comprehension mostly at lexical and syntactic level. Nuttall (2005:38) states that the aim of intensive reading is “*to arrive at an understanding, not only of what the text means, but of how the meaning is produced*”. This needs efficient readers.

Intensive reading is very effective for the development of the reading skills of students (Nuttall, 2005). Intensive reading usually involves approaching the text under the guidance of a teacher (Yazar, 2013). According to Harmer (2002), in intensive reading, teachers need to perform their roles flexibly. The teacher should be a curricula organiser, an observer, a feedback organiser and a prompter. As a curricula organiser, the teacher should tell students

what their reading purpose is and give them clear instructions about how to achieve it and how long they have to do it. When teachers are not organised, they go into their classes without an obvious purpose for the text, which contributes to their students' poor comprehension. As an observer, the teacher should detect his/her students' progress in reading and whether they are doing well individually and collectively. As a feedback organiser, the teacher may ask the students to compare their answers in pairs. The teacher can lead a feedback session to check whether the students have completed the task successfully. As a prompter, the teacher can prompt the students to notice language features in the text they read, and then clarify ambiguity.

Some teachers' lack of proficiency to apply such roles in their classes might negatively reflect their students' levels, especially when students are not aware of the need for developing different strategies and skills to enhance their reading comprehension. This study tries to demonstrate that the Libyan teaching environment of English language suffers from many shortcomings that make the Libyan teachers' task to teach reading comprehension effectively very difficult. Akyol et al. (2014) emphasise the efficiency of the construction of an appropriate reading environment to help learners improve their performance.

3.5.2 Extensive Reading

Grabe and Stoller (2002:21) state that extensive reading is reading "*large quantities of materials that are within learners' linguistic competence*". Yamashita (2013:248) also views extensive reading as "*an approach to reading pedagogy that encourages students to engage in a large amount of*

reading". Being a source for language practice, vocabulary learning and skill developing, extensive reading not only makes the students fluent readers, but also enables them to learn new words and expand their understanding of words they knew before. Through a study on some Taiwanese students who were divided into two groups (experimental and control), Chen et al. (2013) highlight the powerful role of extensive reading in stimulating EFL learners' reading comprehension, reading attitude and vocabulary growth.

Nuttall (2005:127) specifies two reasons for extensive reading. The first reason is that extensive reading is "*the easiest and most effective way of improving reading skills*". The second reason is that being "*an educational tool*", extensive reading not only provides "*a favourable climate*" for the students but also it serves as "*a source of enjoyment*". As a result, students feel interested in reading, which helps them to acquire the desired progress in developing their reading skills. Extensive reading has a positive effect on EFL learners' reading attitude (Yamashita, 2013). On the other hand, Keene and Zimmermann (2013) believe that in order to teach reading comprehension effectively and improve comprehension instruction, teachers themselves should read extensively. Reading is an important resource for language teachers to get more knowledge about the issues related to their field (Casanave, 2004).

Extensive reading helps EFL students to be better readers and better speakers of English. Modirghamene and Gowrki (2011:19) argue that "*reading extensively in the second language leads to successful readers who are able to read reading texts fluently (and) achieve better understanding*".

The Jordanian researcher, Alzu'bi (2014) also stresses that extensive reading improves university EFL students' reading comprehension, vocabulary and grammar achievement and increases their culture knowledge.

In extensive reading, students can select the books and texts they are interested in. The purpose of extensive reading is to enjoy reading texts and students do not have to answer questions on the texts they read, so they can read a great deal at their own pace. Extensive reading practice is one way of improving comprehension and increasing reading flexibility (Nassaji, 2003). Commenting on the benefits of extensive reading, Grabe (2009:311) states that *"no other set of reading activities or reading practice can substitute for reading a longer text with reasonable comfort and without needing to stop constantly, and without feeling fatigued or overwhelmed"*. Similarly, Chen et al. (2013:303) state that *"extensive reading is relaxing, informal, and allows students to choose materials based on their English proficiency level and their interests"*. However, it is not effective to just make students read a lot. This process should be to some extent guided by teachers in order to make sure that students benefit from their readings on their own. Pfof et al. (2013) highlight the positive effects of time spent on extracurricular reading on the development of reading competency because it leads to increasing prior knowledge and increasing the automaticity of the processes needed for comprehension, but still they point out that this depends on the type of reading material students read.

What emerges from the above debate is that there are many benefits and values to the purpose and types of reading; however, each reader has his/her

own purpose for reading, which shapes the type of reading they focus on.

3.6 Approaches to reading

There are three important approaches that attempt to explain the reading process. There is a distinction between two approaches: bottom-up and top-down approaches. While the bottom-up process is text-driven/ word-driven, the top-down approach uses the meaning brought by the reader, i.e. it is reader-driven/knowledge driven. Johnson (2001) suggests that both models are important. A combination of these two approaches is known as the interactive approach. Which approach might be appropriate depends on the type and size of the text, the capability of the class, as well as students' needs, the purpose of reading and the time allotted.

3.6.1 Bottom-up approach

As mentioned by Hudson (2007), the bottom-up approach was proposed by Gough in 1972. It assumes that a reader constructs meaning from letters, words, phrases, clauses, and sentences by processing the text into phonemic units that represent lexical meaning, and then the reader builds up meaning in a direct manner. The reading task is supposed to be understood by examining it in a series of stages which proceed in a fixed order: from sensory input to comprehension and appropriate response. There is an assumption that the process of gaining information is rapid and efficient and occurs in a passive manner.

This approach limits the reading process to the recognition and decoding of letters, words and then sentences. It also ignores the contribution of the reader's background knowledge to reading comprehension. Consequently,

students will lack the motivation to read as the process of reading in this way is monotonous. Because it disregards the importance of what the reader brings to the text, Johnson (2001) indicates that the bottom-up approach cannot alone account for comprehension. According to this approach, the information in memory has little effect on how the processing happens. Alderson (2000:17) criticises the bottom-up approach because it considers that “*readers are passive decoders of sequential graphic-phonemic-syntactic-semantic systems*”. This means that the reader is entirely dependent on the contextual meaning, and s/he does not need any background knowledge since it is text-driven.

Although underestimating the role of previous knowledge is seen by this study as the most prominent drawback of the bottom-down approach, it might be argued that this approach can be effective in the pre-reading and while-reading activities of the reading class especially with beginners and low-level readers (like most Libyan students). Some teachers find it effective to highlight the new key words in a text and decode them morphologically and phonologically.

3.6.2 Top-down approach

Unlike the bottom-down approach where the students’ background knowledge is not considered, the top-down approach highlights the importance of the students’ prior knowledge and expectations in helping them to construct meaning from a reading text (Alderson, 2000). As mentioned by Hudson (2007), this approach to the reading process was proposed by Goodman (1967). It assumes that a reader approaches a text with

conceptualisations above the textual level already in operation and then works out the text itself, omitting chunks of the text which seem to be irrelevant to the reader's purpose. Some of the reading skills that the top-down approach emphasises are prediction, summarising and anticipation from texts (Ahmadi et al. 2013). Readers apply background knowledge to the text to create intelligible meaning, which enables them to predict the writer's argument and then use this framework to interpret difficult parts of the text. Expectations of the reader play a crucial role in this process. Readers bring their personal experiences and views with them, and those aspects largely affect the way they interpret a text.

This approach is recommended by many researchers because it is directly related to the readers' schemata, personal knowledge and experiences. However, although schemata play an important part in comprehension from an early stage, there are cautions from the risk of inaccurate comprehension through applying schemata to texts without much regard for what the texts actually say (Johnson, 2001). Taking into account the current situation in the Department of English at Zawia University, where most of the students lack the necessary information to promote their background knowledge and schemata, it is believed that it could be ineffective for Libyan students at this stage to rely on the top-down approach for enhancing their reading comprehension abilities.

3.6.3 Interactive approach

Many experts such as Ahmadi et al. (2013) argue that neither of the above-mentioned approaches (namely, 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approaches)

stands alone for effective reading. According to Harmer (2002), there should be an interaction between bottom-up processing and top-down processing; that is, through bottom-up processing, the reader focuses on individual words and phrases, and achieves understanding by stringing these detailed elements together to build up a whole, while through top-down processing, the reader gets a general view of the reading passage by absorbing the overall picture which allows the reader to have appropriate expectations of what is being read based on their background knowledge. As a result, a proper combination of these two approaches known as the interactive approach has emerged. This approach strikes a balance between the differing processes of bottom-up and top-down approaches. In other words, an interactive process requires the use of background knowledge, expectations, and context. At the same time, it also includes notions of rapid and accurate feature recognition for letters, words and lexical forms, and the concept of processing them automatically. This is stated by Ahmadi et al. (2013:239) who point out that the interactive reading approach refers to the reader that *“takes into account the critical contributions of both lower-level processing skill (word recognition) and higher-level comprehension and reasoning skills (text interpretation)”*. Thus, reading comprehension is the result of meaning construction between the reader and the text. There are some perspectives which recognise the models that adopt the interactive approach as mentioned by Hudson (2007). The major emphasis is on the process rather than the product of reading, and the focus is on the interaction of the writer's intentions and the reader's interpretations. Language is thought to have two aspects: a surface structure which exists in print or speech and a

deep structure which is the meaning obtained by the reader.

3.7 Issues related to learners of reading comprehension

"Learning a foreign language is not a simple process where reception is automatically followed by production" (Fields, 2000: 172). The process of learning reading comprehension at school or university involves three main elements: reading materials, learners and teachers. Teaching methods should take the three elements into account in order to achieve the ultimate goal here, which is to help learners comprehend texts through suggesting activities that can be applied by learners and teachers.

3.7.1 Learners' attitude towards English reading comprehension

There are many factors that can influence the learning process such as learners' attitudes and motivation. The matter of learner's attitude is considered one of the most important factors that affect learning language (Fakeye, 2010). According to Montano and Kasprzyk (2008: 71),

Attitude is determined by the individual's beliefs about outcomes or attributes of performing the behaviour (behavioural beliefs), weighted by evaluations of those outcomes or attributes.

Lee and Schallert (2014) argue that past reading experience, purpose of reading, and reading environment are essential in determining EFL learners' attitudes towards reading. Positive attitudes lead to showing positive behaviours toward courses of study (Kara, 2009) and enhancing learners' frequency in reading (Ro and Chen, 2014).

Having taught English in some Arab countries for years, Lau et al. (2011) observed that Arab students have a negative attitude towards reading.

Similarly, many researchers such as Pathan (2012), Abidin et al. (2012), Omar (2013) and Jha (2014) found that many Libyan EFL learners have a negative attitude towards learning English and most of them regard it as a difficult language, which has a direct bearing on their language achievement and performance in English reading comprehension. Abidin et al. (2012) suggest that EFL teachers should respect and think about students' feelings and beliefs before their cognitive abilities. The researcher agrees with this suggestion but the aim of this respect should be to enhance learners' cognitive abilities.

Little exposure to English print might contribute to students' negative attitude towards reading in English. Sparks et al. (2012) and Chang (2012) indicate that reading rates and print exposure can play a significant role in L2 learning and proficiency. Learners with little exposure to the second language have difficulty in reading that language (Hudson, 2007). Therefore, Soliman (2013) blames the limited use of the media as one of the reasons behind the Libyan students' low proficiency in English.

3.7.2 Learning to read and learning theories

Learning is a critical aspect of developing reading comprehension skills. There are some learning theories that try to explain the process of acquiring reading skills. These theories are the social learning theory, the cognitive skill theory, and the model of domain learning.

3.7.2.1 Social Learning Theory

The social learning theory was hypothesised by Bandura in the 1970s. It assumes that knowledge, skills, strategies, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours

can be learnt through observing others. It emphasises that learning has a social nature. Bandura (1977) categorise learning into two types: enactive and vicarious learning. Enactive learning occurs when enacting a behaviour and observing the consequences. Vicarious learning means learning without obvious completion of a behaviour and it happens through watching or listening to models of instruction such as texts or people. Thus, learners who see their parents read for pleasure are likely to enjoy reading themselves. This theory explains the rare habit of reading by the new generation of Libyan learners whose grandparents and parents were not able to read or write as a result of refusing to enrol in the Italian schools during the Italian colonial period from 1912 to 1943. *“Seeing parents reading may affect children’s attitudes to reading, and parents’ reading habits are also likely to be positively linked to parents’ reading ability”* (Sullivan and Brown, 2013:10).

3.7.2.2 Cognitive Skill Theory

The cognitive skill theory was postulated by Anderson in the 1980s. It focuses on the nature of changes in developing skills over time. Learners’ cognition can influence the direction and persistence of achievement-related behaviours (Schunk, 1989). According to Anderson (1982), there are three stages of skill acquisition: the declarative stage, knowledge compiling and the procedural stage. In the declarative stage, initial skill learning takes place; that is, learners encode the information needed to complete a skill. For learning how to read, learners start learning the letters of the alphabet and decode words letter by letter. In the second phase, learners fix any errors occurred in the encoding stage and transform information into procedures that can be practiced. Thus, learners of reading no more need decoding

words letter by letter, as they acquire the ability of automatic recognition of words. In the procedural stage, learner start to gain expertise through practising their skills. In this phase, learners develop their reading comprehension skills. Learners' beliefs and attitudes can largely affect their learning process.

3.7.2.3 Model of Domain Learning

The model of domain learning was coined by Alexander in the late 1990s. It is a model of expertise development and learning improvement in academic areas. According to Alexander (2003), this model includes three stages: acclimation, competency, and proficiency or expertise. During the acclimation stage, learners have incomplete and limited knowledge of the task and use surface strategies like rereading and paraphrasing. When they try to read, they might face difficulties with some or all aspects of reading including decoding, vocabulary knowledge and comprehension. Learners enter the competence phase when their knowledge becomes sufficient and they start understanding tasks and using some deep-processing strategies such as reflecting on reading texts and evaluating them. Readers in the expertise stage can process a broad principled knowledge base and can easily use deep-processing strategies. Following this model for assessing students and deciding what successful learners do can help teachers to select appropriate reading material.

3.7.3 Learning of reading comprehension strategies

Foreign-language researchers have stressed the importance of training language learners to be strategic readers. Strategies help students turn

information into knowledge and use it in an active way (Harvey and Goudvis, 2013). Therefore, skilful readers adopt and use reading strategies more frequently than unskilled readers do (Park and Kim, 2011). Students need to be trained to practise reading skills in class.

3.7.4 Reading comprehension strategies

Comprehension is an underlying part of learning and a complex process with many layers of understanding. Reading comprehension is also prerequisite to a student's ability to successfully engage in text. It is therefore the teacher's task to ensure that students are effectively trained in various comprehension and reading strategies because students must apply a variety of comprehension strategies to achieve satisfactory understanding. Reading comprehension skills are essential for learners if they are to grasp the meaning of the text and understand the content efficiently. Researchers such as Grabe and Stoller (2002), Machado (2010) and Karasakaloglu (2012) emphasise that without developing reading skills, learners will struggle and continually focus on decoding letters and words instead of focusing on meaning and understanding. A successful and efficient reader is a reader that can use all or most of these reading comprehension skills.

Reading comprehension strategies are viewed by Karasakaloglu (2012) as the activities which allow students to control their own learning. In fact, there are difficulties with distinguishing between reading skills and reading strategies as a fundamental concern in second language reading involves the identification and nature of reading skills (Hudson, 2007). According to Nuttall (2005) and Manoli and Papadopoulou (2012), these terms are often used

interchangeably by many researchers and educators. For example, Mobalegh and Saljooghian (2012:1180) claim that “*these skills are generally called reading strategies*” that can be defined as “*mental operations relating to how readers perceive a task, what textual cues they attend to, how they make sense of what they are reading, and what to do when they do not understand*”. However, Hudson (2007) indicates that some researchers distinguish between reading skills and reading strategies by seeing skills as subconscious and strategies as conscious activities. According to Grabe and Stoller (2002:15), skills “*represent linguistic processing abilities that are relatively automatic in their use and their combination*” while strategies refer to “*a set of abilities under conscious control of the reader*”. Similarly, Manoli and Papadopoulou (2012) present some differences between reading skills and strategies as follows: while skills are automatic, unconscious, effortless, and text-oriented; strategies are deliberate, conscious, effortful, flexible, adaptable and reader-oriented. Nevertheless, they state that skills and strategies are two faces of the same coin because strategies, through practice and repetition, can become automatic like skills.

Skills and strategies are often used interchangeably in this research for the purpose of this study and due to the current situation that the targeted students’ reading comprehension is inadequate because of their lack of these skills and strategies. In other words, there is no point at this stage to distinguish between reading skills and reading strategies as the ultimate goal is to improve the students’ comprehension performance and help them develop any abilities related to reading comprehension.

3.7.4.1 Cognitive and Metacognitive strategies

Text comprehension is a complex task that involves many different cognitive and meta-cognitive skills and strategies (Matsumoto et al., 2013). Ahmadi and Ismail (2012:159) state that *“reading comprehension is a combination of the reader’s cognitive and meta-cognitive processes”*. It is noteworthy that students should combine these strategies to achieve competence in reading. This is confirmed by Staden (2011) who lays emphasis on the effectiveness of using reading comprehension strategies in combination. However, Huang and Newbern (2012:67) claim that *“metacognitive strategies are deemed as higher order cognitive skills due to their role in overseeing other cognitive skills”*. This claim is also implied by Ahmadi et al. (2013:236) who also assume that *“metacognitive reading strategy awareness has become one of the effective ways to facilitate students’ reading comprehension in the field of second/ foreign language studies”* because *“readers who are meta-cognitively aware know what to do when they face difficulty in learning”*. Kang (2014) also supports this view and thinks that using appropriate meta-cognitive reading skills is beneficial in making students fluent readers.

Through a study carried out on Spanish and Russian groups of EFL students, O’Malley and Chamot (1999) identify some learning strategies used by foreign language students, which include: cognitive strategies such as translation, rehearsal, note taking, substitution, and contextualization; and meta-cognitive like organisational planning and delayed production. Egbert and Petrie (2008) categorise strategies under three groups: meta-cognitive (planning for, monitoring, or evaluating the success of a learning activity), cognitive (rehearsal, organisation, inference, or summarising), and

social/effective (cooperation, questioning, self-talk).

Egbert and Petrie (2008) emphasise the value of the learner's conscious choice and application of the appropriate strategy to a certain learning task. They claim that this issue can make the difference between effective and less effective language learners. Good students demonstrate adeptness at matching the strategies to the task they are working on whereas the less successful learners lack the meta-cognitive knowledge about task requirements that help in selecting the appropriate strategies. This is supported by Ghafournia (2014) who also believes that the more efficient the reader is, the more conscientiously and effectively s/he uses the reading strategies.

3.7.4.1.1 Cognitive skills

All researchers agree on the importance of developing reading skills and strategies. To become effective readers, students have to develop their reading comprehension skills (Grabe and Stoller, 2002). However, it is noteworthy that different language specialists list rather different types of reading skills. Harmer (2002) lists a number of skills of reading such as predicting, guessing word meaning, reading for specific information, scanning, skimming, reading for general comprehension, inferring from texts, interpreting texts, surveying text organisation, and critically evaluating texts. In addition to this list of reading skills, Madhumathi and Ghosh (2012) mention other reading skills like using mental images, envisaging, asking questions and monitoring comprehension. Alderson (2000) highlights the importance of using different reading skills for different text types; for

example, to recognise and use memorised elements when texts are enumerative and to skim and scan while reading orientated texts like newspapers and messages. The skills of decoding and classifying are implemented with instructive texts whereas inferring, guessing and interpreting are used for evaluating literary texts. Below are the main reading skills that are noted by different linguists:

Skimming

Skimming is defined by Nuttall (2005:49) as “*glancing rapidly through a text to determine its gist*”. Skimming helps people save time when they are after specific information. Skimming as a more thorough activity requires an overall view of the text and implies a confident reading competence (Grellet, 2010). McDonough and Shaw (2003) indicate that skimming helps skilled readers to extract general information from a text and scanning helps them to locate specific information in it. Skimming seems to be an important skill for reading comprehension because it facilitates getting a general understanding of the text quickly (Grabe and Stoller, 2002).

Scanning

Scanning is a means of selecting specific information in a text (Patesan et al., 2014). It involves looking for specific words/phrases, figures, names or dates of a particular event. According to Nuttall (2005:49), scanning is “*glancing rapidly through a text either to search for a specific piece of information (e.g. a name, a date) ... or to get an initial impression of whether the text is suitable for a given purpose*”. When a reader is good at scanning, it will be easy for him/her to dismiss any unneeded information, which saves time and

effort. Scanning appears to be more teachable and easier to apply than some other reading skills and it can help students to pass their exams but it does not guarantee full understanding of a text.

Browsing

Browsing is a “*sort of reading where goals are not well defined, parts of a text may be skipped fairly randomly, and there is a little attempt to integrate the information into a macrostructure*” (Urquhart and Weir, 1998:103). Students might use browsing when they are asked to select topics or texts. It can be more effective when the purpose of reading is definite. It is also helpful in extensive reading.

Prediction

According to Ahmadi and Ismail (2012:157), predicting includes “*joining the reader’s background knowledge, new information from the passage, and the passage’s construction to make assumptions*” that are related to the writer’s message. As Nuttall (2005) suggests, the importance of prediction lies in activating schemata and thinking along with the writer using one’s own experience to resolve difficulties. Prediction occurs when the reader brings his/her own knowledge and experience to the text, which makes it easy and smooth for them to make out the meaning of the text. Johnson (2001) points out that prediction is part of the top-down process. The previous knowledge or experience of a reader helps them to predict what the writer is going to say next. Grellet (2010) indicates that making use of grammatical, lexical and cultural clues helps readers predict what is to come next.

A successful reader depends largely on prediction and does not have to go

through each and every line in the text. Prediction begins with the title of a text and continues throughout the whole process of reading. Sometimes prediction may be wrong, yet it makes the reader think about the topic as prediction is useful even when it is not successful (Nuttall, 2005). Efficient readers always depend on their ability to predict what comes next. They use minimum clues from the text in order to reach the appropriate meaning of the text. Grellet (2010) and Cuperman (2014) suggest that teachers should make their students think about the topic, use key words of the text and ask themselves questions about the various ways the text may develop. When it is applicable, using pictures is one way to help students predict what is coming next (Harmer, 2002). On the other hand, Johnson (2001) suggests that using cloze exercises, in which learners are given a text with some words missing, can help learners develop predictive skills. Prediction is one of the skills that can be rather easily enhanced by teachers and developed by learners, even those in the primary school. It is important for teachers to stop starting a reading class by writing or telling their students the title of the reading text instead of showing them some pictures or giving them some clues to encourage their imagination and let them start predicting.

Inferencing

Inferencing is “*to make assumptions and logical deductions from concrete ideas*” (Cuperman, 2014:50). When a text does not state something directly, it is the reader’s responsibility to infer this information. Thus, inferencing is linked to the process of reconstructing the writer’s unstated ideas. Readers can make use of syntactic, logical and cultural clues to discover the meaning of these unknown elements (Grellet, 2010). Accordingly, the purpose of

inferencing is to help readers to fill in the gaps in information and go beyond the literal meaning of words in a text to create a fully comprehensive image (Hogan et al., 2011). In addition, Nuttall (2005) indicates that readers can use their inferencing skills to draw a certain conclusion from facts or points in an argument, etc. that a text mentions, but as Snowling and Hulme (2005) point out, it is difficult for less skilled comprehenders to make inferences while reading. Teachers can enhance the inferencing skill of students in a reading class by using key or clue words and by raising inferential questions. The importance of inferencing was highlighted by Davis in the 1940s. Hudson (2007) cites Davis's four factors or skills that can help learners in reading comprehension which are: knowledge of word meaning, drawing inferences from the content, finding answers to questions answered explicitly or in paraphrase in the passage and weaving together ideas in the content, and drawing inferences about the meaning of a word from context.

It should be noted that inferencing is not necessarily of certainty. It is about probabilities. But these possibilities may gradually turn into certainties when the reader meets a word more frequently and understands it more explicitly. According to Nuttall (2005), inferencing affects the interpretation of a text to a large extent, helps the students to read texts more quickly and makes reading more enjoyable because of its problem-solving character which appeals to most people and which challenges students to make use of their intelligence. In order to infer a piece of information of a given text effectively, students should make use of common sense, power of reasoning, knowledge of the world and other cultures. However, because the English and Arab cultures are totally different, it might be difficult for Libyan students to gain

such a skill and apply it effectively, especially as Libya is not a culturally diverse country.

Previewing

Grabe and Stoller (2002:263) define previewing as “*a pre-reading activity that introduces students to key features of a text*”, which helps students to establish their expectations about what and how information is organised. Previewing is a quick technique for the reader who wants to find out where the required information is likely to be (Grellet, 2010). It involves using the title of a text, the table of contents, the index, the appendix, the preface of the author or publisher, headings or subtitles of chapters and paragraphs, information in the back cover, abstracts of journal articles, acknowledgement etc.

This useful skill saves students time in leading them towards intended and specific information that they look for. For example, instead of spending a long time reading a whole book for locating specific information, the students can check the table of contents or the text on the back cover to decide whether they need that book or not.

Recognising Text Organisation

To recognise text organisation means to be able to identify the internal structure of sentences and textual pattern, which may enable the reader to predict the likely values of sentences; and this in turn will help them to interpret difficult texts. According to Lo et al. (2013:413), text structure “*refers to the way the writers organise information in text*”. Zarrati et al. (2014) identify two kinds of information in texts: content information and structural

information. While readers use content information to construct a meaningful mental representation of a text, they use structural information to organise the content and thus facilitate the process of making meaning of a text. Thus, knowledge of text structure is important for comprehension (Hudson, 2007; Cain, 2010). The identification of how the text is organised and how the ideas hang together makes it easier to interpret difficult sentences (Nuttall, 2005). A reading text will probably be like a puzzle to the readers who are unable to recognise how it is organised and how the ideas in a text are structured.

Mobalegh and Saljooghian (2012) suggest that cohesion is one of the aspects that show how well-organised a passage is. They identify five kinds of cohesive ties: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion. Reference means interpreting something in a text by referring to something else; substitution is replacing an item by another; ellipsis is omitting an item which is not key in a text; conjunctions are devices that express certain meanings; and lexical cohesion is related to selecting vocabulary. The consistency of thinking and knowledge of text structure and organisation are helpful in facilitating reading comprehension.

Shared Assumptions

For any communication to take place, it is essential for the reader and the writer to have certain things in common (Nuttall, 2005). Sharing the code is the minimum requirement as it is not logical to read a text in a language that one does not know. Vocabulary is also an important area to be shared between the writer and the reader. Shared assumptions include some other intangible things like attitudes, beliefs, values, culture and customs, which

may contribute significantly to a better understanding of a text if they are common or identical.

It is obvious that the shared assumptions between the writer and the reader affect the development of the reading skills; that is, the more assumptions the writer and the reader share, the more effective the reading is. With the major differences between the English culture and Libyan culture, they are not expected to have many shared assumptions. This skill is relevant to the schema process and the background knowledge of the reader.

3.7.4.1.2 Meta-cognitive skills

Metacognitive reading skills can facilitate students' reading comprehension (Ahmadi et al., 2013). They help students to regulate and monitor cognitive strategies (Madhumathi and Ghosh, 2012; Nergis, 2013; and Ahmadi et al., 2013) and enable them to cope with the reading difficulties encountered and make necessary adjustments (Dabarera et al., 2014). According to Huang and Newbern (2012), metacognition involves components such as selecting strategies, setting goals, and monitoring one's own progress. Metacognitive reading strategies are of interest because they direct the ways readers arrange their interaction with the text and what strategies to use to achieve effective reading comprehension (Ahmadi et al., 2013). Baleghizadeh (2011) highlights the effectiveness of engaging learners in meaningful interactions with texts to help them with reading comprehension.

It seems that metacognitive reading strategies are crucial in facilitating EFL reading comprehension and improving students' reading skills. It is the teachers' responsibility to enhance their students' reading strategies. This is

presumed by Ahmadi and Gilakjani (2012) who strongly emphasise that when students do not have adequate reading skills, teachers should be able to train them how to use meta-cognitive strategies effectively in order to enable these students to avoid focusing only on words rather than the meaning of the whole text. Planning, monitoring and evaluation are the main metacognitive reading strategies. Planning takes place before reading, monitoring is a while-reading strategy to check understanding during reading and evaluation is activated after reading to assess the reading experience (Dabarera et al., 2014).

Planning

According to Ahmadi et al. (2013:237), planning is *“the process of thinking about and organising the activities required to achieve a desired goal”*. Planning, as a reading skill, helps readers to select the appropriate strategies while reading. Cogmen and Saracaloglu (2009) relate planning to having a reading purpose before and while reading. This helps readers to be selective and focused on the desired information.

Monitoring

Monitoring is the strategy of analysing information. In general, it is *“the ability to know what has been done right or wrong and to integrate new information with prior existing knowledge”* (Yang, 2002:19). According to Hogan et al. (2011:8), comprehension monitoring *“involves the capacity to reflect on one’s own comprehension and includes the ability to detect inconsistencies within a text”*. Grabe and Stoller (2002) emphasise that readers should monitor their reading behaviour to find out whether they understand the information in a

text appropriately and interpret it meaningfully. Snowling and Hulme (2005) and Vorstius et al. (2013) also highlight the positive effect of monitoring in reading comprehension. In fact, Snowling and Hulme (2005) associate low reading comprehension with low monitoring performance. The purpose of monitoring is *“to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of a project... It facilitates keeping the work on track...it is an invaluable tool for better controlling while reading”* (Ahmadi et al., 2013:237,238). It enables the students to determine whether their abilities and resources are sufficient. Vorstius et al. (2013:202) indicate that

successful comprehension monitoring requires the ability to notice instances in which coherence in a given text cannot be established and thus needs appropriate actions to resolve the problem.

Students should develop and practice this strategy when reading texts because if they lack it, their reading comprehension will be negatively affected and they may lose confidence as a result of the difficulties they face in understanding what they read when they have no solutions to achieve comprehension. Teachers can help their students monitor themselves in reading classes through error detection activities, self-questioning training, and questioning the author. Training students in generating their own comprehension questions was highly recommended by Baleghizadeh (2011).

Evaluation

Ahmadi et al. (2013:238) define evaluation as *“appraising the conclusion and regulatory processes of an individual’s learning”*. Through evaluating the plan and the accomplishment of text reading, students facilitate their reading comprehension. Many students face difficulties in understanding texts

adequately and make mistakes in interpreting many texts. Teachers can promote their students' evaluation skills by informing them about the mistakes they commit, making them aware about the difficulties they encounter and identifying the areas of challenge to students in reading comprehension. This is recommended by Akyol et al. (2014) who highlight the effectiveness of this procedure when an appropriate environment and guidance are provided.

Taking into account the above-mentioned skills and strategies which should be acquired by proficient readers, many Libyan students might be categorised as less effective language learners. The question is: is it fair for Libyan students to be labelled as such without having any opportunity to be taught such strategies and skills or at least to be made aware of them at all?

3.7.5 Linguistic abilities

There is a strong relationship between the reader's linguistic ability and their reading ability (Snowling and Hulme, 2005; Hudson, 2007). According to Nassaji (2003:263), *"linguistic deficiency constrains the reading comprehension process, and limited language proficiency leads to inefficient processing of text"*. Linguistic abilities include word-level processes and text-level processes. Word-level processes usually involve orthographic processing, vocabulary identification and size, morphological awareness, and phonological awareness, which facilitate reading comprehension through the linguistic knowledge of words in a text. On the other hand, text-level processes are related to knowledge about syntactic structures and schemata, which help readers access understanding a reading text as a whole.

3.7.5.1 Phonological processing and awareness

Phonological processing/awareness is a core component of readers' linguistic abilities of lexical identification (Blythe et al. 2015). It is an important factor in reading comprehension (Lipka and Siegel, 2012). Willis (2008:162) defines phonological processing as "*identifying the individual sounds that make up words (phonemes) and subsequently identifying the words that the sounds combine to make*". Phonological awareness reflects sensitivity to the phonological structure of words and the ability to identify phonemes in spoken language (Boer et al., 2014). According to Blythe et al. (2015), during phonological processing, beginning readers involve themselves in phonological decoding (an effortful and conscious identification of words by associating the printed letters in a word with their speech sounds) whereas skilled readers utilise the strategy of phonological recoding (a rapid and non-conscious activation of abstract phonological codes). With increased reading experience over time, word identification becomes a more automated process and phonological processing becomes more important as readers' abilities develop (Blythe et al. 2015). Phonological awareness contributes equally to silent and oral reading (Boer et al., 2014). However, in silent reading, the phonological activation is implicit, automatic and quicker than it is when reading aloud which requires overt articulation of words that is slow and needs explicit phonological coding (Alario et al, 2007).

Letter-sound knowledge is a critical skill that is closely related to phonological awareness and learning to read (Melby-Lervåg et al., 2012). Phonological processing sits alongside orthographic processing in printed word identification and reading development (Blythe et al., 2015). They are

reciprocally related as the phonological processing is important in the construction of the orthographic lexicon (Sprenger-Charolles et al., 2003).

3.7.5.2 Orthographic processing

Orthographies can be alphabetic as in English and Arabic or non-alphabetic such as Chinese (Melby-Lervåg et al., 2012). Orthographic processing concerns the ability to form, store and access orthographic representations, which might be in the form of individual letters or a group of letters (Sun-Alperin and Wang, 2011). According to the Japanese researcher, Matsumoto (2013) there is a strong impact of L1 orthography on L2 reading development and strategy use. In fact, when the orthographies are similar, first language skills may facilitate L2 learning (Hudson, 2007). However, if the orthographic systems of L1 and L2 are different, the acquisition of reading skills in L2 will be affected (Abu-Rabia et al., 2013). This is the case between English and Arabic.

As a Semitic language, Arabic is different from English which is an Indo-European language with a Roman alphabet: the scripts are entirely different. Moreover, the way Arabic-speakers' eyes shift when reading in Arabic is the opposite to the way English language is read: while Arabic reads from right to left, English reads from left to right. This may negatively affect the Arab students' attitude towards reading in English. According to Moore (2010), who has fifteen years' experience teaching ESL/EFL in Canada, Japan, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, what causes problems at deep levels for Arab EFL learners is the need to adapt from the right-to-left writing and reading system of Arabic to the left-to-right writing and reading system of English

besides the different symbols, strange new sounds and cultural values as well as the backwards orientation when proceeding from page to page.

3.7.5.3 Morphological processing and awareness

Morphology plays an important role in L1 reading comprehension (Koda, 2005; Kieffer and Lesaux, 2012). Similarly, Jeon (2011) emphasises the need for more attention to morphological awareness in L2 reading instruction of older readers because morphology becomes increasingly important as contact with academic texts increases. Carlisle and Stone (2003:28) define morphological awareness as “*the capability to reflect on and/or manipulate the morphological structure of words*”. Morphological awareness distinguishes good readers from poor readers who demonstrate a weakness in developing morphological processes to analyse words into meaningful morphemes (Tong et al., 2011). A morpheme is “*the smallest semantic unit of a language*” (Jeon, 2011:223) and a word can have one or more morphemes. The more morphologically complex a word is, the more units of meaning a word contains within the word-form and the longer it will take to analyse (Nassaji, 2003). According to Koda (2005), morphology contributes to reading through multiple routes. The semantic knowledge of commonly occurring morphemes can speed up a young reader's word learning process and, consequently, improve reading abilities. Recognition of known morphemes in a newly encountered, derived word could help with word recognition speed and accuracy, facilitating fluent reading comprehension. Morpheme recognition can also help a reader infer the meaning of a newly encountered word in a reading passage.

Morphology and vocabulary knowledge have been found to correlate highly

with each other because of their shared involvement with the semantic aspects of language (Jeon, 2011). Morphological awareness may help the development and broadening of vocabulary, which facilitates successful reading comprehension (Kieffer and Lesaux, 2012). Through morphological analysis, readers can work out the meaning of unknown vocabulary by thinking of related stems and examining affixes (Rivers, 2000). In summary, most of the contribution of morphological awareness to reading comprehension seems to be through the facilitation of accurate and rapid word reading (Kieffer and Lesaux, 2012).

3.7.5.4 Vocabulary knowledge and word identification

Vocabulary knowledge and the capacity of vocabulary are essential elements for students' effective reading comprehension (Roehrig and Guo, 2011; Nezami, 2012). Hudson (2007: 227) also states that "*vocabulary is a considerable factor in reading ability. Consequently, it appears that a large vocabulary can facilitate reading comprehension*". Reading comprehension and vocabulary are inextricably linked because knowing the meaning of words has a direct effect on knowing the meaning of the text. Students with limited vocabulary have difficulties in recognising key words in reading texts, which might negatively affect their reading comprehension. When students are engaged in reading a text where they encounter a large number of unfamiliar words, they might think that the language of the text is difficult and that may stop them from understanding the text as a whole. Nassaji (2014) highlights the importance of word recognition skills in order to recognise and access the meaning of the print. In other words, the ability to infer the meaning of unknown words from text is an important reading skill (Alderson,

2000). Consistently, Koda (2005) cautions against the premature implementation of higher-level processes such as focusing on ideas across sentences with learners who still struggle with word meaning extraction because this can have a negative impact on L2 learners and may lead to confusion and frustration.

There is a strong relationship between vocabulary size and reading comprehension (Kieffer and Lesaux, 2012). Students who cannot recognise too many words in a text probably face more difficulties in reading comprehension than other students. Texts that contain many unfamiliar words can be challenging even for the advanced level students especially if word meanings are central to comprehension (Kuzborska, 2012; Snowling and Hulme, 2005). Therefore, applying the skill of locating the key words in a text can cover students' vocabulary weaknesses when they read (Lehr and Osborn, 2001; Roehrig and Guo, 2011). In addition, contextualisation of vocabulary is a key element for understanding a text. Foley and Thompson (2003:208) state that "*Learners must be able to contextualise a text*". Ur (2005) also encourages learners to try to guess the meaning of the incomprehensible vocabulary from the surrounding context and to focus on the significant bits of the text.

Both intensive reading and extensive reading at the students' level can lead to vocabulary enrichment and word development (Rashidi and Piran, 2011). According to Rivers (2000), teachers can aid their students in extracting meaning of texts in an interactive way when they follow these techniques:

- to discuss possible meaning of new vocabulary, and use synonyms and

antonyms in the target language;

- to encourage students to work at meaning through morphological analysis and think of related stems and examining prefixes and suffixes;
- to paraphrase phrases in which the unfamiliar words occur;
- to make use of the context about structural as well as semantic elements and encourage students to draw inferences from them;
- to demonstrate parallelism with native-language structures where applicable.

Although the above-mentioned techniques can be practical and effective, some of them might be difficult to apply because of the radical differences between English and Arabic languages. Moreover, these techniques need to be applied by well-qualified teachers who have the linguistic ability (in syntax, semantics, phonology and morphology) as well as the knowledge of English culture.

Cain (2010) argues that knowledge of the meanings of words in a text is an indicator of reading comprehension, but Chun (2001) claims that L2 learners with low proficiency in their second language rely more on vocabulary knowledge than learners with high proficiency. Thus, it can be debated whether comprehending a text is guaranteed once a reader understands the meanings of all the key words without any prior knowledge about the topic and without understanding how words are put together in sentences.

3.7.5.5 Grammar and syntactic awareness

Syntactic awareness represents the ability to recognise and use the grammatical structures of a language (Chik et al., 2012). Syntactic awareness

can predict reading comprehension (Guo et al., 2011). Consistently, Nergis (2013) emphasises the significance of the syntactic awareness of L2 learners in their reading comprehension. Guo et al. (2011) identify two levels of syntactic awareness: low-level and high-level syntactic abilities. Low-level syntactic awareness includes the awareness of the sentence as a basic unit of language, knowledge about grammatical acceptability and how well sentences are formed, and judgements about the relations between syntactic structure and semantic properties of sentences. On the other hand, high-level syntactic abilities are related to the ability to identify and formulate the rules of syntax and the ability to control and reflect on one's performance and knowledge of syntactic rules and structures. This knowledge might affect the ease or difficulty of texts that L2 readers encounter (Hudson, 2007). Trying to emphasise the importance of grammar in L2 reading, Grabe (2009) lists some roles that grammar can play in facilitating reading comprehension. Some of these roles are: disambiguating ideas, tracking referents, timing the events, and providing information about content through the way words and sentences are ordered. Such grammatical roles provide important information needed for text comprehension and interpretation.

Snowling and Hulme (2005) highlight the effectiveness of adopting a high coherence standard in developing comprehension to higher levels and supporting interest in reading. Establishing text coherence is fundamental for successful reading comprehension, and the use of connectives is an important system to convey structural organisation that expresses underlying relational information of text (Koda, 2005). In other words, mastering the use of connectives represents the learner's ability in understanding and, hence,

making use of logical meanings between clauses exemplified by a range of connectives. Thus, connectives are important syntactic devices that may enhance learners' comprehension.

Many students have problems with reading comprehension and understanding text organisation because they fail to understand the English syntax. In addition, there is a big difference between English and Arabic sentence formulas and word order. While the English sentence follows the structure of SVO (subject+ verb+ object), the Arabic sentence has the structure of VSO (verb+ subject+ object) and also in English, adjectives precede nouns whereas in Arabic they follow nouns. Research in some Arab countries shows the contribution of linguistic deficiency of many students to their poor comprehension when reading English texts. For instance, through a study carried out by Alkhawaldeh (2010) on Jordanian students, he reported that students face difficulty in understanding the grammatical structure of some texts and in distinguishing main ideas from secondary ideas in texts, which contributes to their poor reading comprehension. In line with this, based on a study conducted in an Algerian university to investigate some postgraduate physics students' reading comprehension problems, Azeroual (2013) attributes the students' comprehension difficulties to their linguistic problems mainly in grammar and vocabulary. The problem of inadequate reading comprehension seems to be similar in different parts of the Arab world.

It is clear that grammar and vocabulary are essential in the comprehension process because they enable readers to understand the words and individual sentences in a text, but still, successful readers should go beyond single-

word sentence understanding to comprehend the meaning of the whole text (Hogan et al., 2011). According to Ur (2005), learners understand the text better if they apply the background knowledge they have on the content of the text.

3.7.5.6 Schemata (background knowledge)

There are always some gaps of information in any piece of writing, and it is claimed that the reader will fill up these gaps with shared knowledge by both the writer and the reader. These assumptions are technically described as schemata. According to Nuttall (2005:7), schema is

a mental structure. It is abstract because it does not relate to any particular experience, although it derives from all the particular experiences we have had. It is a structure because it is organised; it includes the relationships between its component parts.

The schema is the knowledge that a person acquires from the different experiences s/he has. While reading, readers activate their relevant existing schemata and insert new information into them. The reader calls to mind any relevant experiences and associated knowledge that s/he already has, and it helps him/her interpret the text more clearly (Alderson, 2000). Thus, the previous knowledge of a reader on a topic largely affects their understanding and interpreting of a text. Nuttall (2005) has suggested that students' schemata and shared assumptions should be promoted to improve reading skills. Thus transferring prior knowledge into the reading environment and using strategies throughout the reading process enhance the reading environment and reading comprehension (Akyol et al., 2014). Because a schema involves individual experience, Zhao and Zhu (2012) argue that it

attracts students to reading through raising their interest, increasing their reading speed and helping them make proper judgements. This means that when readers lack the appropriate schema and prior knowledge, they will face difficulties in understanding what they read.

According to Zhao and Zhu (2012), there are three types of schemata: linguistic schema, formal schema and content schema. Linguistic schema includes prior knowledge about phonetics, grammar and vocabulary. It should be mentioned that a reader's linguistic schema does not guarantee understanding the message of a writer in a text but it facilitates understanding it. Formal schema is the knowledge of different text genres and their language and structural organisation. Content schema refers to the background knowledge and cultural knowledge about the topic of a reading text. Among the three types, content schema is considered as the most important one as lacking this kind of knowledge most negatively affects the reader's interpretation of texts.

Some of the schemata, like the content schema, can be transferred from L1 to L2 providing that the reading text is not culture-centred. Talebi (2013) states that the awareness and use of reading strategies transfer cross-linguistically from L1 to L2 and vice versa; however, he argues that the reader's proficiency level in L2 and how effectively s/he uses these strategies are essential factors in this transfer process. Park (2013) claims that L1 reading and L2 knowledge play a significant role in L2 reading comprehension, while Grabe and Stoller (2002:84, 85) indicate that foreign language teachers should assist "*students to transfer L1 reading strategies*"

and to gain “*sufficient L2 proficiency*”. This means that when readers are proficient in L2, they can benefit from transferring the strategies that they use when reading in their mother tongue; otherwise, transferring these strategies could have a negative effect on their reading comprehension in L2.

Koda (2005) states that readers’ comprehension of a text occurs when they extract and integrate various information from the text and combine it with their previous knowledge. Similarly, Alderson (2000:103) believes that “*what readers know will affect what they understand when reading*”. This argument is supported by McEntire (2003) who says that when reading, readers’ prior knowledge and experience affect their reading comprehension of the text being read. It is noteworthy that prior knowledge and experience are very effective in learners’ reading comprehension. When EFL learners lack background knowledge, they will find it difficult to comprehend a text (Lipka and Siegel, 2012). The question here is: what should teachers do if their students’ background knowledge and schemata are so insufficient that they are unreliable to help them interpret a text efficiently? Teaching reading comprehension in these circumstances is challenging.

3.8 Reading materials and texts

While reading is shaped by textbooks in primary and high schools, at university level, it is usually the teachers’ duty to select the materials for reading classes. For teaching reading comprehension skills, many lecturers often use general books for teaching English language such as ‘Headway’, ‘New English File’ and ‘English Straight Forward’. Most of the content and material of these sources are culturally-oriented, which might make it difficult

for students to understand the text efficiently. Pathan (2012) states that the materials and methodology used for teaching language skills in Libyan universities, especially the reading comprehension skill, vary from teacher to teacher as there are no prescribed textbooks. Teachers have more flexibility to design their courses and select materials for their students. This gives freedom of material selection to the course teacher. This situation has always resulted in curricula with no particular system or standardisation, even among teachers working in the same department. In addition, teaching is influenced by the students' mixed ability of achievement and knowledge, class sizes and allotted time.

Thus, one of the most effective factors regarding the level of learners' reading comprehension is the choice of reading materials by teachers. Selecting appropriate reading materials in terms of genres, difficulty, interest and cultural background and choosing topics that suit students' interest is the core of teaching reading as it helps students improve their reading skills (Harmer, 2002; Adam et al., 2013). Teachers' selection of materials can also affect students' involvement in the class (Richards and Renandya, 2004). Ur (2005) suggests some tips to teachers of reading comprehension for choosing appropriate texts like selecting texts where the language is comprehensible and not too difficult and the content is accessible to the learners and not too far removed from their knowledge and experience. According to Nuttall (2005), the main criteria that influence the choice of texts are suitability of content, exploitability, and readability. In order to be suitable in content, texts should interest the readers. The exploitability of texts refers to the facilitation of learning whereas readability refers to the combination of

structural and lexical difficulty. Alderson (2000) and Rivers (2000) also assert that text content affects readers' processing of texts.

A reader may face difficulty when reading something written by someone in a language with different cultural assumptions (McDonough and Shaw, 2003). This means that students of different cultures and environments cannot be expected to face the same difficulties in reading comprehension classes. Nonetheless, Asghar and Al-Bargi (2014) assert that reading texts with a conceptual and cultural focus helps readers perceive the world in their schematic background and enables them to fill in the gaps between their knowledge and the new knowledge. Some language-teaching specialists such as Harmer (2002) advise teachers to motivate language learners and overcome some cultural barriers to language learning through authentic materials. The traditional reading materials are inadequate because they focus on the structural usage rather than teaching reading skills and the reading items do not have authentic features of real text (McDonough and Shaw, 2003). On the other hand, authentic materials are ordinary texts that are not produced specifically for language teaching purposes (Carter and Nunan, 2001). For instance, the Internet provides a rich source of authentic materials and keeps the students motivated to continue learning and using the new language after their formal classes (Wu et al., 2013). However, Hudson (2007) and Kaya et al. (2015) point out that the identification, preparation and organisation of these materials and the tasks that can suit the learners' levels may become very time-consuming for the teacher, or may provide the learner with boring or irrelevant material. Through a study conducted to recognise Libyan EFL teachers' attitudes and beliefs regarding

the use of authentic reading materials at university level in Libya, Soliman (2013) asserts that a good reading class should use a combination of both authentic texts and textbooks. Although he reports that the use of authentic materials has not yet received much attention in Libyan EFL classes, the results of his study show the positive attitudes of most EFL Libyan teachers towards using this type of material. However, due to the shortage of resources of authentic materials in Libya, it is difficult to keep up to date when trying to use such materials.

According to Pathan (2012), the use of short stories for developing language skills offers real and creative material that is rich in language selection as well as amusing and motivational in nature. In line with this, Ahmad (2012) emphasises that short stories as authentic reading materials give the language learners an opportunity to interact with the text emotionally and involve themselves personally. In addition to the authentic context that the use of short stories provides in the reading class, Pathan (2012) discusses some of the advantages of using short stories in English language teaching classrooms such as the linguistic, socio-cultural and personal benefits that language learners develop. Through an investigation of the Libyan EFL learners' perceptions towards using short stories for developing reading comprehension skills, Pathan (2012) has observed the Libyan EFL learners' positive attitudes towards the use of short stories in reading classes.

Marzban and Seifi (2013) emphasise the importance of considering the type of text and integrating different types of texts when teaching reading comprehension. Through a study on Turkish students, Yoshida (2012) found

that text types and task types affect students' comprehension and recall products to a large extent. Students will probably be less successful in understanding a text of a topic in which they are not interested and with which they are unfamiliar. Consequently, they may be reluctant to engage fully with an activity and their lack of engagement may be a major hindrance to reading comprehension. Therefore, "*familiarity with the topic of a text is essential for readers in either first language or second language to understand a writer's message*" (Hudson, 2007:161). Thus, to facilitate reading, it is important for students to know how texts are organised, what sort of information to expect, where to look for the main idea and how subsidiary ideas are marked. Naidu et al. (2013) highlight the effectiveness of tackling reading comprehension through the topic and main ideas of a text.

Text structure is one of the areas that could be problematic for students when they do not realise how the ideas of a text are expressed and messages are presented. Various kinds of texts have different structural elements, which needs the application of different types of reading skills (Harmer, 2002). Thus, understanding text structure is important because it can support reading comprehension. Marzban and Adibi (2014:393) point out that "*the identification and use of text arrangement are crucial procedures underlying reading comprehension*". According to Snowling and Hulme (2005), less-skilled readers have weakness in text structure understanding. In discussing the role of knowledge of text structure, Grabe (2009) also distinguishes successful readers as being able to identify how texts are organised and utilise this information effectively for better interpretation and understanding of the text.

Hudson (2007:224) states that “*genre is a central concept in understanding how text is organised*”. In other words, the type of a text determines how it is organised and how the paragraphs relate to each other. It may also affect the students’ level of understanding and their choice of reading skills and strategies to achieve comprehension. In order to provide students with sufficient opportunities to read different types of texts and for different purposes, Kuzborska (2012) argues that L2 reading teachers should be aware of different cultural preferences for structuring texts. Hudson (2007:225) also points out that “*differing cultural emphases, assumptions, and linguistic forms can create different textual structures designed to represent the same genre*”. This means that genres vary in their representations across cultures; therefore, readers from different languages and cultures need to recognise the potential differences among cultures in order to be good comprehenders.

Hudson (2007) and Marzban and Seifi (2013) categorise texts into two basic types: narrative and expository texts. Kraemar et al. (2012) regard narrative text as synonymous with story and expository texts as informational, the content of which is usually true. According to Marzban and Seifi (2013), the most common expository texts are description, enumerative, sequence, comparison and contrast, problem and solution and cause and effect.

Through preparing reading comprehension tests according to text types, the Turkish researcher, Sahin (2013), found that it is easier for students to understand narrative texts than informative texts. This is justifiable as narrative texts are likely to be more interesting and less complicated in the

structure and the ideas. But still, Pfoest et al. (2013) argues that narrative texts often contain metaphors, implicit and explicit indications and missing information that readers have to infer by themselves, which makes it difficult sometimes for readers to fully comprehend the whole text.

According to McCormick (2007), some of the factors that make expository texts difficult for readers to understand include text structure, new information, content-specific information, abstract concepts and readability level of the text. Yet, Kraemar et al. (2012) believe that when students are interested in the topic of the expository texts, they will demonstrate a high level of text understanding. On the other hand, Namjoo and Marzban (2014) highlight the positive effects of students' awareness of text-structure and critical thinking on their understanding of expository texts.

Alderson (2000) discusses different aspects related to texts that might facilitate or make difficult the reading process such as text topic and content, text type and genre, and text organisation and readability. Consistently, Shanahan et al. (2012) point out that when teachers understand what makes texts complex, they can support students in reading them in a better way. Some of the reasons that may make a text difficult to read and understand are when the reader is not familiar with the language in which a text is written; when the text is relevant to a specific science that the reader has no previous knowledge about; when the concepts expressed in a text are very complex and the language is intellectually challenging, and when the reader's vocabulary is so limited that s/he may encounter a lot of new vocabulary items (Nuttall, 2005). According to Shanahan et al. (2012), what probably

determines how hard it is for readers to make sense of a text are vocabulary, sentence structure, coherence, organisation of ideas and the reader's prior knowledge.

White (2012) also categorises the text features that can ease or obstruct text comprehension into three groups: those which facilitate the literacy task, those which increase overall task difficulty, and those that are related to inherent task difficulties. He points out that some of the text features that act as facilitators include repetition of key words; generic-specific cues (whose structural elements are predictable); discourse markers which show relationships between ideas in the text such as 'but and therefore'; and syntactic cues that facilitate comprehension through the use of sentence structures. Some of the text features that act as inhibitors are: the presence of misleading cues such as similar words and numbers; the presence of many specific pieces of information; very long sentences; low-frequency words; and long, polysyllabic and irregular words. On the other hand, some of the text features that may act as either facilitators or inhibitors (depending on the task) can be typographical devices (such as font size and boldface); organisational devices (like the headers and graphic devices); order of fact presentation; pronouns (clear or unclear referent); and information about the numbers and arithmetic operation. Teachers' familiarity with which text features facilitate or inhibit text comprehension helps them facilitate understanding of the texts by their students.

Nuttall (2005) argues that texts that are linguistically difficult may result in the use of translation, which is not suitable for developing reading skills. Shanahan et al. (2012) suggest three strategies that can help teachers to

facilitate difficult and challenging texts for students. They are: building students' skills, establishing the purpose of reading to students, and fostering motivation through combining complex texts with effective instructions. One of the ways to make a text more comprehensible is through modifying texts. Baleghizadeh (2011) identifies two directions of text modification: simplification and elaboration. In simplification, difficult words and structures are replaced by simpler or more familiar ones; and in elaboration, more information is added to texts. Consistently, Alderson (2000) suggests simplifying a text when it is found to be too difficult for learners so as to make it more readable. For instance, to pre-modify scientific texts without spoiling their authenticity, Rahimi and Rezaei (2011) recommend adopting the syntactic elaborative modification, a material adjustment technique, such as using two simple sentences instead of one complex sentence.

Nevertheless, Baleghizadeh (2011) discusses a number of reasons that make simplified materials not favoured by many language-teaching researchers. Some of these reasons are: creating choppy and unnatural discourse through the use of limited vocabulary along with short simple sentences; distorting the system of references, making it more difficult through repetition and redundancy; and depriving learners of the chance to learn the natural forms of language through replacing complex linguistic forms with more simple ones. Ironically, simplification seems to be a coin with two faces; that is, it sometimes makes a text more complicated rather than easier to understand. It is teachers' responsibility to choose which one suits their students better.

3.9 Issues related to teaching of reading comprehension

The problems experienced by students in learning reading appear to be as much to do with the teaching of reading comprehension as with the students' inability to master and develop their reading skills. Yazar (2013:36) argues that *“although reading is an individual activity, it requires guidance to develop basic reading skills”*. One of the obstacles that negatively affect teaching reading is the lack of expertise among educators who can effectively teach reading skills (Duke and Block, 2012). According to Sailors and Price (2015), to improve students' reading achievement and their ability to comprehend texts, it is essential to improve the ability of teachers to effectively teach their students. Providing relevant training for teachers can be effective when students begin to frequently practise reading and using any skills that they are trained to do.

3.9.1 Teachers' beliefs, attitudes and reflection

The traditional teaching method is teacher-centred, which makes students passive bystanders of the whole teaching process. Students are not encouraged to process the information from texts by themselves through an intellectual engagement, analysis and interpretation of the text. A traditional type of reading comprehension class consists of a text followed by comprehension questions to measure students' understanding of the text. The reading components of the English course focus on understanding word meaning and answering specific questions. The problem is that such questions are usually answerable even if they are incomprehensible or the students do not understand the text effectively. Students are not challenged in a way that helps them use and develop their reading skills. According to

Yazar (2013:35), *“to teach reading effectively, teachers should teach and make students use reading strategies and to choose the right one to understand the text”*. In consonance with this view, Lau et al. (2011) believe that students need to be taught and given time to read and interact with texts and should be encouraged to continue using these skills independently.

Teachers' perceptions and attitudes impact on and determine the success of the teaching process (Dabarera et al., 2014). When teachers implement ineffective strategies in teaching reading comprehension, they might unconsciously lead their students to poor comprehension. To support this, Coleman et al. (2005:80) argue that *“good teaching is being understood to be a matter of providing good learning experiences ... both at the level of quality performance activities and of a conducive learning environment”*. In other words, relying merely on traditional strategies might frustrate students rather than motivate them to read and learn. In order to teach reading comprehension effectively and improve comprehension instruction, teachers should monitor their own thinking processes, reflect on and discuss their reactions and insights with others (Keene and Zimmermann, 2013). Reflection on practice helps teachers to move from theoretical knowledge that they learned in their education to views of teaching consistent with their understanding of their situation and students (Crandall, 2000). It also enables teachers to develop pedagogical content knowledge, which does not seem to develop from teachers' education courses (Hashweh, 2005). According to Seferoglu (2010), teachers should be encouraged to share ideas and support each other through discussion and reflection on their teaching.

Teachers' beliefs about teaching have a strong influence on their instructional practices in reading comprehension (Hollenbeck, 2013). Farrell (2007:9) argues that *"...teachers must subject their own beliefs of teaching and learning to critical examination by...comparing these beliefs to their actual classroom practices"*. Consistently, Adam et al. (2013) recommend teachers to adopt the interactive approach in reading comprehension. This is in line with Grabe and Stoller (2002:226) who indicate that *"reflective teachers ask themselves questions about the effectiveness of their classroom instruction"*. In other words, *"If a teacher-education program is to change the way teachers teach, it needs to address their beliefs"* (Wyatt, 2014:1). Some of the issues that this study tries to address are to investigate how English reading comprehension is taught in the Department of English at Zawia University and to assess the views and attitudes of the students and lecturers concerning learning and teaching of reading comprehension. Elabbar (2011:11) illustrates a clear picture about the situation of Libyan teachers as follows:

Libyan teachers learned to be Libyan teachers in a particular social context, using a particular kind of knowledge at a particular time; therefore, their practices are socially constructed. The practices of Libyan teachers teaching English as a foreign language at the university level can be seen as constructed from their cultural background, views on learning and teaching, and the kind of education they have received They are a product of the way learning is managed in the university context.

The postgraduate courses in Libya provide teachers with theoretical information about curriculum knowledge and language skills. To shape teacher cognition and classroom practice, Macalister (2014:393) asserts that *"professional coursework in the form of pre- and in-service teacher education*

has an important role in improving the teaching of reading". However, Libyan teachers do not receive in-service training or professional support because the universities do not provide such courses based on the belief that university teachers are already qualified enough to teach any subject, which puts pressure on these teachers (Elabbar, 2011). Therefore, most Libyan teachers depend on their teaching experience without any critical analysis of their practice. Teachers need support for their professional development (Sailors and Price, 2015).

3.9.2 Motivating students to read

According to many language-teaching specialists, motivation is a key factor that influences reading development. Dornyei (2001:28) states that *"motivational strategies are techniques that promote the individual's goal-related behaviour"*. There are two main types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation comes from within the individual. Intrinsic reading motivation can lead to growth in reading comprehension skills and can contribute significantly to poor readers' performance in reading (Logan et al., 2011). It acts as an energiser (Taboada et al., 2009). Extrinsic motivation is something or someone that helps create the desire to learn. In a reading class, it is the teacher's responsibility to motivate students. Dornyei (2001:73) distinguishes three types of stimulation strategies that teachers should take into account; they include *"breaking the monotony of learning, making the tasks interesting, and increasing the involvement of the students"*.

Grellet (2010) explains that being motivated means starting reading the text prepared to find answers to a number of questions and specific interesting

information or ideas. A key feature in the successful teaching of reading skills concerns the choice of comprehension tasks (Rivers, 2000). The reading tasks sometimes appear to be testing the students rather than helping them to understand. Reading tasks should not be too easy or too difficult. They ought to be challenging but achievable to create a motivational environment for reading.

There are potential relationships between reading motivation and L2 reading strategy use (Matsumoto et al., 2013). Motivating learners to read can increase their reading amount and make reading a frequent practice, which will enable them to decode words automatically and help them gain topic knowledge and thus enhance their comprehension performance (Stutz et al., 2016). According to Harmer (2002:213), *"In order to get students to read enthusiastically in class, we need to work to create interest in the topic and task"*. Similarly, Dundar and Akyol (2014:362) point out that *"selecting the texts which catch the attention of students will increase their reading motivation"*. Chen (2012) suggests motivating EFL students through exposing them to children's literature and accompanying DVD films, and he highlights other benefits of this enjoyable method to EFL students in L2 reading classes such as improving learners' linguistic abilities, providing them with the chance to learn customs of a particular culture and influencing their reading proficiency in a positive way.

Trying to shed light on the reasons behind learning a foreign language and the powerfulness of the motivation of needing to read in that language, Allwright and Bailey (2002:164) argue that *"Learners do need to feel*

confident that success will bring positive rewards that at least outweigh the likely extra burdens that success may also bring". Moreover, Field (2000) claims that learning a foreign language will help learners get a better job. This is a good reason that can be given to motivate reluctant learners. Yet, Nuttall (2005) discusses the situation where the foreign language is only needed and read for classroom purposes, and suggests that students' low motivation is unsurprising if this is the case. This gives a clear picture of the circumstances in the English classes in Libya. According to Omar (2013), some of the reasons that make learning English demotivating and Libyan learners passive is the ignoring of speaking and listening activities by their teachers due to the limited time devoted to English classes, overcrowded classes and lack of facilities.

3.9.3 Methods of teaching how to read

Teaching learners to read accurately, fluently, and with adequate comprehension is one of the main goals of early education (Hulme and Snowling, 2011). Singh (2011) identifies four main methods that can be used to teach learners how to read: the phonics method, the 'look and say' method, the language experience approach, and the context support method. In the phonics method, learners are taught the names of the letters and the sounds they make, and then they learn how to blend letters together to make words. In the 'look and say' method, they learn how to read words as whole units. Sometimes words are accompanied by pictures or put in a meaningful context. The language experience approach uses learners' own words to make it easier for them to read. The context support method focuses on using reading material that is of interest to the learners' learning context.

Although the phonics method seems to be the oldest among the four methods of teaching how to read, it is still widely used in many parts of the world. It is used in Libyan schools for teaching how to read both in the mother tongue (Arabic) and in any other foreign language (mainly English).

3.9.4 Planning and work design

Ceranic (2009) discusses the importance of good planning for effective English teaching and learning. She believes that good planning and creating a supportive classroom environment are crucial for progression. To develop sound practice, teachers need time to plan and design their class work (Yeganehmw and Goudvis, 2013). Some of the activities that well-organised teachers carry out in a reading class are setting and clarifying the purpose of a lesson, organising the classroom, selecting the teaching techniques and learning activities, and evaluating students' achievement and progress (Carlisle et al., 2011). Armbruster et al. (2003) suggest some reading strategies a teacher can use to help students improve their comprehension skills. These strategies include: identifying where the difficulty is, identifying what the difficulty is, restating the difficult sentences in their own words, using the context clues in eliciting unknown vocabulary through answering questions or having students asking questions, recognising the structure of the text, having students monitor their own comprehension (which enables them to detect any inconsistencies and comprehension failure), summarising the reading text, and encouraging cooperative learning through letting students work and learn together. A reading class can be lively when these strategies and techniques are applied.

3.9.5 Stages of activities in reading classes

Akyol et al. (2014) emphasise the effectiveness of enhancing reading with activities for pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading stages. According to Yazar (2013), the aims of these three activities are as follows: the purpose of the pre-reading phase is to introduce the topic giving a reason for reading and to provide some language preparation for the text; the aims for the while-reading stage is to help students understand the writer's purpose and clarify the content and structure of the text being read; and the aim of the post-reading phase is to reflect upon what has been read and relate it to the students' own knowledge. Madaoui (2013) highlights the importance of pre-reading activities in aiding EFL reading comprehension in a significant way. Pre-teaching of vocabulary definitions is the traditional pre-reading activity that Libyan teachers carry out. This can be effective when the new key words in a text help to engage the students' background knowledge. Nuttall (2005) lists some pre-reading activities that can make students' tasks more explicit and the way they tackle it more effective, and these activities are: providing a reason for reading, introducing the text, breaking up the text, dealing with new language, and asking signpost questions. She also recommends combining three kinds of class organisation while reading, which are the individual mode where each student works on their own most of the time, the teacher-centred class where the teacher controls the class largely and decides the sequence of work and the group-work mode where much of the guidance comes from fellow students. After reading, the text as a whole must be evaluated. Students should link the content with their experience and knowledge, distinguish fact from opinion and weigh evidence. To do this,

Marzbanand and Adibi (2014) recommend having students write about the text they read. Hogan et al. (2011) also suggest some activities for a reading class: as a pre-reading activity, background knowledge should be activated; while reading, elements of text structure need to be identified and inferential questions should be asked to focus on inference making; after reading, the main points of a text ought to be summarised to increase comprehension monitoring. To help students practice summarisation, teachers may select some texts with familiar topics, provide students with guiding questions and ask them to take notes while reading (Willis, 2008).

Comprehending a text is a constructive process in which skilful readers are active in the different stages of the reading class: before reading, during reading and after reading (Henderson and Buskist, 2011). Before reading a text, students may activate their background knowledge by connecting to past experiences, which enables them to make prediction. During reading, good readers interact with the text and integrate it to their knowledge through activating their skills like self-monitoring and refining predictions. After reading, effective readers should be able to summarise and evaluate the text in hand.

3.9.6 Explicit instruction in strategy application

“One of the important factors that affects the quality university is the quality level of instructor and his/her course” (Kalayci and Cimen, 2012:838).

Ahmadi et al. (2013:235) claim that *“the teaching of reading comprehension strategy remains largely neglected in the field of English language teaching”* in spite of its importance. Lo et al. (2013) highlight the importance of EFL

reading instruction in helping students improve their comprehension by identifying the main idea of a paragraph and recognising paragraph elements. The type of instruction that promotes cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies helps students improve their reading comprehension (Gayo et al., 2014). According to Grabe and Stoller (2002:226),

The effectiveness of reading instruction is dependent on a large number of instructional and motivational factors including: appropriateness of lesson objectives; sequencing of classroom activities and tasks; clarity of instructions, suitability of materials and corresponding tasks; teacher flexibility and responsiveness to student needs; student attitudes, interest and motivation; pacing and time allotments; and teacher/student preparedness.

Grabe (2010) argues that many of the reading skills required for fluency are gained through implicit learning and reading practice rather than from explicit language instruction. However, some other researchers such as Ness (2011), Mobalegh and Saljooghian (2012), Huang and Newbern (2012), Dabarera et al. (2014) and Ghafournia (2014) suggest that reading strategies should be taught explicitly in order to make students aware of them and their effectiveness, and enhance students' confidence in reading and motivation to learn on their own. Ahmadi and Ismail (2012) claim that the explicit teaching of reading strategies is a solution to the problem of poor reading comprehension skills. Staden (2011) also argues that explicit guidance and explicit instructional techniques (like questioning, predicting, making inferences and summarising) make a significant improvement in students' reading comprehension through helping them to apply reading strategies in reading classes. Reading instruction should start from the word-level activity

to help students make connections between decoding words in a text and understanding the meaning of it as a whole (Yeh et al., 2012).

3.9.7 Modes of reading in class

In a reading class, teachers may ask their students to read either aloud or silently. Thus, the two modes of reading are oral reading and silent reading.

3.9.7.1 Oral reading

Fluent oral reading is a strong predictor of reading comprehension (Turkyilmaz et al., 2014). Reading aloud helps in analysing the mistakes readers make but it is not the normal way in which people read (Alderson, 2000). It is useful in the early stages (Nuttall, 2005). Arab learners prefer oral reading to silent reading (Lau et al., 2011). Reading aloud is the main way to learn and read in Arabic. This strong tradition of oral language has resulted in the situation where Arab children learning English employ the same strategy of reading aloud around the class that they used learning Arabic, as noted by Wyatt (2014) who taught in the Sultanate of Oman, an Arab country in the Gulf. However, the use of this traditional practice in English classes is time-consuming and not effective (Wyatt, 2014). Similarly, Nuttall (2005) stresses that overdoing the practice of getting language learners to read aloud around the class is dreary, demotivating and useless, unless it is done in order to help inadequate readers to read in groups or to round off work on a text. Moreover, Grabe and Stoller (2002) suggest that when reading aloud, readers must focus on every word, which may slow reading speed and impede reading comprehension. Thus, is silent reading more advantageous than reading aloud?

3.9.7.2 Silent reading

Silent reading is a reading skill that all readers need (Nuttall, 2005). It is the primary reading mode for proficient readers (Boer et al., 2014). Kim et al. (2011) support promoting silent reading fluency in classes; however, they warn of the possibility that students may pretend to be engaged in reading while they are not. In addition, when teachers ask the class to read a text silently, the faster students might become bored and restless as they finish long before the slower ones (Nuttall, 2005). The implementation of silent reading in beginners' classrooms has been deeply criticised for the following: lack of teacher guidance about how students can select challenging texts appropriately; poor control of the time allocated for reading practice; little or no teacher interaction with students around reading texts; no feedback to students about the quality and quantity of their reading; and no student responsibility, purposes, or goals for the time spent in reading practice (Reutzel et al., 2008). The setting where a teacher holds a book and reads silently in the independent reading time in class is unlikely to teach students much about why or how to read, but a teacher becomes a reading model by enthusiastically promoting books, by discussing books and by reading aloud interesting books (Reutzel and Juth, 2014).

Prior et al. (2011) encourage using both oral reading (reading aloud) and silent reading activities in reading instruction to facilitate comprehension. In fact, any single reading practice used exclusively over long periods of time tends toward tedium for both students and teachers (Reutzel et al., 2008). Whether oral or silent, reading should be fluent; that is, confident readers simultaneously comprehend what they read. According to Samuels (2007),

the major elements of fluent reading include accurate, effortless, and automatic word identification; grade-level-appropriate reading speed or rate; appropriate use of volume, intonation and stress to reflect expression; and correct text phrasing.

3.9.8 Reading fluency

Reading fluency development is one of the important components of a reading programme that influences students' reading comprehension through quick and accurate word recognition and meaningful ideas organisation (Macalister, 2014; Ari, 2015). According to Chang and Millett (2013) and Basaran (2013), good reading fluency usually indicates a high level of comprehension. Ari (2015b: 688) states that "*reading fluency refers to a process by which most of the words in a text are recognised automatically and their meanings accessed efficiently*". Grabe (2009:57) views reading fluency as "*the ability to read rapidly with ease and accuracy...and text comprehension is the expected outcome*". Lack of fluency is a major obstacle to developing independent readers with good comprehension skills (Taguchi et al., 2012:30). This means that lack of fluency is a common characteristic of poor readers and reading fluency is one of the defining characteristics of good readers (Turkyilmaz et al., 2014).

Kim et al. (2011) argue that reading fluently occurs at various levels: sub-lexical, lexical and connected text level. They claim that fluency at decoding words can be measured by having students read lists of words orally and as quickly and accurately as possible, but they indicate that connected text reading fluency predicts reading comprehension beyond and above word-

level reading fluency. Some of the requirements of reading fluency are the development of skills like automatic word recognition, grammatical skill and a large recognition of vocabulary (Grabe, 2010). In the same line of thought, Nation (2009) argues that fluency is accompanied by improvements in accuracy. He strongly rejects the distinction between fluency and accuracy, based on his belief that there is a reciprocal supportive relationship between them. He also emphasises that the skills of automatic word recognition need to be gradually developed through fluency-oriented activities like extensive reading that benefit learners' vocabulary growth.

Reading fluency is a significant component of reading behaviour that deserves attention in both instruction and assessment (McCormick and Zutell, 2010). Nevertheless, in L2 reading research, fluency has not received the attention it deserves (Grabe, 2010). A major reason for this might be because accurate word decoding is given more weight than automaticity and speed (Chang, 2012). According to Grabe (2009) and Chang (2012), reading involves lower-level cognitive processes like word recognition, and higher-level cognitive processes like comprehension including background knowledge, making inferences and using strategies to understand text meaning. However, Grabe (2009) claims that many L2 readers are not able to carry out lower-level processing efficiently, which might make lower-level processing more problematic than higher-level processing, and may consequently prevent L2 readers from using cognitive resources for meaning construction. Because of this, Saigh and Schmitt (2012) and Chang and Millett (2013) argue that it is essential to assist L2 readers to develop low-level processing so that they become effective readers. According to Beglar

et al. (2012), one way of developing reading fluency is through an extensive reading programme where the texts read are easy and the language used is already known to the learner. Yet, Macalister (2014) identifies two additional teaching practices that have become the recent research interest regarding the development of reading fluency. These teaching practices are speed-reading and repeated reading.

3.9.8.1 Speed-reading/ timed reading

Speed-reading or timed reading courses consist of a series of fixed-length texts with controlled vocabulary items. According to Nation (2009:2), the reading material of timed reading *“needs to be well within the learners’ level of proficiency. There should be little or no unknown vocabulary or grammatical features in the speed-reading texts”*. After reading the texts, learners have to answer simple multiple-choice comprehension questions without referring back to the text because the focus is on general understanding only to allow students to read faster (Chang, 2014). However, some researchers have reported less satisfactory comprehension levels in L2 reading research that involved timed reading (Chang and Millett, 2013). As clarified by Chang (2014), what may partly account for this is that because of timing, students focus more on speed rather than comprehension, and while answering the questions, they do not have the opportunity to look again at the texts they have read. In other words, when students read under time constraints, they might sacrifice comprehension to complete a text rapidly (McLean, 2014). Therefore, Beglar et al. (2012) argue there is an emphasis to provide evidence of improving students’ reading rates and comprehension levels when utilising timed reading to prove its efficacy as a teaching practice.

3.9.8.2 Repeated reading

Another means for developing reading fluency and comprehension skills is repeated reading (Taguchi et al., 2012; Yeganeh, 2013; Ari, 2015). Cohen (2011:20) defines repeated reading as “*a method where the student reads and rereads a text silently or aloud from two to four times to reach a predetermined level of speed, accuracy, and comprehension*”. Dundar and Akyol (2014) consider repeated reading as one of the most effective methods for eliminating the reading problems of students and increasing these students’ level of recalling vocabulary items, which will improve their reading fluency and comprehension skills. Similarly, Chang and Millett (2013) highlight the effect of repeated reading on improving comprehension levels especially when the materials are at the appropriate level for the reader.

Repeated reading was originally devised by Samuel in 1979 for developing English L1 readers’ fluency (Cohen, 2011; Taguchi et al., 2012). After that, language educators implemented it for teaching second and foreign languages. According to Gorsuch and Taguchi (2010) and Cohen (2011), repeated reading plays a great role in improving EFL learners’ reading comprehension as it increases reading fluency in L2. They think that poor word recognition skills are likely to be the reason behind FL learners’ slow and laborious reading of texts and that repeated reading seems to be successful in this respect. This is supported by a study carried out by Gorsuch and Taguchi (2010) on intermediate college-level Vietnamese learners of English who intended to become L2 teachers. The researchers found that the learners’ reading fluency and comprehension improved through an assisted repeated reading treatment of moderate intensity and

length. However, Chang (2012) claims that “*the use of RR to improve reading fluency in an L2 context has rarely been reported*”. Thus, more research should be conducted to check the success of this strategy in teaching L2 reading comprehension.

To make repeated reading more effective, Taguchi et al. (2012) suggest that before rereading a text, readers should be given an opportunity to check the meanings of the unknown key words or phrases. In addition, Vorstius et al. (2013) emphasise that repeating only the critical parts of the text can be beneficial for comprehension. They also claim that this strategy is practical with more fluent readers, who can identify the important sections of a text whereas less fluent readers and poor readers may engage in complete and aimless repeating of texts. It is teachers’ duty to train their students how to identify critical parts of texts in order to make the strategy of repeating advantageous and not time-wasting.

The repeated reading strategy needs plenty of time to be applied efficiently in reading classes. In fact, there is a significant relationship between the time devoted to reading and the use of reading comprehension strategies (Kirmizi, 2010; Pfof et al., 2013). According to Duke and Block (2012), skilful teaching can be effective and improve students’ reading when there is enough time for teaching reading. That means the short time allocated for teaching reading and reading skills is one of the obstacles that hinder teachers’ instruction to improve students’ reading (Carlisle et al., 2011; Duke and Block, 2012). Reading classes in Libyan universities are usually for a limited time (only two to three hours a week). Teachers who participated in the interview were

asked if the time dedicated to reading classes is satisfactory and they stated they need more time to be able to use more teaching strategies.

3.9.8.3 The reciprocal teaching strategy

Many researchers such as Ahmadi and Gilakjani (2012), Stricklin (2011) and Ahmadi and Ismail (2012) believe that the reciprocal teaching strategy is an important factor to improve reading comprehension. According to Ahmadi and Gilakjani (2012), the aim of reciprocal teaching is to teach students particular strategies that they can apply to new texts. They highlight the effectiveness of reciprocal teaching in enhancing the reading ability of both proficient and less proficient students. Furthermore, Stricklin (2011) lists a number of advantages for using reciprocal teaching in reading classes such as being appropriate for use with all text genres and any grade levels, being effective in increasing students' levels of reading comprehension, being a tool for raising students' confidence in their reading skills, and making reading a source of enjoyment. Reciprocal teaching was originally developed by Palincsar and Brown in 1986; and then in 2005 it was coined by Oczkus who calls it the 'Fab Four' because four strategies are emphasised to be used in reading comprehension classes. The four strategies are: predicting, clarifying, questioning and summarising. According to Castek (2013), predicting activates readers' background knowledge; questioning supports setting a purpose for reading and promotes active and responsive readers; clarifying prompts students to self-monitor so that they can identify new words and ideas; and summarising requires students to identify the key ideas that are included in the text and to paraphrase them in their own words. The four steps can be used throughout the reading class. According to Stricklin

(2011:620), teachers have three primary responsibilities during a reciprocal teaching class:

1. *Before reading, activate prior knowledge of words or ideas students will encounter during reading.*
2. *During reading, monitor, guide, and encourage individuals or groups in their use of the Fab Four.*
3. *After reading, encourage student reflection and ask students to share which strategy helped them the most and why.*

This strategy is very effective when it is applied in a stable and conducive learning environment. It keeps students working efficiently throughout the reading class. It requires highly-qualified teachers who can play different roles flexibly and smoothly.

3.9.8.4 Cooperative learning strategy

Cooperative learning is an effective strategy that can be applied in reading classes. A number of researchers such as Armbruster et al. (2003), Jalilifar (2010) and Bolukbas et al. (2011) highlight the efficacy and effectiveness of cooperative learning in maximising students' learning. Cooperative learning is *"a process through which students with various abilities, gender, nationalities and different levels of social skills carry out their learning process by working in small groups and helping each other"* (Bolukbas et al., 2011:330). In this practice, group members can build on each other's knowledge and provide feedback on each other's activities (Webb, 2009). Although this method is learner-centred, the organisation and structure of the groups of learners are managed by teachers. Teachers should make sure that each student in each group is active so that they can maximise the learning of both their own and their friends.

The most important activity in this technique is 'ask together – learn together'. According to Bolukbas et al. (2011), the steps of this technique start with organising the groups heterogeneously based on their skills and level of achievement. Groups should consist of 3 to 4 learners. To motivate learners and attract their attention, each group selects a name. In order to make sure all learners participate, they are given roles in turns such as recorder, postman, reporter, debate leader, and monitor. Each learner reads the related text individually and silently then makes up questions about the reading text. The teacher might inform the learners about the important points to be considered during reading. After that, members of each group come together to prepare the group question which should be put on a card or a piece of paper and sent to another group chosen randomly by a student with the role of a postman. Each group presents their response to the question they have to the whole class. The teacher raises a discussion by summarising the subject to clarify the points that were not understood completely. After the session is completed, all students take an exam individually. The points gathered from the exam are summed up and a group point is measured. By comparing group points to previously defined criteria and a scale, groups are given praise which is also decided in advance such as 'very good', 'good', 'not bad'. This technique encourages learners to improve their critical thinking and problem solving skills (Bolukbas et al., 2011). Poor readers can largely benefit from the activities of this strategy.

This strategy can be effective with small classes. In Libyan universities, there are on average over forty students in one class and sometimes the number exceeds sixty. Bahanshal (2013:49) indicates that "*large size of classes is a*

prime impediment for the efficient English teaching and learning". It is onerous for teachers to manage classes with a big number of students with various levels. The opinion of teachers about the ideal number of students in a reading class will be determined through the interview.

3.9.9 Technology and reading

Reading written texts in traditional reading materials like books might be demotivating for many students. Teaching reading in such circumstances is not easy. With the emergence of technology and its fast development, teachers have to integrate technology and the use of computers in teaching reading (Park and Kim, 2011). *"It became a must to utilise technology in education"* (Sahin and Alsancak (2011: 347). It makes it easy to access new information. However, Ertmer (1999) points out some factors that may hinder the implementation of technology integration in classrooms. These factors can be extrinsic to teachers or intrinsic to teachers. External factors include lack of adequate access, time, training and institutional support while internal factors include teachers' personal beliefs such as teachers' pedagogical beliefs and teachers' willingness to change and use technology in education practice. Besides, Tsai and Chai (2012) highlight the importance of taking into consideration the dynamicity of students and classroom contexts; therefore, teachers should adapt to the instructional needs for different contexts or varying groups of learners by re-organising learning materials and activities.

Using technological devices like computers and tablets in learning can make it possible to design and develop learning environments that take the

differences among the individuals into account and that could be modified according to the personal needs of the users (Brusilovsky, 2003). Compared to printed material, computers are preferred by many people because of the accessibility of the information, the ability to change text to the desired size, ease of organisation, the avoidance of paper costs, and environmental benefits by the reduction of paper use (Dundar and Akcyir, 2012). Using computers in teaching English can increase learners' motivation, promote language awareness, stimulate learners' responses to literary texts and aid comprehension (Zainal, 2012).

Nevills (2011) argues that teachers should maximise the use of technology and media for instructional purposes. Technology, particularly the Internet, can enrich materials and help the students to understand native speakers to improve the foreign language they learn (Wu et al., 2013). The Internet is also one of the effective resources for EFL teachers (Chen, 2008). According to Abdi (2013), some of the benefits of using the Internet in language teaching and learning include motivating students and teachers, increasing the participation and interaction of students in the classroom, allowing a deeper integration with the culture of the target language, and encouraging students to go deeper into the themes under discussion. In line with this, Lo et al. (2013) reveal that online technology allows EFL readers the flexibility to interact with the text in ways not possible with printed texts only. In spite of these advantages, Spencer (2006) claims that some readers like the scent of the paper and prefer to read books that they can hold in their hands rather than spending an extended amount of time looking at a monitor. This is a viewpoint.

3.9.9.1 Reading online and hypertext

According to Naumann et al. (2008:197), *“hypertexts are non-linear computer-based texts that consist of individual pages connected via hyperlinks. Readers may navigate from one page to another by clicking on a hyperlink”*. Reading of hypertext is very different from reading on a paper (Sandberg, 2011). Kang et al. (2009) claim that online reading comprehension is superior to traditional reading comprehension. Reading on-line may require developing new skills and strategies to read and understand texts (Coiro, 2011; Huang et al., 2009). Wright et al. (2013) support the use of online materials based on the results of their study which concluded that students are more likely to utilise reading resources when engaged with digital text. Consistently, Genc and Gulozer (2013) conducted a study on Turkish students and found that students who read the hypertext performed better on the test than students who read the printed text. Therefore, it is believed that students benefit from strategic reading instruction offered in a technology-enhanced learning environment (Levine et al., 2000).

Sandberg (2011) suggests that researchers and practitioners need to work together to find out the most effective strategies for reading online. For example, Castek (2013) highlights the effectiveness of adopting the approach of Internet reciprocal teaching in helping students become skilled readers. According to Wright et al. (2013), providing online material to students can be either by selecting appropriate materials from the resources of the Internet or by converting printed materials to hypertext. They also support the use of online bilingual dictionaries to help facilitate students' learning. However, Park and Kim (2011) claim that research into L2 reader's reading strategy

use in this field is scarce.

According to Abdi (2013), reading on-line needs the existence of appropriate access to Internet, which is not the case in Libyan universities. Using technology in education provides accessibility to a wide range of materials in the English language, which will probably help develop the quality of learning and teaching methods and techniques. This will also help the Libyan teachers to shift from traditional methods with 'talk and chalk' mode to technological approaches. However, some problems prevent the teaching staff in Libyan universities from using technological aids. Emhamed and Krishnan (2011) point out that time constraints and lack of administrative support are some of the difficulties that face Libyan English language teachers when trying to integrate technology in teaching EFL students.

3.9.10 The place of reading in different teaching methods

People can learn foreign languages in many different ways, but the choice of methods usually determines which teaching objectives can be effectively achieved. The history of language teaching has been characterised by extensive and broad research for more effective methods and techniques of teaching a foreign language.

The grammar-translation method, as its name suggests, focuses on accuracy rather than fluency through teaching grammar and translation. It is one of the oldest methods that has been used in teaching reading comprehension as reading and writing were the main skills to be developed by the students. Solak and Altay (2014) state that reading was the primary focus of language learning and teaching in this method. Larsen-Freeman (2000) points out that

a fundamental purpose of learning a foreign language according to this method is to be able to read literature written in that target language. Students should also be able to translate each language into the other. It is obvious that according to the grammar-translation method, the ultimate goal from reading a text in the target language is to be able to translate it into the mother tongue.

Considering the current situation in the Libyan classes of English, Arabic is the language of instruction and the learners who can translate English texts into Arabic are thought to be successful language learners and top students.

In contrast with the grammar-translation method, a basic rule in the direct method is that translation is not allowed and grammar is treated inductively. In fact, it was so called because it uses the target language to convey the meaning directly through the use of demonstration and visual aids without resorting to the students' native language. Oral communication is seen as basic; therefore, the reading skill is based upon what students practise orally. Enriching vocabulary, which might help comprehension, is emphasised over grammar. Teachers should use vocabulary in full sentences and teach it through demonstration.

The audio-lingual method, like the direct method, is also an oral-based approach to language teaching. As Larsen-Freeman (2000) indicates, listening and speaking have the priority over reading and writing. Students' reading work is based upon the oral work they do in advance. Cultural information is contextualised in the dialogues. New vocabulary and structural patterns are also presented through dialogues. Fluent reading has seldom

been a product of the audio-lingual method.

The failure to produce accuracy and fluency through using the grammar-translation method and the audio-lingual method led to the development of communicative language teaching (Sundqvist 2012). The communicative approach in language teaching emphasises language functions over forms. Harmer (2002:84) states that the communicative approach is concerned with “*what aspects of language to teach... (and) how to teach*”. One of its basic assumptions is that by learning to communicate, students will be more motivated to study a foreign language due to their satisfaction. Regarding reading comprehension, meaning is thought to be derived from the written words through an interaction between the reader and the writer (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). The reader tries to understand the writer's intentions. Thus, a different understanding of the role of reading in the language classroom and the types of texts has appeared in teaching. Since the goal of the instruction is to communicate competently, everyday materials like newspapers have become appropriate classroom materials. Developing reading is one way of communicative competence.

One of the forms of communicative approach is the communicative language teaching in which tasks and activities are viewed as central to meaningful language learning (Sidek, 2012). The obvious characteristic of reading according to this method is that everything is done with a communicative intent; i.e., being able to understand the writer's intentions is part of being communicatively competent (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Sidek (2012) promotes the use of communicative language teaching as it enhances real-time

communication and meaning-centred learning. This method requires regular and frequent training for teachers to cope with the demands of effective communication.

It can be argued that the wide variety of teaching methods currently available might confuse Libyan teachers rather than comfort them. In fact, the grammar-translation method is still widely used in teaching English in Libya.

3.10 Summary and Gaps in the Literature

The conclusion that can be drawn from the literature is that there is a general consensus about the importance and complexity of reading comprehension. However, more importantly the definition of the term reading comprehension is not precise as almost every writer on the subject has provided it their own slant by devising a reading comprehension definition to suit their beliefs, perspectives and educational setting and academic experiences. The result is a plethora of individual definitions which defeat comparisons and compound the difficulties of forming a consensus.

Although reading comprehension as an area of research has a rich history in many parts of the world, it is still under-researched in the Arab world, particularly in Libya. This shortage of research on teaching English as a foreign language in the Arab world has led their educational systems to adopt a DIY teaching and learning comprehension.

Most of the theories and approaches of reading are western-oriented. They are set in well-established and progressive educational systems. However, there is no one-size-fits-all reading model or strategy all over the world

because of the different reading interests and educational systems as well as the cultural differences. Moreover, approaches to reading are mainly designed for reading in the first language, which implies that they might not work perfectly in foreign language settings. Due to the cultural differences among the various societies, some views cannot be generalised as they are not necessarily suitable and applicable in the Arab world even if they are important and useful.

Many studies have been conducted in developing countries by researchers from Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and Malaysia. Although they share some cultural and educational features with Libyan society, their findings are not easily applicable to the Libyan context because their educational systems are relatively well-developed and their regimes are progressive and they encourage education. In contrast, the Libyan educational system has remained unchanged for over 40 years. Still, with some adjustments, their findings might be worth trying.

Some teaching strategies, like the cooperative learning, require small-group classes to be effective and the average number of students in Libyan university classes exceeds forty. Other strategies, such as repeated reading and reciprocal teaching, are time-consuming while the time devoted to reading in Libyan universities is one and a half hour sessions twice a week.

Little research is related to reading comprehension at university level. Most studies were carried out in primary and secondary schools. Taking into account the inadequacy of English in most Libyan universities, such studies might facilitate the promotion and development of reading schemes to

enhance learners' reading skills.

Arabic-speaking students of English face serious difficulties in learning English, particularly when reading. What makes it worse is that the culture of reading in many Arab countries is rare. Many parents lack time or do not make an effort to assist their children with reading. The majority of parents do not encourage their children to read even for pleasure, and neither does the educational system. moreover, teachers cannot provide students with additional books to read out of class because schools lack libraries and English newspapers are not available.

Chapter Four:

Research Methodology and Methods

4. Introduction

In this chapter, the methodology and methods that are adopted by this study are discussed and justified and the data instruments selected for this research are explained. In addition, the various research philosophies, approaches, and methods of data collection used in research are analysed, justifying the reasons for the methodological choices adopted in this study in relation to the objectives of the research.

This chapter is divided into sections as follows: 4.1 provides a discussion of the importance of research; 4.2 reiterates the research questions and objectives for the study; 4.3 distinguishes the difference between methodology and methods; 4.4 discusses research philosophy, defines ontology and epistemology, identifies positivism and interpretivism as the two main philosophies in conducting social science research and highlights the research philosophy utilised for this study; 4.5 explores the research methods, qualitative and quantitative, justifying the reason for selecting mixed methods; in 4.6 the research approaches -inductive and deductive- are highlighted; 4.7 evaluates research design; 4.8 explores types of research; 4.9 highlights the data collection instruments selected for obtaining the relevant data; 4.10 discusses the types of sampling and the sampling population; 4.11 discusses the outcome of the pilot study; in 4.12 generalisability, validity and reliability are explained; 4.13 discusses the ethical considerations; 4.14 establishes data analysis strategies, and finally in 4.15 a summary of the chapter is provided.

4.1 The importance and definition of research

Although research means different things to different people, it is often defined by many scholars in a similar way. Creswell (2012:3) views research as “*a process of steps used to collect and analyse information to increase our understanding of a topic or issue*”. Similarly, research for Saunders et al. (2012:680) is “*the systematic collection and interpretation of information with a clear purpose, to find things out*”. In the same line of thought, Bryman (2012) points out that research is a systematic inquiry that helps a researcher to identify the issues that are to be addressed, decide on the objectives and finally draw conclusions on the basis of the data and its analysis. Kumar (2014) provides a slightly different shade of meaning to research; he argues that research is a set of skills and a way of thinking, the function of which is to find answers to the research questions. According to Nunan (2006), research has three components: a question or a problem, data collection, and data analysis and interpretation. In short, research is an investigation to address a problem. This research aims to find out the challenges that face Libyan university students in reading comprehension.

4.2 Revisiting research questions and objectives

The following research questions and objectives emerged from the synthesis of literature review. For the purpose of this study, it is important to reiterate the research questions and objectives. In order to achieve the aim of this study, the following questions are formulated:

1. What are the views and perceptions of the students and lecturers in the Department concerning the challenges of learning and teaching of

reading comprehension?

2. How is English reading comprehension taught in the Department of English at Zawia University?
3. How can the quality of learning and teaching of reading comprehension in the Department of English at Zawia University be improved?

In order to answer the research questions, this study has set the following objectives:

1. To critically review the literature related to reading comprehension.
2. To assess the views of the students and lecturers at the Department of English at Zawia University concerning the challenges and problems that face students in reading comprehension.
3. To determine the factors which impact directly on the quality of learning and teaching of reading comprehension in Department of English at Zawia University.
4. To investigate how English reading comprehension is taught in the Department of English at Zawia University.
5. To make recommendations for improving the quality of teaching of reading comprehension in the Department of English at Zawia University based on the findings of this study.

4.3 Distinguishing between methodology and methods

Often confused or used interchangeably by some researchers, methods and methodology are different. As Payne and Payne (2004:148) point out, methods are the “*specific techniques*” used to collect and analyse data within a research project whereas methodology indicates “*the sets of*

conceptual and philosophical assumptions that justify the use of particular methods". Hallebone and Priest (2009:187) consider methodology as "a set of tactics and supporting steps that operationalise the chosen science and logic of inquiry" while they describe methods as "the procedures, tools, techniques and associated skills... that are needed to perform the specific tasks required by the methodology". Neuman (2011:2) argues that while methods "refer to the collection of specific techniques we use in a study", methodology is "broader and envelops methods. Methodology means understanding the entire research". As Dawson (2009) indicates, methodology is the philosophy that guides the research. In conclusion, methodology and methods are distinct and not synonymous.

4.4 Research philosophy

The notion of research is introduced through a research philosophy. Saunders and Lewis (2012:104) define research philosophy as "The development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge in relation to research". According to Hallebone and Priest (2009:26), a philosophy of science refers to "a set of explicit fundamental assumptions and frames of reference that underpin a way to conceive of, and know about, a particular reality being studied in a research frame or reference". The philosophy is essentially the background knowledge which drives the research forward (Creswell, 2009). Williams (2011) argues that research philosophy is a significant part of research methodology in order to collect data in an effective and suitable manner. Easterby-Smith et al. (2002 and 2008) provide key reasons for the importance of understanding the philosophy by researchers: a) it can help to clarify a research design; b) it allows the

researcher to identify and even create designs that might be outside their past experience; c) knowledge of philosophy can help the researcher to recognise which design will work and which will not.

The terms 'philosophy', 'paradigm' and 'worldview' are often used randomly or interchangeably, yet they are not the same, they share common features but they carry distinct shades and nuances of meaning. Hallebone and Priest (2009) indicate that paradigm embodies a philosophy of science and logic of inquiry. According to Cohen et al. (2000), the research paradigm is described as a precise procedure that involves various steps by which a researcher creates a relationship between the research objectives and questions. Gliner and Morgan (2000:17) state that a *"paradigm is a way of thinking about conducting a research. It is not strictly a methodology, but more of a philosophy that guides how the research is to be conducted"*. Punch (2006:31) views paradigm as *"a set of assumptions about the social world, and about what constitutes proper techniques and topics for inquiring into that world"*. A research paradigm is a perspective that is based on the set of shared assumptions, values, concepts and practices (Johnson and Christensen, 2010). For Morgan (2007:50), paradigm is *"a way to summarise researchers' beliefs about their efforts to create knowledge"*. Burton et al. (2014) use the term 'paradigm' interchangeably with the term 'research philosophy' and believe that paradigms represent worldviews. Likewise, Hartas (2010) views paradigm as a "worldview". Most of the literature on research methods and methodology use these terms inconsistently, interchangeably and confusingly. In fact, they all have similarities in meaning; however, the

worldview includes philosophy and paradigm; it is much broader. According to Williams (2011), it is the way the researcher thinks about the development of knowledge which is related to the nature of the world.

There are two main ways of thinking about research philosophy: ontology and epistemology. According to Saunders et al. (2009), each one of these ways of thinking about research philosophies causes important differences, influencing the way of thinking according to the research process. Flowers (2009) argues that these two parameters describe the nature of reality and truth, perceptions, beliefs and assumptions and can influence the way the research is undertaken, from the way it is designed to the conclusion. Therefore, in order to achieve the purpose of the study, the researcher needs to take into consideration these two supporting assumptions: ontology and epistemology.

4.4.1 Ontology and epistemology

Gill and Johnson (2010) point out that ontology and epistemology are philosophical terms that are each derived from two Greek words; ontology consists of 'ontos' which refers to 'being' and 'logos' which refers to 'theory' or 'knowledge', while epistemology is a combination of the Greek words 'episteme' which means 'knowledge' or 'science' and 'logos' which means 'theory', 'knowledge' or 'information'. Schraw (2013) indicates that there are no universally shared definitions of ontology and epistemology; however, ontology is always associated with studies on the nature of reality and being, and epistemology is always related to studies on knowledge and beliefs about knowledge. Oliver (2010:34, 35) defines ontology as "*the*

study of what we assume to exist in the world", and epistemology as *"the study of the grounds upon which we believe something to be true"*. According to Neuman (2011), ontology is an area of philosophy that deals with what exists and asks what the fundamental categories of reality are; and epistemology is an area of philosophy that is concerned with the creation of knowledge and focuses on how we know what we know and how we can reach truth. Reality from the positivist perspective is objective, rational and independent from the observer, whereas from the interpretivist perspective, reality is multi-dimensional, ever changing and dependent on different frames of reference (Burton et al., 2014).

According to Saunders et al. (2009), ontology includes two aspects: objectivism and subjectivism. Objectivism views the social entities as positioned externally from the social actors whereas, for subjectivism, the reality of social phenomena is created by the perceptions and actions of the social actors as it exists in individuals' consciousness. However, Easterby-Smith et al. (2012) divide the ontological assumptions into four categories as shown in Table 4.1

Table 4.1: Four categories of ontology

Ontology	Realism	Internal Realism	Relativism	Nominalism
Truth	Single truth	Truth exists, but is obscure.	There are many truths.	There is no truth.
Fact	Facts exist and can be Revealed.	Facts are concrete, but cannot be accessed directly.	Facts depend on viewpoint of observer.	Facts are all human creation.

Source: (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012:19)

Woods and Cakir (2011) argue that knowledge is a familiarity about a

subject which is acquired through education or experience which is explicit and universally and objectively true. However, Schraw (2013:13) argues that “*knowledge is subject to interpretation*”. As far as research is concerned, Greener (2011) underlines that different methods favour different kinds of knowledge. According to Powell, et al. (2008), there are four sources of knowledge: intuitive knowledge, authoritative knowledge, logical knowledge, and empirical knowledge. Tashakkori and Creswell (2007) indicate that intuitive knowledge is based more on individual feelings such as belief and faith rather than facts. Authoritative knowledge, as Turner (2007) claims, is based on secondary data sources; therefore, its strength or weakness depend on these sources. Picken (2007) argues that logical knowledge is based on the connection between two points by reasoning from point A that it is generally accepted to move to point Z, which constitutes new knowledge. According to Kennan (2007), empirical knowledge is based on demonstrating facts through different methods such as experimentation and observation. Thus, the question is whether the nature of knowledge is acquired or personally experienced and whether the belief of the researcher is subject to the level of involvement in the research. According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008:14),

in epistemology, there is an objectivist and subjectivist view. According to the objective view in epistemology, it is possible that there exists a world that is external and theory neutral. According to the subjective epistemological view, no access to the external world beyond our own observations and interpretations is possible.

There are many paradigms for acquiring knowledge; however, there are two that are predominant and widely cited in epistemology: transmissional rooted

in positivism, and transformative embedded in interpretivism. Positivism suggests that the knowledge is out there to be found while interpretivism believes that people construct meaning through their interpretive interactions in their social environments (Johnson, 2004). According to Easterby-Smith et al. (2012), positivism and interpretivism are identified as the main philosophies in conducting social science.

4.4.2 Positivism

As indicated by Cohen et al. (2011), positivism is historically linked to the French philosopher, Auguste Comte, who values reason and observation as a means of understanding behaviour that can be explained and described in a scientific way. Della Porta and Keating (2008) point out that positivists argue that only statements that can be verified or falsified are accepted. According to Saunders et al. (2012), the positivist's view is to test a theory and gather facts to allow hypothesis testing, and the data obtained as part of a positivist study is generally quantitative enabling statistical analysis. Oliver (2010) argues that the term 'facts' here should be avoided and replaced with the term 'statistical data'. Correspondingly, Bryman and Bell (2011) believe that positivism aims to generate hypotheses that can be tested and replicated by others to verify results. Bryman (2012:28) states that positivism entails the following principles:

- *Only phenomena and hence knowledge confirmed by senses can genuinely be warranted as knowledge (the principle of phenomenalism).*
- *The purpose of the theory is to generate hypotheses that can be tested and that will thereby allow explanations of laws to be assessed (the principle of deductivism).*

- *Knowledge is arrived at through the gathering of facts that provide the basis for laws (the principle of inductivism).*
- *Science must (and presumably can) be conducted in a way that is value free (that is, objective).*
- *There is a clear distinction between scientific statements and normative statements and a belief that the former are the true domain of the scientist.*

According to positivism, the purpose of theory is application and truth can be distinguished from untruth in a rational way (Jankowicz, 2005). In positivism, the social world is external to the researcher and its properties should be measured by means of objective methods (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Guthrie (2010) argues that the essence of positivism is as follows: the world and people are studied as objective things; data, which are viewed as being independent of the researcher, are accepted as scientific evidence only if they are collected according to strict rules; the scientific method is considered objective and research is concerned with the scientific rules that researchers follow.

4.4.3 Interpretivism

Interpretivism is in contrast to positivism. Easterby-Smith et al. (2012) call this philosophy 'social constructionism', where the focus is on the ways that people make sense of the world and determine reality through sharing their experiences using language. Saunders et al. (2012) state that it is interpretive because researchers attempt to understand the subjective and socially constructed meanings about what they study and also they interpret the social roles of others according to their own set of meanings.

According to Jankowicz (2005:387), the assumption of interpretivism is that *“knowledge is the result of people’s attempts to make sense of what’s going on around them”*. What makes this approach distinctive from positivism are the differences between the subject matters of the natural and social sciences (Bryman and Bell, 2011). According to Hallebone and Priest (2009), interpretivism involves an insider perspective on social phenomena. Therefore, in order to distinguish humans from the natural order, the use of instruments like interviews and observation is required. According to Bryman (2012:30) interpretivism:

is a term that usually denotes an alternative to the positivist orthodoxy that has held sway for decades. It is predicated upon the view that a strategy is required that respects the differences between people and the objects of the natural sciences and therefore, requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action.

The data obtained as part of an interpretivist study is generally qualitative as it is generated and interpreted. The essence of this philosophy is that knowledge is viewed as cultural and has many forms, which makes it subjective. Data are regarded as dependent on the relationship between the researcher and the respondent and they are not put in pre-defined categories. The scientific methods are considered as social constructs and research is not restricted to a set of scientific rules but rather it follows what researchers do (Guthrie, 2010).

Saunders et al. (2012) list a number of differences between positivism and interpretivism as follows: in positivism, the researcher’s view of the nature of reality is external, objective and independent of social actors while it is socially constructed, subjective and may change in interpretivism;

regarding what constitutes acceptable knowledge. Positivists believe that only observable phenomena can provide credible data and facts whereas interpretivists accept subjective meanings and social phenomena. In positivism, highly structured data collection techniques are most often used with large samples and quantitative measurements while in interpretivism, qualitative data collection techniques are concerned with in-depth investigations with small samples.

Table 4.2: Implications of the philosophies of positivism and interpretivism

	Positivism	Interpretivism
The observer	Must be independent	Is part of what is being observed
Human interests	Should be irrelevant	Are the main drivers of science
Explanation	Must demonstrate causality	Aim to increase general understanding of the situation
Research progresses through	Hypotheses and deductions	Gathering rich data from which ideas are induced
Concepts	Need to be operationalised so that they can be measured	Should incorporate stakeholder perspectives
Units of analysis	Should be reduced to simplest terms	May include the complexity of whole situations
Generalisation through	Statistical probability	Theoretical abstraction
Sampling requires	Large numbers selected randomly	Small numbers of cases chosen for specific reasons

Source: Easterby-Smith et al. (2008:59)

There are various types of philosophies; some of them are totally different and others are quite similar. Each has its strengths and weaknesses.

4.4.4 Selecting a research philosophy for this study

The positivist philosophy is based on objective reality using facts and figures, whereas interpretivist is subjective and knowledge is based on words and meaning. For the purpose of the study and based on the nature of the problem and the research questions and objectives of this research, the philosophy of this research tends to be predominantly positivist through distributing a large number of questionnaires to reach as many students as possible in order to obtain large numbers and find out the facts about the challenges that students face when studying reading comprehension. In addition, in view of the fact that the researcher is a member of staff at Zawia University, the researcher wishes to be independent and external so as not to influence the participants' responses and to avoid bias in order to have objective data. Accordingly, the questionnaires were not self-administered. They were distributed and collected by the researcher's colleagues. In addition, there was a focus to frame the questions properly and to make the language clear and check for intrinsic bias. Still, it is essential to understand the behaviours and actions of students and other lecturers because individuals are influenced by their personal perspectives and interpretations of their environment, which have an impact on others (Saunders et al., 2009).

4.5 Research methods

Dörnyie (2007) identifies three types of data in applied linguistic research: qualitative data, quantitative data and language data, for which different methods and analysis have been developed. Language data (such as a recorded language task or a student essay) is often included in qualitative

data in the literature. Thus, there are two main methods: quantitative and qualitative. Punch (2005) argues that neither the qualitative approach nor the quantitative approach is considered superior to the other and the over-reliance on any one method is not appropriate as each approach of them has its weaknesses and strengths. While the quantitative research is related to the deductive testing of hypotheses and theories, the qualitative research is concerned more with generating hypotheses and theories inductively.

As Punch (2005) indicates, the main differences between the quantitative and the qualitative research approaches lie in the nature of their data and the methods of collecting and analysing them, and to select which one to use depends on the purposes and circumstances of the research more than on philosophical considerations. Robson (2011) says that qualitative data generally support quantitative findings. However, Nunan (2006:20) claims that the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research is *"a philosophical one which is not always reflected in the actual conduct of empirical investigation"*. This issue might raise a big debate among scholars; however, it is important for researchers to understand how to conduct research whether it is quantitatively and qualitatively directed. The following sections explain and show the difference between quantitative and qualitative methods.

4.5.1 Quantitative method

Quantitative research is associated with the positivist philosophy. Researchers set out to adopt what was called the scientific method in their

investigations. A quantitative research method “*involves data collection procedures that result in numerical data which are then analysed mainly by statistical methods*” (Dörnyie, 2007:24). According to Kumar (2014:14), the quantitative approach “*follows a rigid, structured and predetermined set of procedures to explore; aims to quantify the extent of variation in a phenomenon*”. Quantitative research entails the collection of numerical data and is concerned with techniques that analyse numbers (Greener, 2011; Bryman and Bell, 2011). Quantitative research is concerned with common features between groups rather than individuals. Large sample sizes are often used in the research. Dawson (2009:14) states that quantitative research “*generates statistics through the use of large scale survey research, using methods such as questionnaires or structured interviews*”. As indicated by Dörnyie (2007), this method has several advantages: it is systematic, focused and tightly controlled; it has precise measurements, and it provides reliable data that can be generalised to other contexts. Nevertheless, Dörnyie (2007) points out that the quantitative research is viewed by the qualitative researchers as very simplistic, and reductionist as it averages out responses that are decontextualised, failing to get the meanings that participants attach to their circumstances. The following table illustrates the strengths and weaknesses of quantitative methods as listed by Saunders et al. (2009).

Table 4.3: Strengths and weaknesses of quantitative methods

Strengths	Weaknesses
Tests and validates already constructed theories.	The research questions may not be clear and easy to understand.
Can generalise a research finding when data are analysed against samples of sufficient size.	The researcher may miss out on key elements as the research is focused upon hypothesis testing rather than hypothesis creation.
Provides accurate numerical data.	Data analysed might be too general or complex to understand.
Research results are primarily independent of the researcher.	

Source: Saunders et al. (2009)

4.5.2 Qualitative Method

In contrast with quantitative research, which is associated with the positivist philosophy, qualitative research is associated with the interpretivist philosophy. While the nature of data in quantitative methods is based on numbers and the research focuses on facts, the nature of data in qualitative methods is based upon text and the research focuses on meanings (Gray, 2014). Words are emphasised more than quantification in the collection and analysis of data in qualitative research (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Therefore, qualitative methods involve data collection procedures that result in open-ended and non-numerical data (Dörnyei, 2007; Greener, 2011). These data are then analysed primarily by non-statistical methods (Dörnyei, 2007). Qualitative research enables researchers to study social and cultural phenomenon through researching peoples' life experiences, through thoughts, feelings and emotions (Grbich, 2013). It explores attitudes, behaviour and experiences through such methods as interviews

and observations (Dawson, 2009).

Qualitative research is normally conducted in a natural setting and sample sizes tend to be small, with no statistical grounds for guidance (Punch, 2006). Because qualitative methods are concerned with individuals' subjective opinions and experiences and the outcome is the result of the researcher's interpretation of the data, the qualitative analysis is considered to be interpretive. Creswell (2012:537) states that "*the researcher assesses reality subjectively through his or her lens*". This feature possibly makes it more flexible in its response to new openings that may occur in the research process during which the analytical categories and the research questions may be redefined.

Qualitative research can broaden the understanding of a phenomenon with its in-depth analysis as sense can be made of complex situations. However, there is a danger that, while analysing data, the researcher makes too simple interpretations of the findings, or that the researcher's personal biases influence the results. In addition, qualitative methods are criticised by quantitative researchers because of the small size of the samples, which might question the generalisability of the results because the specific conditions of few participants may not apply broadly to others and because no standardised instruments or statistical analytical techniques are used so that a hypothesis can be tested (Dörnyei, 2007).

Table 4.4: Strengths and weaknesses of qualitative methods

Strengths	Weaknesses
Ability for in-depth case study.	Difficult to test hypotheses and theories.
The research question will be clear and easy to understand (or clarification can be easily obtained).	May not be possible to obtain a sufficient size sample population for analysis.
Provides understanding and clear description of personal experiences.	Data collection and analysis can be too time-consuming.
Can conduct cross-case comparisons and analysis.	Results can be easily influenced by researcher's opinion.
Can determine respondents' understanding.	

Source: Saunders et al. (2009)

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches are used in this study which adopts mixed methods approach. The following section is devoted to describing the mixed methods approach and highlighting its advantages and disadvantages.

4.5.3 Mixed Methods (MM)

Researchers like Greener (2011) and Creswell (2014) stress that mixed methods is an approach to inquiry that involves using both quantitative and the qualitative methods in a research project. Patton (2002) and Dawson (2009) call it triangulation. According to Saunders et al. (2012:683), triangulation is “*the use of two or more independent sources of data or data-collection methods within one study*”. It is very important that the researcher is skilled in the use of both methods (Creswell, 2014). In addition, Cohen et al. (2011) and Creswell (2012) argue that, in mixed

methods research, the data should be mixed and integrated.

The use of mixed methods in a research project has some advantages and disadvantages. Some of these advantages, as Kumar (2014) indicates, are: enhancing research possibilities, being better for more complex situations, enriching data, and collecting additional research evidence. The disadvantages of using mixed methods that Kumar (2014) lists are: involving more data, which means more work and resources, requiring additional and diverse skills, contacting two study populations, and resolving disagreements in data.

Creswell (2014) also presents some arguments for and against using mixed methods. Some of these arguments for using mixed methods indicate that mixed methods increase validity and confidence and credibility of results, stimulate creative and inventive methods, may serve as a critical test of competing theories, present greater diversity of views, and provide stronger inferences. On the other hand, some of the arguments against using a mixed methods approach in research, as Creswell (2014) points out, are that they take up more resources than single method studies; they provide no help if the wrong questions are asked; their use requires a competent design which should be relevant to the research question; and they need skilled researchers.

Based on the purpose of the study, the nature of the problem and the research questions and objectives, a mixed methods approach is deemed appropriate for this study in order to increase its effectiveness.

Table 4.5: Strengths and weaknesses of a mixed methods approach

Strengths	Weaknesses
Narrative and words can be used to add support to numeric data.	Can be time-consuming and incur more cost.
Numeric data can be added to support narrative and words.	Researchers must understand how to mix and apply methods appropriately.
Can answer a broader range of research questions, as not limited to one research method or approach.	Methodological traditionalists insist that you should only work within one research philosophy at a time.
Can provide stronger evidence for conclusion and recommendation.	

Source: Saunders et al. (2009)

4.5.4 Justification of the methodology selected for this study

Easterby-Smith et al. (2012) state that establishing the most suitable methodology and methods is still under discussion among researchers as implementing different methods will provide different perspectives on what is being studied. Many authors such as Jankowicz (2005) and Robson (2011) emphasise that there is no straightforward rule that obliges researchers to choose one method for one investigation and another for another investigation. Thus, mixed methods research should not be considered as being universally applicable or being the most appropriate approach for any research context (Creswell, 2014; Bryman and Bell, 2011). Some arguments emphasise the possible dangers of believing that the use of mixed methods is the ultimate solution in deciding upon the best choice of research method. Bryman (2012) stresses that mixed methods research is not superior to research that uses a single method.

However, Guthrie (2010) argues that the findings achieved from using mixed methods may gain credibility and be acceptable to a large audience,

especially when similar findings come from different sources. The mixed methods approach uses the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research (Kumar, 2014). Mixing methods strengthens the validity and reliability of research. Guthrie (2010) argues that adopting the positivist paradigm can increase the reliability and generalisation of research, but it lowers its validity and relevance whereas following the interpretivist research improves validity and relevance but at the expense of reliability and generalisation. Nunan (2006) points out that “*a mixed methods approach can offer additional benefits for the understanding of the phenomenon in question*”. Creswell and Clark (2011:13) also support the above that the mixed methods approach is “*a preferred mode to understand the world*” and it is practical as it gives the opportunity to the researcher to be free to use all methods possible to address a research problem. Johnson and Christensen (2012) favourably argue that the mixed methods approach allows us to understand both the subjective (individual) and the objective (casual) realities in our world.

According to Lou and Dappen (2004), a mixed methods approach is required in educational settings because educational problems are complex and inflexible and need multiple ways of understanding. Therefore, conducting mixed methods research to investigate language-related issues can enhance knowledge in this field as it focuses on explaining and understanding the topic being searched (Riazi and Candlin, 2014). This study uses questionnaires to measure the students’ views about the challenges of reading comprehension. According to Bryman and Bell (2011) and Gray (2014), questionnaires are a well-known and widely

used primary data gathering technique for collecting quantitative data. On the other hand, the tool of semi-structured interviews is used in order to support the findings for quantitative data.

Although Creswell (2012 and 2014) indicates that the procedure of using both qualitative and quantitative methods is time-consuming as it requires collecting and analysing extensive data, he indicates that this combination of methods provides a broader perspective to the study and a better understanding of the research problem and question than using one method by itself. Greener (2011) presents some justifications for mixing methods in a research project which are: to achieve breadth (through using quantitative methods) and depth or closeness (through using qualitative methods); to gain greater validity for research, to bring the methods themselves into focus to check whether different methods produce different findings; and to see if using mixed methods generate new findings in fields that tend to be in a particular way. Similarly, Patton (2002) strongly supports the use of mixed methods as it significantly enhances the accuracy of the data, which is the basis of any research. Furthermore, by including both numeric trends and specific details, a better understanding of a phenomenon might be achieved. In addition, using mixed methods may improve the validity of the research and allow for making generalisations, which is normally not easily done using a qualitative or quantitative research method alone.

Saunders et al. (2012) highlight some reasons for using a mixed methods design as follows: the use of mixed methods may help findings to be

elaborated, clarified, illustrated and confirmed; it might also allow the generalisability of a study; it solves the problem of getting insufficient data from one method; it may help reflect a greater diversity of views in the study; combining data helps to make sure that the findings from the two methods corroborate with each other; and it might lead to greater confidence in the conclusions of a study.

Table 4.6: Quantitative, mixed methods and qualitative research

	Quantitative Research	Mixed Methods	Qualitative Research
Scientific method	Deductive or “top-down”. The researcher tests hypotheses and theory with data	Deductive and inductive	Inductive or “bottom-up”. The researcher generates new hypotheses from data collected during fieldwork
View of human behaviour	Behaviour is regular and predictable	Behaviour is somewhat predictable	Behaviour is fluid, dynamic, situational, social, contextual, and personal
Most common research objectives	Description, explanation, and prediction	Multiple objectives	Description, exploration, and discovery
Focus	Narrow-angle lens, testing specific hypotheses	Multi-lens focus	Wide-angle and “deep-angle” lens, examining the breadth and depth of phenomena to learn more about them
Nature of observation	Attempt to study behaviour under controlled conditions	Study behaviour in more than one context or condition	Study behaviour in natural environments. Study the context in which behaviour occurs
Nature of reality	Objective (different observers agree on what is observed)	Common sense realism and pragmatic view of world (i.e. what works is what is “real” or true)	Subjective, personal, and socially constructed
Form of data collected	Collect quantitative data based on precise measurement using structured and validated data collection instruments (e.g. closed-ended items, rating scales,)	Multiple forms	Collect qualitative data (e.g. in-depth interviews, participant observation, field notes, and open-ended questions). The researcher is the primary data collection instrument
Nature of data	Variables	Mixture of variables, words, and images	Words, images, categories
Data analysis	Identify statistical relationships	Quantitative and qualitative	Search for patterns, themes, and holistic features
Results	Generalisable findings	Corroborated findings may generalise	Particularistic findings. Representation of insider (i.e. “emic”) viewpoint. Present multiple perspectives
Form of final report	Statistical report (e.g. with correlations, comparisons of means, and reporting of statistical significance of findings)	Eclectic and pragmatic	Narrative report with contextual description and direct quotations from research participants

Source: Creswell (2009)

4.6 Research approaches: inductive and deductive

The research approach guides the process of data collection, ensuring that the parameters and processes used result in organising the correct data. According to Greener (2011), inductive research works from data to build a theory whereas deductive research tests a theory through the use of quantitative data. A researcher uses a deductive approach when they start with a theory and design a research strategy to test the theory; however, a researcher uses an inductive approach if they start by collecting data to explore a phenomenon and generate a theory (Saunders et al., 2012). While inductive reasoning is related to identifying patterns within a large amount of data effectively, deductive reasoning works from the more general to the more specific (Hair et al., 2007). Saunders et al. (2009) discuss the differences between the emphasis of the deductive approach and the inductive approach as follows: the deductive approach is highly structured, emphasising the scientific principles where the researcher is independent of what is being studied, and focusing on collecting quantitative data with large samples so that the results can be generalised. On the other hand, the inductive approach follows a more flexible structure where qualitative data are collected and the researcher is part of the research process with less concern to generalise the conclusions, and it also has a close understanding of the research context and the meanings human beings attach to events.

Table 4.7: Differences between deduction and induction

Deduction	Induction
The conclusion must be true when the premises are true.	Untested conclusions are generated through using known premises.
Generalising from the general to the specific.	Generalising from the specific to the general.
Hypotheses related to an existing theory are evaluated through data collection.	A phenomenon is explored and a conceptual framework is created through data collection.
Theory falsification or verification.	Theory generation and building.

Source: Saunders et al. (2012)

In addition to inductive and deductive approaches, Blaikie (2010) lists another two research approaches: retroductive and abductive approaches. The aim of the retroductive research approach is to discover underlying mechanisms that explain observed regularity in particular contexts and the first step is provide a description of the regularity to be explained. The aim of the abductive research approach is to describe and understand social life in terms of social performers' meanings and concepts.

4.7 Research design

A research design is defined by Yin (2003:20) as “*a logical plan for getting from here to there, where here may be defined as the initial set of questions and there is the conclusions to these questions*”. Saunders et al. (2012:680) view the research design as “*a framework for the collection and analysis of data to answer the research questions and meet research objectives providing reasoned justification for choice of data sources, collection methods and analysis techniques*”. The process of a research design is to ensure that the evidence acquired allows the researcher to answer the main research questions in a clear manner and to satisfy the aims and objectives

of the study (Creswell, 2009). In addition, it develops the plan of how research should be carried out. It also includes theoretical and philosophical assumptions upon which research is based. This will then enlighten the methods adopted for the study. Creswell (2012 and 2014) identifies some types of mixed methods designs such as the convergent parallel design, the explanatory sequential design, the exploratory sequential design, the embedded design, the transformative design, and the multiphase design.

a) The convergent parallel design is a form of mixed methods research in which quantitative data and qualitative data are merged to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem. Both quantitative data and qualitative data are given equal priority and are collected and analysed simultaneously and separately. The findings are compared and integrated to achieve the interpretation; and if there are any contradictions, they should be explained or further probed.

b) The explanatory sequential design involves two phases in which quantitative data collection and analysis are done initially and followed up with qualitative data collection and analysis to get the interpretation. The key idea is that the qualitative data collection builds directly on the quantitative results. Thus, quantitative data are given the priority while qualitative data are used to refine the results from the quantitative data and elaborate the findings. The qualitative sample should be the same or part of the same quantitative sample because the aim of this design is to follow up the quantitative results and explore them in more depth. This design is the most popular form of mixed methods design in educational research.

c) The exploratory sequential design is the reverse sequence of the explanatory sequential design; that is, qualitative data collection and analysis precede and build to quantitative data collection and analysis to get the interpretation. The intention of this design is to develop better measurements with specific samples of populations and to find out if data from a small sample in the qualitative phase can be generalised to a larger sample of a population. However, the sample for the quantitative data collection cannot be the same because the quantitative sample needs to be much larger than the qualitative sample. Consequently, the results of both phases cannot be compared. The qualitative results are exploratory and the quantitative results refine and extend the qualitative findings to determine whether the qualitative outcomes can be generalised to a larger sample.

d) The embedded design is an advanced mixed methods design that integrates the elements of convergent, explanatory sequential and exploratory sequential designs. In general, quantitative and qualitative data can be collected simultaneously or sequentially but one form of data plays a supportive role and provides additional information to the primary form of data. Quantitative data are often the major form and qualitative data usually take the secondary status. The two datasets are analysed separately then compared.

e) The transformative design encases the convergent, explanatory, exploratory, or embedded design within a transformative framework. Quantitative and qualitative data could be processed convergently or they

could be ordered sequentially with one building on the other. This design uses a theoretical lens drawn from social justice as a perspective. The typical frameworks in this mixed methods design are feminist, ethnic, racial, and disability perspectives. Thus, the intent of this design is to address and engage a social issue for underrepresented or marginalised populations in research that brings about change or reform.

f) The multiphase design is common in the fields of evaluation and programme interventions. Concurrent or sequential strategies are used to best understand a long-term programme goal. This design involves examining and studying a problem or topic through a series of phases or separate studies by a group of researchers to address a common research objective. The different phases or studies should link together to provide insight into an overall project objective.

The selection of an appropriate research design has significant implications for the whole process of the research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002; Creswell, 2009). According to Bryman and Bell (2011), the choice of research design is based on the research questions, objectives, time, the extent of the existing knowledge and other resources. However, it should be noted that there is no research design that is more superior or less inferior to any other design or strategy (Churchill and Iacobucci, 2009).

In this study, (a quantitative method) closed questionnaires were distributed and analysed before conducting semi-structured interviews (a qualitative method). Thus, this study is following the embedded mixed methods design. After measuring the students' views about their reading

skills and about the teaching strategies of their lecturers, interviews were conducted to gauge and interpret the lecturers' points of view about the teaching and learning of reading comprehension. Afterwards, the results were compared and integrated to gain a deeper understanding of the problems and obstacles that EFL students and lectures encounter in reading classes at the Department of English at Zawia University in Libya, which can enable the researcher to benefit the stakeholders and decision-makers in this respect and make recommendations based on the findings of this study.

4.8 Types of research

According to Saunders and Lewis (2012), there are three main types of research: exploratory, descriptive and explanatory. Kumar (2014) adds to this list the correlational research, which is used to establish or discover the existence of a relationship, association or interdependence between two or more aspects of a phenomenon or a situation.

Exploratory research is used when the researcher has little knowledge or information of the research problem (Hair et al., 2007) in order to clarify his/her understanding of a problem and gain insights about a topic of interest (Saunders et al., 2012). Zikmund et al. (2012) identify three purposes for exploratory research: screening alternatives, discovering new ideas and the diagnosis of a situation.

Descriptive research is *“designed to obtain data that describes the characteristics of the topic of interest in the research”* (Hair et al., 2007:419). According to Saunders et al. (2012), the purpose of descriptive

research is to produce an accurate presentation of persons, events or situations. Therefore, when using descriptive research, there ought to be a good structure and understanding of the research problem (Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2002). Descriptive research may be used for discovery and knowledge of the characteristics of an exacting problem; frequently, the data collected are quantitative and the information is usually summarised using quantitative and statistical means (Collis and Hussey, 2009).

Explanatory research *“focuses on studying a situation or a problem in order to explain the relationships between variables”* (Saunders and Lewis, 2012:113). An explanatory study takes the descriptive research a stage further by exploring factors and looking for explanation behind a particular occurrence (Saunders and Lewis, 2012). According to Punch (2006), while a descriptive study asks about what the case or situation is, an explanatory study asks about why or how this is the case.

As far as this study is concerned, the type of this research is a mixture of exploratory and explanatory research. This research is exploratory because it tries to understand and diagnose the problem of inadequate English reading comprehension of EFL Libyan students at university level while it is explanatory because it looks for an explanation behind this problem to suggest solutions.

4.9 Data collection instruments

Saunders et al. (2012) describe research methods as a way of collecting, analysing and interpreting data that the researcher obtained for their studies. There are various types of methods for collecting quantitative and

qualitative data for research. Zohrabi (2012) indicates that the variety of techniques will make the data more substantial and valid. The instruments for gathering data for this study are closed questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Surveys are a popular strategy that are often used to measure the frequency of attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of individuals, which is in line with the research objectives and questions of this study. In general, surveys are widely used because they allow gathering of large amounts of data from a sizeable population in a highly economical way (Gill and Johnson, 2010). The research strategy needs to be appropriate for the questions being answered (Robson, 2011). Therefore, as this study seeks to investigate the respondents' perceptions, using a questionnaire is pertinent for this study.

4.9.1 Questionnaires

Questionnaire as a general term *"includes all data collection techniques in which each person is asked to respond to the same set of questions in a predetermined order"* (Saunders et al., 2012:679). Payne and Payne (2004:186) define questionnaires as *"the printed set of questions to be answered by respondents, either through face-to-face interviews or self-completion, as a tested, structured, clearly presented and systematic means of collecting data"*. Gray (2014:352) also defines questionnaires as *"research tools through which people are asked to respond to the same set of questions in a pre-determined order"*. Denscombe (2010) points out that questionnaires are at their most productive when used with large numbers of participants. Jankowicz (2005:222) states that *"questionnaires are particularly useful when you want to contact relatively large numbers of*

people to obtain data on the same issue or issues, often by posing the same questions to all". Dawson (2009) divides questionnaires into three types: closed-ended, open-ended, or a combination of both. On the other hand, Cohen et al. (2011) call the closed-ended questionnaires as structured questionnaires, the open-ended as unstructured questionnaires, and the combination of both as semi-structured questionnaires. They argue that the smaller the size of the sample, the less structured, more open and word-based the questionnaire is likely to be; and the larger the size of the sample, the more structured, closed and numerical the questionnaire should be.

Closed-ended/structured questionnaires are used to generate statistics in quantitative research. These questionnaires follow a set format with boxes to tick or scales to rank. Great numbers can be produced because of the ease of analysis.

Open-ended/unstructured questionnaires are used in qualitative research. They consist of a set of questions with a blank section for participants to write their answers.

Semi-structured questionnaires or a **combination** of both types of questionnaire is used by some researchers. Such questionnaires start with a series of closed questions and finish with a section of open questions for more detailed responses.

Dawson (2009) lists some advantages and disadvantages of open and closed questions. While open questions tend to be slower to administrate, harder to record responses, difficult to code, and takes longer to answer,

closed questions tend to be quicker to administer, easier to record answers, easy to code and quick to answer. However, open questions enable respondents to speak their minds and raise issues, which is not the case with closed questions, where response is stifled. Greener (2011) provides two reasons that make using open questions in some research projects more appropriate: to avoid imposing the researcher's ideas and concepts upon the respondent, and when it is impractical to give all of the possible options, which might be too many. Nunan (2006) advises researchers to be aware of the types of questions they include in questionnaires as well as question wording so as to avoid culturally biased questions, which are likely to happen in language and education research when the researcher and respondents do not share the same culture. Dörnyei (2010) lists some of the main problem sources in questionnaires such as: simplicity of the questions and the short time that respondents spend working on a questionnaire result in superficiality of answers and limit the depth of the investigation; literacy problems of some respondents (specially those with limited L2 proficiency); unreliable and unmotivated respondents; having no opportunity to correct the respondents' mistakes if they misread or misinterpret questions; and the social desirability or prestige bias which may affect the results when people do not provide true answers.

Dörnyei (2010) indicates some advantages and disadvantages of questionnaires. He highlights their "unprecedented efficiency" in terms of financial resources and researcher time and effort as well as being very versatile; that is, they can be used with a variety of people in a variety of

situations dealing with a variety of topics. However, there are some limitations that threaten the reliability and validity of questionnaire data if the questionnaires are ill-constructed. According to Cohen et al. (2011), the advantages of the questionnaire over interviews are that: the questionnaire tends to be more reliable; it is more economical in terms of time and money; it is possible to be mailed; and because it is anonymous, it encourages more honesty (although not guaranteed). But still, Cohen et al. (2011) argue that interviews can be effective and efficient, and accurate data can be obtained if the interviewer is skilful and does his or her job well and the respondent is sincere and well-motivated.

Table 4.8: The advantages and disadvantages of a questionnaire

Advantages	Disadvantages
It is less expensive.	Self-selecting bias.
It offers greater anonymity.	Response rate can be very low.
The inflow of data is quick from many people.	Limited application. People of limited literacy may not be included in sample
It provides convenience (of time, place and speed) for respondents.	Lack of opportunity to clarify issues by interviewers and respondents.
Interviewer effects are absent.	Others can influence the answer.
It allows remote access to respondents.	There is no opportunity for spontaneous response as it can be read as a whole before starting answering.
Data analysis of closed questions are relatively simple.	Respondents might give inaccurate or misleading answers.

Source: Bryman (2012), Kumar (2014), Burton et al. (2014) and Gray (2014)

Questionnaires are often used to measure the frequency of attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of individuals. This is in line with the objectives of

this study, which aim to investigate the students' attitudes and perceptions towards learning and teaching of English reading comprehension at university level. Through the responses of the participating students, some of the current problems and difficulties that face Libyan students in the Department of English at Zawia University in reading comprehension can be figured out. In addition, the respondents' replies illustrate how English reading comprehension is taught in the Department of English at Zawia University.

According to Kumar (2014), using closed-ended questions in a questionnaire helps to ensure that the data required by the researcher is obtained and the responses are easier to analyse. In addition, closed-ended questions are easier and quicker to complete and may enhance the comparability of answers and clarify the meaning of a question for respondents (Bryman, 2012). This study uses the the closed-ended questionnaire as a quantitative data collection instrument.

Dörnyei (2011:102) lists three types of data that questionnaires can produce about respondents and they are as follows:

- *Factual questions: which are used to find out certain facts about the respondents such as demographic characteristics.*
- *Behavioural questions: which are used to find out what the respondents are doing or have done in the past.*
- *Attitudinal questions: which are used to find out what people think, covering attitudes, opinions, beliefs, interests, and values.*

The data pursued in the questionnaire of this study are in line with Dörnyei's (2011) list. The first part of the questionnaire seeks some

demographic data about respondents such as their gender, ages and academic levels. The questionnaire consists of 39 questions that are divided into four dimensions: Dimension One (3 questions) tries to investigate the attitudes of students towards reading comprehension and reading in English. Dimension Two (8 questions) tries to gauge the students' abilities and use of the different skills and strategies of reading comprehension. Dimension Three (4 questions) tries to check students' opinions about the facilities and resources of their university. Dimension Four (24 questions) is related to students' attitudes towards their lecturers' teaching strategies in the reading classes and the activities that they use before-, while-, and post-reading an English text.

The questionnaire has a five-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) 'strongly disagree' to (5) 'strongly agree'. Kumar (2014) points out that of the three types of scale that measure attitude (which are the Likert, Thurstone and Guttman scales), the Likert scale is the most commonly used. Bryman (2012:166) states that the Likert scale "*is essentially a multiple-indicator or multiple-item measure of a set of attitudes relating to a particular area. The goal of the Likert scale is to measure intensity of feelings about the area in question*". According to Bertram (2007), some of the strengths of the Likert scale are that it is simple to construct, likely to produce a highly reliable scale, easy to read and complete for participants and that a universal method of collecting data is used, which makes it easy to understand and code them. When constructing a Likert-scale, the items that take up the scale should be statements that are interrelated sharing the same object (Bryman, 2012).

4.9.2 Interviews

An interview is defined by Payne and Payne (2004:129) as “*data collection in face-to-face settings, using an oral question-and-answer format*”. According to Saunders et al. (2012:680), a research interview is a “*purposeful conversation between two or more people requiring the interviewer to establish rapport, to ask concise and unambiguous questions and to listen attentively*”. The interview process means a purposeful discussion between two or more individuals (Churchill and Iacobucci, 2009; Gray, 2014). Moreover, the purpose of the interview is to provide reliable and valid data that are relevant to the research objectives.

Burton et al. (2014) state that interviews are very effective in research in education. As far as reading comprehension is concerned, Rivers (2000:70) states that “*...interviews have proved useful in identifying the strategies employed by efficient readers as they extract meaning from texts*”. According to Punch (2005) and Denscombe (2010), being one of the main data collection tools in qualitative research, interviews are suitable when there is a need to collect data based on people’s perceptions, opinions, feelings and experiences, which is one of the objectives of this study. Interviews aim to explore diversity rather than to quantify (Kumar, 2014). Therefore, usually few people take part in the interviews.

Interviewers should be well-organised and well-prepared when they conduct an interview, dress and behave appropriately and show respect and establish rapport with the interviewees, be punctual and negotiate and

stick to a length of time for the interview, keep questions short and to the point avoiding double-barrelled questions, and repeat and summarise answers to aid clarity and understanding (Dawson, 2009).

Some of the purposes of interviews are: to test or develop a theory; to evaluate or assess a person in some respect; to gather data; and to sample respondent's opinions (Cohen et al., 2011). This study uses interviews to gather rich descriptive data about the lecturers' opinions about teaching reading comprehension and the factors that affect their practices and students' performance.

How an interview should be conducted depends on the accessibility of individuals, the cost, and the amount of time available. Creswell (2012) lists four types of interview approaches: one-to-one interviews, focus group interviews, telephone interviews, and e-mail interviews. One-to-one interviews are the most time-consuming and costly approach; and focus group interviews are used to collect shared understanding from several individuals and to get views from specific people. Both telephone interviews and e-mail interviews are often used when the participants are geographically dispersed. For this study, face-to-face interviews were supposed to be conducted; however, due to the unrest and turmoil that is currently taking place in Libya, the researcher was unable to travel to Libya to conduct face-to-face interviews. As a result, the researcher held telephone interviews via Skype and phone calls.

A number of researchers (Dawson, 2009; Denscombe, 2010; Gill and Johnson 2010; Robson, 2011 and Easterby-Smith et al., 2012) distinguish

three different types of interviews: structured interviews, unstructured interviews and semi-structured interviews.

Structured interviews are used in quantitative research, frequently in market research, hence the name as they are highly structured. This sort of interview consists of a series of pre-established questions, with pre-set response categories and should be delivered in a standardised manner. The interviewer, who ought to play a neutral role, asks the questions and ticks boxes with interviewee's responses. It can be conducted face-to-face, over the phone or online.

Unstructured interviews are used for qualitative research. They are also called in-depth interviews. Hair et al. (2007:419) point out that the in-depth interview is "*an unstructured one-to-one discussion session between a trained interviewer and a respondent*". Nunan (2006) indicates that these interviews are usually guided by the interviewee's responses rather than the researcher's agenda, which makes the direction of the interview relatively unpredictable. The main strength of unstructured interviews lies in being free in terms of the structure, the question wording and order, and content (Kumar, 2014). The questions in this type of interview are open-ended and not pre-planned, and with no pre-established categories for responding. The interviewer attempts to achieve a complete understanding of the points of view of the interviewees who are free to talk about what they think important, with little directional influence from the researcher. Unstructured interviews can be difficult to analyse due to the great deal of data produced. Punch (2005) indicates some points to think about when

planning data collection by unstructured interviews such as understanding the language and culture of respondents, gaining trust and establishing rapport.

Semi-structured interviews lie between these two extremes (Punch, 2009). They are guided open interviews (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Wilkinson and Birmingham (2003) point out that in the semi-structured interview, the interviewer sets up a general structure by deciding what area is to be covered and what main questions are to be asked. In addition, the interviewer has the opportunity to ask further questions in response to what are seen as significant replies (Bryman, 2012). Because of this flexibility, this type of interview is the most common type of interview used in qualitative social research (Dawson, 2009) and in applied linguistic research (Nunan, 2006; Dörnyie, 2007).

Interviewers produce interview schedules of a list of specific questions or topics to be discussed in order to elicit specific information. Although the same questions should be asked in each interview so that the researcher can compare and contrast the responses of the participants, the interview needs to remain flexible to let other important information arise. As pointed out by Dörnyie (2007), in semi-structured interviews, the interviewer provides direction and guidance, and follows up interesting developments to encourage the respondents to elaborate on certain issues. Kumar (2014) and Burton et al. (2014) present some advantages and disadvantages of interviews as follows:

Table 4.9: The advantages and disadvantages of interviews

Advantages	Disadvantages
More appropriate for complex situations.	Time-consuming and expensive.
Useful for collecting in-depth information.	Possibility of researcher bias.
Questions can be explained.	The quality of data is influenced by the quality of the interviewer.
Interactive as it allows the interviewer to probe relevant issues.	The interviewer requires the skill to keep it focused and relevant.
Very effective when there is trust between the interviewer and interviewee.	The quality of data depends upon the quality of the interaction.
Has a wider application	May be difficult to arrange.

Source: Kumar (2014), Burton et al. (2014)

According to Punch (2009) and Cohen et al (2011), interviews provide a useful way of understanding others and enable participants to express their ideas and understanding of the context that they work in. As a tool of data collection, the interview is flexible and powerful, enables interaction and gives space for naturalness (Cohen et al., 2011). In addition, Wilkinson and Birmingham (2003:44) state that *‘while other instruments focus on the surface elements of what is happening, interviews give the researcher more of an insight into the meaning and significance of what is happening’*. Therefore, interviews are an appropriate tool for collecting data in this research. According to Rowley (2012:162), interviews are useful when *“The research objectives centre on understanding experiences, opinions, attitudes, values, and processes”*. For this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted to find out the lecturers’ views and perceptions about their students’ reading skills and the challenges facing both students and lecturers during the teaching of comprehension skills.

4.10 Sampling

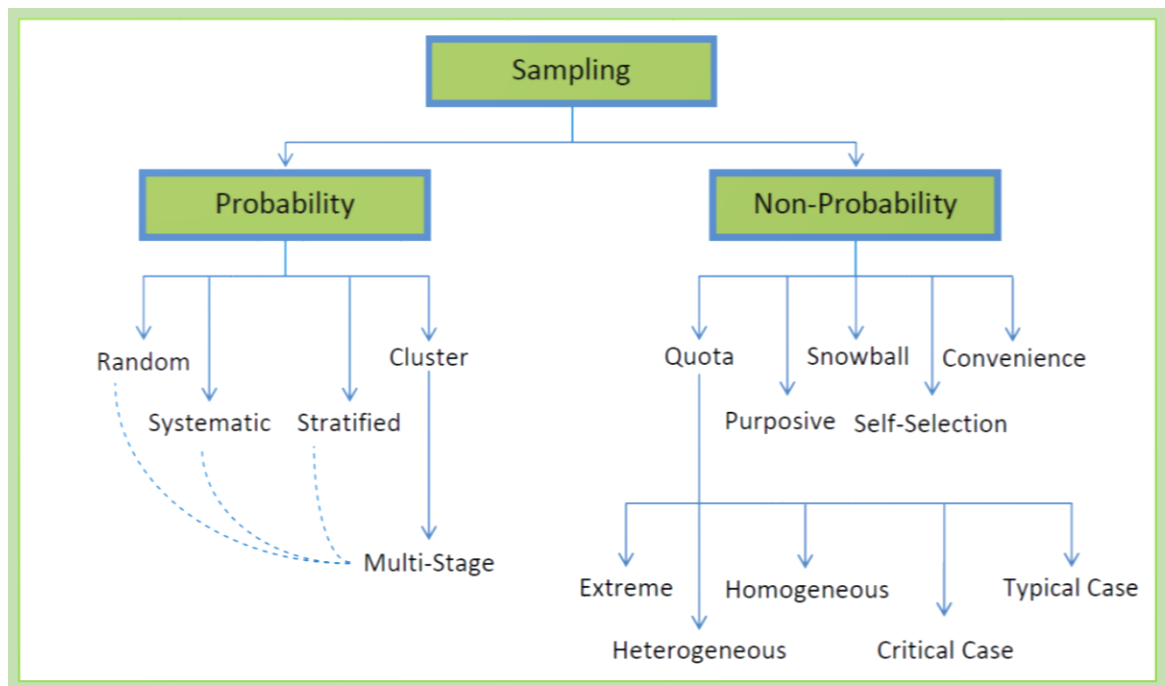
Sampling is one of the key ways to assess the design of a research project. Dörnyie (2007:96) defines 'sample' as "*the group of participants whom the researcher actually examines in an empirical investigation*". Hallebone and Priest (2009) state that the sample, which is a part of a larger population about which the study is, should be consistent with the study's objectives, the research questions, the method(s) or technique(s) used and the intended uses of the study's findings. Gray (2014) identifies two main approaches or procedures of sampling: probability sampling and non-probability. Probability sampling involves selecting random samples of subjects from a given population that represents the total number of possible elements as part of the study, whereas in non-probability sampling, the selection of participants in a study is non-random. Probability sampling includes simple random sampling and stratified sampling and cluster sampling while non-probability sampling includes convenience sampling, quota sampling and purposive sampling. Probability sampling designs are considered valuable due to the possibility to be precise about the relationship between a sample and the population, which allows the researcher to make firm judgement about the relationship between characteristics of a sample and the population (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012).

Random sampling is defined by Greener (2011:202) as "*a sampling process which attempts to be representative of the wider population by everyone within the group having an equal chance of being chosen*". Random sampling is used when the population is relatively homogenous

with respect to the research questions (Gray, 2014). In random sampling, a researcher includes all members of the population and selects a sample of them in a random process so as to avoid bias. According to Gill and Johnson (2010), another aim of random sampling is the generalisability of the finding through ensuring that the participants are a representative subset of the research population. As indicated by Greener (2011:202), in stratified sampling, *“the population is split into groups that may be representative of it according to a theory being tested (e.g. class, gender, ethnicity) and participants chosen randomly within them”*. An advantage of stratified sampling is that it increases the key groups in the sample while ensuring random selection (Gray, 2014). Cluster sampling acknowledges the difficulty in sampling a population as a whole and choosing a large number of small clustering units is preferable to a small number of large units. Hair et al. (2007) point out that, in cluster sampling, the target population is viewed as made up of heterogeneous groups or clusters.

Non-probability sampling designs such as convenience sampling involve selecting sample units on the basis of how easily accessible these samples are (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). In quota sampling, which is similar to stratified random sampling, non-random sampling methods are used to gather data through dividing the relevant population into categories and then selecting a specific size of a sample within each category. Purposive samples are used when the researcher has a clear idea of what sample units are needed and when particular people or settings are known to provide important information that cannot be gained otherwise.

Figure 4.1: The Common sampling techniques and types



Source: Saunders, et al. (2009:213)

According to Greener (2011:51), “*The sampling method chosen for a project is appropriate to the goals of the research*”. Random sampling is deemed to be in line with the objectives of this study.

4.10.1 Sampling population

A population is a group of individuals that share the same characteristic that is of interest to a study (Hartas, 2010). Neuman (2011:241) defines population as “*the abstract idea of a large group of many cases from which a researcher draws a sample and to which results from a sample are generalised*”. The respondents in this study can be categorised under two types of groups: students (who are involved in answering the questionnaires) and lecturers (who are invited to participate in semi-structured interviews). According to Greener (2011:51), “*quantitative and qualitative research designs might require different sampling strategies*”.

The sample size depends on the size of the the phenomenon that a researcher is trying to investigate, the number of the subgroups of the population, the heterogeneity of the population, and the degree of precision to be estimated (Bernard, 2013). Random sampling is used to ensure validity and reliability of the study. All of the lecturers who have taught reading comprehension in the Department of English at Zawia University were asked to take part in the interview. The sample of the questionnaire was decided on the basis of the calculation.

The researcher calculated the sample by using Yamane's (1967) formula:

Figure 4.2: Yamane's formula

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

According to Yamane (1967), **n** is the sample size, **N** is the population size, and **e** is the level of precision. The English Department at Zawia University includes 800 students, therefore:

$$n = \frac{800}{1 + 800 (0.5)^2} = 267 \text{ students}$$

In line with the calculations, 267 students were representative of the targeted population. However, all of the students of the Department of English at Zawia University were invited to participate in the questionnaire because "*In most second language studies, the population is the group of all language learners, perhaps in a particular context*" (Mackey and Gass, 2005:119). Therefore, 800 questionnaires were distributed. 468 questionnaires were returned, but 19 of them were incomplete. The data from 449 valid

questionnaires were analysed using the SPSS. Some of the criteria that were applied to judge the validities of the questionnaire are to eliminate any questionnaire paper with major missing values and if the respondent has repeatedly chosen more than one answer for the same question or has answered all the questions in the same manner.

Table 4.10: Response rate of questionnaires

Total number of questionnaires distributed	Number of valid questionnaires	Number of incomplete questionnaires	Response percentage
800	449	19	56.1%

4.12 Research generalisability

The extent to which the obtained results are appropriate for other situations and generalisations can be made to a larger group is known as the research generalisability (Saunders et al., 2009). The generalisability of the findings of research depends on the validity and reliability of the instruments used in a study.

This study focuses on one university in Libya, which means that there are limits to the degree to which the findings can be generalised; however, considering the similarities, problems and learning environment among the Libyan universities, the findings might be generalisable to other Libyan universities and recommendations will probably benefit all Libyan students.

4.12.1 Validity and reliability

Validity is defined by Hallebone and Priest (2009:201) as “*the extent to which data-generation methods and the findings they elicit reflect and*

measure what they set out to describe and/or measure". Saunders and Lewis (2012:127) view validity as "*the extent to which (a) data collection method or methods accurately measure what they were intended to measure and (b) the research findings are really about what they profess to be about*". Hair et al. (2007) associate validity with the term accuracy; that is, a construct measures what it is supposed to measure. According to Nunan (2006), there are two types of validity: internal validity and external validity. Internal validity refers to the interpretability of research and external validity refers to the extent of generalisability of the results. According to Saunders et al. (2012), there are some situations where the validity of research is threatened such as an event that changes participants' perceptions, the effect of testing on participants' views, the impact of changing a research tool in different stages which affects the results, lack of clarity, and the impact of a participant withdrawing from the study.

Reliability is defined by Nunan (2006:14) as "*the consistency and replicability of research*". Saunders and Lewis (2012:128) also define reliability as "*the extent to which data collection methods and analysis procedures will produce consistent findings*". According to Hallebone and Priest (2009:96) reliability is concerned with "*the repeatability and replicability of the approach and findings by the same and/or other researchers operating in the same paradigm and in a similar context*". Reliability might be a synonym for "reproducibility" when it refers to other researchers using the same methods to produce consistent findings, or it could be a synonym for "rigour" when it refers to a precise description of

how meanings were constructed from data reduction and synthesis, or a synonym for “comparative verification” when it refers to the reproduction and affirmation of findings when alternative means are used (Hallebone and Priest, 2009). There are two types of reliability: internal reliability and external reliability. The internal reliability is related to the consistency of data collection, analysis and interpretation, and the external reliability means obtaining similar results when the study is reproduced by other researchers (Nunan, 2006). According to Gray (2014), reliability as a measure of consistency can include measures of stability and equivalence.

Saunders et al. (2009) highlight some of the threats to reliability such as participant error (different issues like time, place or mood might affect the participants’ responses), participant bias (some participants take other people’s views into consideration rather than theirs when they give responses), observer error, and observer bias (such threats usually happen when there are different researchers conducting the same study).

4.12.2 Validity and reliability of questionnaires

Validity here indicates the extent to which the questionnaire reflects the reality as it will measure what the researcher intends to measure. According to Cohen et al. (2011), some of the principles for the validity of quantitative research are: controllability, replicability, predictability, generalisability, context-freedom, fragmentation and atomisation of research, randomisation of sample, objectivity, and observability. Gray (2014) points out some aspects of the questionnaire that might threaten its validity such as the wording of the questions it contains, irrelevant questions, a poor sequencing

of questions or confusing structure or design of questionnaire. Trying to indicate how the research questions of a questionnaire should be, a number of researchers such as Payne and Payne (2004), Dawson (2009) and Kumar (2014) caution about using ambiguous questions, double-barrelled questions, leading questions, questions with complex or technical terms, or questions that are based on presumptions. Dawson (2009) indicates the importance of making the questionnaire as short as possible with a mix of question formats, starting with easy to answer questions, and avoiding words with emotional connotations that might cause offence, embarrassment, sadness, anger or frustration.

Therefore, a number of aspects should be considered to assess the validity of the questionnaire;

- Content validity, which is related to the extent to which the questionnaire reflects accurate results for the questions being investigated, can be achieved through assessing the questionnaire by a group of individuals who can evaluate whether the questions are essential and useful or not (Saunders et al., 2009). The questionnaire of this study was checked by the director of studies and a group of PhD colleagues from several universities.
- Linguistic validity, which refers to the wording of the questions in the questionnaire, which requires careful consideration to avoid misunderstanding of the questions by respondents (Saunders et al., 2009). Thus, to ensure that all the words have the proper experiential meaning, a linguistic check-up of questionnaire wording was performed by the same academic group who judged the content validity.

- A pilot study, which was conducted to ensure the validity of questionnaire.

Reliability refers to the consistency of the findings over time and under various situations, for instance, by a different group of respondents (Field, 2009). A pilot study has been conducted to ensure the reliability of questionnaire. Besides, for the reliability of the questionnaire and consistency of all items in it, the data from the questionnaires were imported into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to find out the Cronbach's Alpha. Cronbach's Alpha is one of the most common ways to measure reliability that presents the average of all possible split-half correlations (Bryman, 2012). Cronbach's Alpha is computed by:

Figure 4.3: Cronbach's Alpha's formula

$$\alpha = \frac{k}{k-1} \times \left(1 - \frac{\sum s_i^2}{s_{sum}^2} \right)$$

The overall reliability co-efficient should be over 0.70 to show that there is a good internal consistency of scale (Brace et al., 2012). The Cronbach Alpha of the questionnaire in the pilot study of this research was 0.747 whereas the Cronbach Alpha of the questionnaire in the field study was 0.925.

4.12.3 Validity and reliability of interviews

Some of the principles of validity in qualitative research that Cohen et al. (2011) point out are: the principle source of data is the natural setting; the key instrument of research is the researcher (who is part of the researched world) rather than the a research tool; data are descriptive and context-bounded; the focus is on processes rather than the outcomes; data are

analysed inductively and presented in terms of the respondents rather than the researchers; and it is essential to catch the meaning and intention. In the case of structured and semi-structured interviews, Gray (2014) states that validity can be gained when ensuring that the question content focuses on the research objectives and interviewer effect is avoided. Even when providing guidance or clarification, the interviewer should not influence the respondent's answer.

4.13 Ethical considerations

Research ethics is associated with the appropriateness of researcher's procedures and behaviours regarding the right of participants, particularly in relation to formulating questions, designing research, obtaining access, collecting data, analysing data, and storing the data as well as presenting the finding in moral and proper way (Saunders et al., 2009). Cooper and Schindler (2008:34) define ethics as "*the norms or standards of behaviour that guide moral choices about our behaviour and relationships with others*". Gray (2014) argues that research ethics are concerned with the moral principles that guide research. Ethical research complies with predefined codes (Greener, 2011). Punch (2006) highlights the importance of determining the ethical dimensions of any research prior to conducting it. The ethical codes direct the manner in which a service is delivered; however, the concept of ethics is changeable from profession to profession but it is always considered unethical to cause harm to individuals, use information improperly or introduce bias (Kumar, 2014).

Gray (2014) lists four main areas of ethical principles: avoiding harm to participants, ensuring informed consent of participants, respecting the privacy

of participants, and avoiding the use of deception. When conducting research, researchers have to be aware of the ethical issues that are related to their studies. Similarly, Saunders et al. (2009) highlight the significance of ensuring avoiding harming, embarrassing, stressing or discomforting participants in any way and to guarantee the privacy of participants, the voluntary participation, obtaining consent from participants, and confidentiality of data and anonymity.

The stakeholders in research include the participants, the researcher and the funding body. Some of the ethical issues that are related to research participants are seeking informed consent and maintaining confidentiality. Some of the unethical issues that the researcher must avoid are introducing bias into the research activity, using inappropriate research methodology, incorrect reporting of the findings, or inappropriate use of information (Kumar, 2014).

Considering research ethics is important prior to conducting any research. According to Kumar (2005), to determine whether the study should go ahead, it is a core requirement of an evaluation to be ethical. As far as this research is concerned, a Research Ethics Application was approved by Liverpool John Moores University Ethics Committee. For the purpose of this study, the ethical principles and guidelines of Liverpool John Moores University have been adhered to throughout the stages to enhance the reliability and credibility of study (Saunders et al., 2009), and to maximise the trust level between the researcher and participant (Jankowicz, 2005).

All students and staff involved who participated in the study have been

informed about the nature and purpose of the study with emphasis on the voluntary nature of participation. The students in the Department of English at Zawia University who participated in the questionnaires were informed that they had the right to refuse or withdraw from the study at any stage and that would not affect their programme of study in any way. Consent forms were signed by the staff members who participated in the interview. These letters assure participants anonymity and confidentiality at all times throughout the study in the treatment of any data collated.

4.14 Data analysis

Bernard (2013:394) states that “*analysis is the search for patterns in data and for ideas that help explain why those patterns are there in the first place*”. According to Bryman and Bell (2007), to understand the data collected, they need to be processed, analysed and interpreted. As illustrated by Neuman (2011), some of the similarities between quantitative and qualitative data analysis are that both of them infer from empirical data to abstract ideas; both use a public process; both make comparisons; and both avoid errors and false conclusions.

Table 4.11: Differences between quantitative and qualitative data analysis

Quantitative data analysis	Qualitative data analysis
Quantitative uses a few shared and standardised techniques.	Qualitative uses many diverse and non-standardised techniques.
Quantitative analysis begins after all data have been collected.	Qualitative begins data analysis while still collecting data.
Quantitative uses precise and compact abstract data.	Qualitative uses imprecise, diffuse and relatively concrete data.

Source: Neuman (2011)

Data analysis involved steps such as coding the responses, cleaning,

screening the data and selecting the appropriate data analysis strategy.

4.14.1 Procedures of data analysis of questionnaires

The questionnaire was used to investigate students' attitudes and perceptions concerning their English reading abilities and use of reading skills, the facilities available at Zawia University and the strategies that their teachers implement in reading classes. The first part of the questionnaire analysis concerned the demographic data of the participants such as gender, age group, and academic level of study. For the reliability of the questionnaire and consistency of all items in it, the data from the questionnaires were imported into SPSS to find out Cronbach's Alpha, which was found to be 0.925. Descriptive analysis of the results provided the frequency and percentages, and mean scores from the data collected to show students' level of agreement and disagreement with the statements of the questionnaire. To achieve the research objectives for the current study and answer the research questions, the variables were compared through three tests: independent t-test, one-way Anova, and Pearson correlation. An independent-samples T-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of the participants according to their gender (males and females). A one-way Anova between-groups analysis of variance was run to explore the impact of the academic levels of students on their reading comprehension performance and determine some factors that influenced the quality of learning of reading comprehension. To find out any differences, Duncan test was run to identify where the differences were. Pearson Correlation analysis was used to quantify the strength and direction of the relationships between each two variables.

4.14.2 Procedures of data analysis of interviews

To verify the results from the questionnaire data analysis, semi-structured interviews were conducted to investigate the lecturers' view about the process of teaching and learning of reading comprehension at the Department of English at Zawia University. After providing the background of the participants, there was an assessment of the lecturers' perspectives regarding their teaching of English reading comprehension module, their perceptions about the teaching environment, and their views concerning some issues related to their roles in motivating students to read. Content analysis was employed. According to Jankowicz (2005), content analysis is suitable for analysing data obtained from interviews in which the categories reflect the major perspectives arising in the interview process.

4.11 Pilot study

According to Bernard (2013) and Saunders et al. (2009), a pilot study should be conducted before running a larger study. Kumar (2014) calls it a feasibility study. The pilot study must be done with individuals similar to the intended participants as the purpose of it is to check for poorly prepared items, ambiguity, or confusion (Wiersma and Jurs, 2009) and to refine the questionnaire so that the participants will face no problem in answering the questions (Saunders et al., 2009). However, Bryman (2012:263) argues that *"the desirability of piloting such instruments is not solely to do with trying to ensure that survey questions operate well; piloting also has a role in ensuring that the research instrument as a whole functions well"*. Therefore, it also helps researchers discover weaknesses in their methodology and methods.

To make sure that the wording and meanings of the questions are understandable in order to identify the students' perceptions about reading comprehension skills, a preliminary questionnaire was designed and distributed to 30 students at the Department of English at Zawia University. All of the 30 students answered all of the questions although some of them reported that the questionnaire was slightly long. All of the students agreed that the language used in the questionnaire was understandable. The data from the pilot questionnaire were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23, and the Cronbach Alpha of the questionnaire in this research was found to be '0.747'. consequently, the overall reliability co-efficient is more than 0.70, which implies that there is a good internal consistency of scale. According to Gorard (2003), the instrument in a pilot study should be delivered and analysed in the same way as intended for the final study. Wiersma and Jurs (2009) indicate that as soon as the measurement instrument is evaluated to be satisfactory, the researcher can begin collecting data. Based on the feedback received from the pilot group and the positive Cronbach Alpha, the study instrument gained the initial reliability and it was valid for the full-scale data collection.

4.15 Summary

The different philosophical assumptions were discussed, concluding that the positivist philosophy more closely aligns with the overall purpose and the nature of the current study. The discussion on the research strategy identified a deductive approach as the most appropriate, because the process of testing out theory is closely related with positivism. Using a

mixed methods research was justified. There was a focus on questionnaires and interviews as data collection instruments because they were the tools this research used for gathering the data needed to answer the research questions and achieve the objectives of this study. The validity and reliability of questionnaires and interviews were also discussed. The next chapter concerns the findings that resulted from the analysis.

Chapter Five:

Data analysis and discussion

5. Introduction

This chapter aims to analyse and interpret the findings obtained from the data collected using questionnaires and interviews in line with the methodology and the research objectives. The purpose of data analysis is to answer the research questions and to help determine the relationship among variables. In the first section, the findings of the output of the questionnaire are gained using SPSS in order to gauge the perceptions of the students about the challenges that they face during the reading comprehension module at the Department of English at Zawia University. To support the findings of the data analysis of the questionnaire, the results of the data analysis of the interviews are presented and interpreted in section 5.2.

5.1 Data analysis of questionnaire

The questionnaire was used to investigate students' attitudes and perceptions concerning their English reading comprehension performance, use of reading skills and the strategies that their teachers implement in reading classes. In addition to the demographic data required, the questionnaire consists of 39 statements with closed response items, scaling from strongly disagree to strongly agree to show to what extent participants agree or disagree with each statement.

5.1.1 Research Participants

Participants are those individuals from the sample who respond to the survey (Andres, 2012). All of the students of the Department of English at Zawia University were asked to participate in the questionnaire. Therefore, 800 questionnaires were distributed. 468 questionnaires were returned, 19 of which were incomplete.

Table 5.1: Response rate of questionnaires

Total number of questionnaires distributed	Total number of valid questionnaires	Number of incomplete questionnaires	Total number of unreturned questionnaires	Response percentage
800	449	19	332	56.1%

5.1.1.1 Demographic Data

The first part of the questionnaire concerns the demographic data of the participants such as gender, age group, and academic level of study as shown in the tables below.

Table 5.2: The respondents' gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	189	42.1	42.1	42.1
	Female	260	57.9	57.9	100.0
	Total	449	100.0	100.0	

As depicted in the above table, the percentage of female participants (57.9%) is much higher than male respondents' (42.1%). This is not surprising because of the large number of female students in the Department in comparison to male students. Traditionally speaking, more female students tend to opt for languages than male students do.

Table 5.3: The respondents' age

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Age_17-19	121	26.9	26.9	26.9
	Age_20-22	194	43.2	43.2	70.2
	Age_23-25	91	20.3	20.3	90.4
	26_Plus	43	9.6	9.6	100.0
	Total	449	100.0	100.0	

As can be seen in the above table, the largest number of participants are aged between 20 and 22 (43.2%), and these are usually in Year 3 and Year 4, who together represent 57.01% of the whole number of participants. The second largest group of respondents are aged 17, 18, and 19 (26.9%), who are usually in Years 1, 2 or 3. 20.3% of the participants are between 23 and 25 years old, followed by those who are 26 years old or more (9.6%). The last group consists of some students who perhaps joined the college as mature students or who failed their exams repeatedly and who are allowed by the system to retake their exams until they pass.

Table 5.4: The respondents' academic level

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Year 1	87	19.4	19.4	19.4
	Year 2	106	23.6	23.6	43.0
	Year 3	119	26.5	26.5	69.5
	Year 4	137	30.5	30.5	100.0
	Total	449	100.0	100.0	

The above table shows the percentage of respondents in each year. It is noticeable that the higher the academic level is, the more the participants are; that is, Year 1: 19.4%; Year 2: 23.6%; Year 3: 26.5%; and Year 4: 30.5%. This gradual rise in the participation rate might reflect the increasing degree of commitment of students as they grow older.

5.1.2 Descriptive analysis

5.1.2.1 Cronbach's Alpha

For the reliability of the questionnaire and consistency of all items in it, the data from the questionnaires were imported into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to find out Cronbach's Alpha. In this study, Cronbach's Alpha is 0.925, which implies that there is a good internal consistency of scale data.

Table 5.5: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach Alpha	N of Items
.925	39

5.1.2.2 The frequencies and percentages of the responses of the participants according to their academic level

Dimension One: **Reading Attitude** (Students' attitudes towards English reading comprehension)

Table 5.6: I find English reading comprehension simple.

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1.1 I find English reading comprehension simple.	strongly disagree	48	55%	57	54%	56	47%	73	53%	234	52%
	disagree	26	30%	29	27%	35	29%	30	22%	120	27%
	neutral	3	3%	3	3%	4	3%	3	2%	13	3%
	agree	5	6%	8	8%	11	9%	18	13%	42	9%
	strongly agree	5	6%	9	8%	13	11%	13	9%	40	9%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

Table 5.6 indicates that the majority of participants do not find reading comprehension simple. 234 students (52%) strongly disagree and 120 students (27%) disagree that English reading comprehension is simple whereas only 42 students (9%) agree and 40 students (9%) strongly agree, most of whom are in Year 4 (31 students/ 22%) and Year 3 (24 students/

20%). This means that most of the participants, especially those in Year 1 (85%) and Year 2 (81%), find English reading comprehension difficult. This may reveal the negative attitude of students towards reading in English in spite of their interest to learn and speak foreign languages, especially the English language.

Table 5.7: I read additional materials (stories, magazines etc. written in English) out of class.

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1.2 I read additional materials (stories, magazines etc. written in English) out of class.	strongly disagree	48	55%	69	65%	71	60%	65	47%	266	59%
	disagree	26	30%	15	14%	16	13%	23	17%	61	14%
	neutral	3	3%	4	4%	4	3%	2	1%	14	3%
	agree	5	6%	10	9%	14	12%	25	18%	58	13%
	strongly agree	5	6%	8	8%	14	12%	22	16%	50	11%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

As illustrated in the above table, most students do not read additional materials in English on their own; that is, 85% of Year 1, 84% of Year 2, 73% of Year 3, and 64% of Year 4 either strongly disagree or disagree with the statement “*I read additional materials (stories, magazines etc. written in English) out of class*”. Some of fourth-year (47 students/ 34%) and third-year students (28 students/ 24%) agree or strongly agree that they read additional materials in English out of class. The main reason for avoiding reading additional materials in English by students is probably the rare habit of reading in Arabic. In addition, English magazines, novels and newspapers are often unavailable and the accessibility to online material is limited because of the bad connections of the Internet and unaffordability to subscribe to some websites.

Table 5.8: I use English-English dictionaries.

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1.3 I use English-English dictionaries.	strongly disagree	50	57%	62	58%	68	57%	75	55%	255	57%
	disagree	18	21%	18	17%	14	12%	13	9%	63	14%
	neutral	5	6%	3	3%	4	3%	3	2%	15	3%
	agree	9	10%	10	9%	18	15%	22	16%	59	13%
	strongly agree	5	6%	13	12%	15	13%	24	18%	57	13%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

Table 5.8 reveals that the majority of students (318 students/ 71%) admit that they do not use English-English dictionaries. 255 students (57%) strongly disagree and 63 students (14%) disagree with the statement “*I use English-English dictionaries*”. Some of the students, few of whom are in first or second Year, either strongly agree (57 students/ 13%) or agree (59 students/ 13%). Many students tend to use bilingual dictionaries, especially electronic ones which are lightweight, small in size, and easy to use.

Table 5.9: Reading attitude

	Statements	Mean	ST.D
1	I find English reading comprehension simple.	1.96	1.315
2	I read additional materials (stories, magazines etc. written in English) out of class.	2.01	1.468
3	I use English-English dictionaries.	2.11	1.504
Overall mean of the dimension of reading attitude		2.0275	
Scale: 1.Strongly disagree, 2. Disagree, 3. Neutral, 4. Agree, 5. Strongly agree			

The above dimension tries to investigate the attitudes of the students towards reading comprehension and reading in English. According to the responses of the participants to the three items in this dimension, it appears that the majority of students think that English reading comprehension is not simple, which implies that they have difficulties in this area. The majority of the students do not read additional materials written in English and only few of

them use English-English dictionary while many of them prefer using English-Arabic dictionaries. This reveals the negative attitude of students towards reading in English in spite of their interest to learn and speak foreign languages, especially the English language. However, Pathan (2012) suggest that the Libyan students' disengagement and disinterest in reading comprehension could be attributed partly to the way reading comprehension is taught.

Dimension Two: **Reading Strategies** (Students' reading abilities and strategy use)

Table 5.10: **Before starting reading, I try to guess what the text will be about.**

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
2.1 Before starting reading, I try to guess what the text will be about.	strongly disagree	49	56%	64	60%	66	55%	57	42%	236	53%
	disagree	22	25%	25	24%	23	19%	35	26%	105	23%
	neutral	5	6%	3	3%	5	4%	4	3%	17	4%
	agree	5	6%	9	8%	11	9%	19	14%	44	10%
	strongly agree	6	7%	5	5%	14	12%	22	16%	47	10%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

Table 5.10 shows that most students (76%) do not try to guess what the text will be about before starting reading, while 91 students (20%) assert that they do try to use this skill. That is, 49 students (56%) of Year 1, 64 students (60%) of Year 2, 66 students (55%) of Year 3, and 57 students (42%) of Year 4 strongly disagree and 22 students (25%) of Year 1, 25 students (24%) of Year 2, 23 students (19%) of Year 3, and 35 students (26%) of Year 4 disagree with the statement "*Before starting reading, I try to guess what the text will be about*". Only 4% of the responses are neutral. On the other hand, only 5 students (6%) of Year 1, 9 students (8%) of Year 2, 11 students (9%)

of Year 3, and 19 students (14%) of Year 4 agree and 6 students (7%) of Year 1, 5 students (5%) of Year 2, 14 students (12%) of Year 3, and 22 students (16%) of Year 4 strongly agree with this statement. Guessing helps readers understand a text through trying to predict what is coming, and making assumptions about the content. Pre-knowledge about a topic helps readers to guess and makes understanding a text an easier task.

Table 5.11: I can read a large text quickly to get an overall idea about it.

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
2.2 I can read a large text quickly to get an overall idea about it.	strongly disagree	54	62%	68	64%	65	55%	72	53%	259	58%
	disagree	17	20%	18	17%	18	15%	19	14%	72	16%
	neutral	4	5%	5	5%	3	3%	4	3%	16	4%
	agree	8	9%	9	8%	19	16%	20	15%	56	12%
	strongly agree	4	5%	6	6%	14	12%	22	16%	46	10%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

Table 5.11 reveals that most of the students (74%) state that they cannot skim a large text quickly. 259 students (58%) strongly disagree with the statement “I can read a large text quickly to get an overall idea about it”; that is, 54 students (62%) of Year 1, 68 students (64%) of Year 2, 65 students (55%) of Year 3, and 72 students (53%) of Year 4 strongly disagree whereas 17 students (20%) of Year 1, 18 students (17%) of Year 2, 18 students (15%) of Year 3, and 19 students (14%) of Year 4 disagree that they can do it. Out of 102 of students (22%) that agree or strongly agree with the statement, 12 students are in Year 1, 15 students are in Year 2, 33 students are in Year 3, and 42 students are in Year 4. Skimming or reading for general understanding helps readers understand the gist of a text without worrying too much about the details. It also helps readers save time and implies a

confident reading competence. Thus, students need to be trained to skim texts.

Table 5.12: **While I am reading, I can find out the main topic idea of a text.**

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
2.3 While I am reading, I can find out the main topic idea of a text.	strongly disagree	59	68%	70	66%	70	59%	84	61%	283	63%
	disagree	12	14%	14	13%	22	18%	13	9%	61	14%
	neutral	3	3%	4	4%	2	2%	3	2%	12	3%
	agree	7	8%	9	8%	9	8%	17	12%	42	9%
	strongly agree	6	7%	9	8%	16	13%	20	15%	51	11%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

What is significant from the above table is that the majority of the respondents (344 students/ 77%) think that they cannot figure out the topic idea of a text while they are reading. Hence, 59 students (68%) of Year 1, 70 students (66%) of Year 2, 70 students (59%) of Year 3, and 84 students (61%) of Year 4 strongly disagree and 12 students (14%) of Year 1, 14 students (13%) of Year 2, 22 students (18%) of Year 3, and 13 students (9%) of Year 4 disagree with the statement “*While I am reading, I can find out the main topic idea of a text*”. Only 3% of the responses is neutral. On the other hand, most of those who agree or strongly agree with the statement are in Year 4 (17+20). To figure out the topic idea of a text is the core of understanding the text as a whole. This requires applying reading skills while reading. Tackling reading comprehension through the topic and main ideas of a text is effective (Naidu et al., 2013). Therefore, training the students to realise the main idea of a text is considered one of the ways through which EFL reading instruction helps to improve their comprehension (Lo et al., 2013).

Table 5.13: I can distinguish the main ideas from supporting details.

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
2.4 I can distinguish the main ideas from supporting details.	strongly disagree	59	68%	74	70%	73	61%	77	56%	283	63%
	disagree	16	18%	12	11%	13	11%	11	8%	52	12%
	neutral	2	2%	3	3%	5	4%	4	3%	14	3%
	agree	5	6%	12	11%	8	7%	16	12%	41	9%
	strongly agree	5	6%	5	5%	20	17%	29	21%	59	13%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

Table 5.13 shows that most of the participants cannot distinguish the main ideas from supporting details in a text; that is, 283 students (63%) strongly disagree and 52 students (12%) disagree with the statement “*I can distinguish the main ideas from supporting details*” whereas only 41 students (9%) agree and 59 students (13%) strongly agree with this statement. Most of these are in Year 4 (45 students) and Year 3 (28 students). This reveals one of the problems that students have in reading, which limits their comprehension of a text. When students are exposed to different types of texts and are trained to understand text organisation, they might find it much easier to identify the main and supporting ideas.

Table 5.14: I can find out specific information from the text quickly.

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
2.5 I can find out specific information from the text quickly.	strongly disagree	66	76%	77	73%	76	64%	81	59%	300	67%
	disagree	9	10%	13	12%	19	16%	12	9%	53	12%
	neutral	3	3%	5	5%	4	3%	4	3%	16	4%
	agree	5	6%	6	6%	11	9%	18	13%	40	9%
	strongly agree	4	5%	5	5%	9	8%	22	16%	40	9%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

The above table depicts that the greatest number of the respondents (353

students/ 79%) are unable to scan a reading text quickly: 300 students (67%) strongly disagree and 53 students (12%) disagree with the statement “*I can find out specific information from the text quickly*”. Half of the students that agree or strongly agree (80 students/ 18%) with the statement are in Year 4 (40 students) and 20 of them are in Year 3. When readers are good at scanning, it becomes easy for them to dismiss any superfluous information, which saves time and effort. In general, scanning appears to be more teachable and easier to apply than some other reading skills and it can help students to pass their exams but it does not guarantee full understanding of a text.

Table 5.15: **I can analyse long sentences and phrases.**

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
2.6 I can analyse long sentences and phrases.	strongly disagree	59	68%	70	66%	77	65%	81	59%	287	64%
	disagree	16	18%	16	15%	18	15%	16	12%	66	15%
	neutral	2	2%	3	3%	3	3%	4	3%	12	3%
	agree	7	8%	10	9%	11	9%	18	13%	46	10%
	strongly agree	3	3%	7	7%	10	8%	18	13%	38	8%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

As illustrated in Table 5.15, most students (79%) either strongly disagree or disagree with the statement “*I can analyse long sentences and phrases*”. On the other hand, 84 students (18%) think that they can analyse long sentences and phrases. It is noteworthy that the majority of students are unable to undertake text analysis because they are not well-prepared. The curriculum often concentrates on teaching grammar rules more than other aspects of language; which suggests that teaching of English programme at the Department of English at Zawia University is in need of reform to balance the four skills and put them on equal footing.

Table 5.16: I can give a title to a reading passage.

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
2.7 I can give a title to a reading passage.	strongly disagree	58	67%	64	60%	77	65%	70	51%	269	60%
	disagree	16	18%	21	20%	20	17%	20	15%	77	17%
	neutral	3	3%	4	4%	4	3%	4	3%	15	3%
	agree	5	6%	10	9%	10	8%	20	15%	45	10%
	strongly agree	5	6%	7	7%	8	7%	23	17%	43	10%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

According to Table 5.16, the majority of students (346 students/ 77%) admit that they cannot give a title to a reading passage. Accordingly, 269 students (60%) strongly disagree and 77 students (17%) disagree with the statement “I can give a title to a reading passage”. 20% of the students, few of whom are in Year 1, either strongly agree (43 students/ 10%) or agree (45 students/ 10%). Giving a title to a reading text can reflect understanding the topic idea in this text as well as comprehending it as a whole. In other words, to correctly give a title to a reading text can be a basic indicator of reading comprehension. Once again, students’ inability to give a title to a text indicates that they are not trained to undertake text information processing in order to attach a title to a text.

Table 5.17: After finishing reading, I can summarise a reading text.

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
2.8 After finishing reading, I can summarise a reading text.	strongly disagree	64	74%	75	71%	73	61%	86	63%	298	66%
	disagree	10	11%	12	11%	16	13%	15	11%	53	12%
	neutral	4	5%	4	4%	5	4%	4	3%	17	4%
	agree	5	6%	8	8%	11	9%	17	12%	41	9%
	strongly agree	4	5%	7	7%	14	12%	15	11%	40	9%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

As shown in the above table, most of the participants (351 students/ 78%) are unable to summarise a text after reading it; that is, 298 students (66%) strongly disagree and 53 students (12%) disagree with the statement “*After finishing reading, I can summarise a reading text*” whereas only 41 students (9%) agree and 40 students (9%) strongly agree with this statement. When a reader understands the text as a whole, s/he can distinguish the main ideas from the supporting details and consequently s/he can give a summary paraphrasing the important parts of a text. Therefore, to give a suitable summary to a reading text may mean managing the reading comprehension process in a proper way.

Table 5.18: Reading strategies

No.	Question	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Before starting reading, I try to guess what the text will be about.	2.02	1.379
2	I can read a large text quickly to get an overall idea about it.	2.02	1.427
3	While I am reading, I can find out the main topic idea of a text.	1.92	1.433
4	I can distinguish the main ideas from supporting details.	1.94	1.460
5	I can find out specific information from the text quickly.	1.81	1.353
6	I can analyse long sentences and phrases.	1.85	1.348
7	I can give a title to a reading passage.	1.92	1.375
8	After finishing reading, I can summarise a reading text.	1.82	1.349
overall mean of the dimension of reading strategies		1.9120	
Scale: 1.Strongly disagree. 2. Disagree. 3. Neutral. 4. Agree. 5. Strongly agree			

The above dimension tries to gauge the students’ use of the different skills and strategies of reading comprehension. It is evident from the answers that most of the respondents lack the necessary reading skills that can help them comprehend English texts. The majority of students are unable to predict,

skim, scan, analyse or summarise reading texts, which reflects their inadequate comprehension when they read English texts. This can easily be attributed to their lack of familiarity with how to process a text for comprehension. On the other hand, most of the students that think they can apply these reading skills are in Year 3 and Year 4, who might be the top students that have improved their reading skills through self-study. Overall, this might give a clue to what extent the Libyan students in the Department of English at Zawia University face difficulties in the reading comprehension module.

Dimension Three: **Students' attitudes to the facilities and resources of the University**

Table 5.19: **The library resources and services at the university are sufficiently available.**

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
3.1 The library resources and services at the university are sufficiently available.	strongly disagree	29	33%	42	40%	37	31%	44	32%	152	34%
	disagree	48	55%	53	50%	71	60%	82	60%	254	57%
	neutral	3	3%	3	3%	4	3%	3	2%	13	3%
	agree	3	3%	4	4%	4	3%	4	3%	15	3%
	strongly agree	4	5%	4	4%	3	3%	4	3%	15	3%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

According to Table 5.19, the majority of participants (406 students/ 91%) either strongly disagree or disagree with the statement (*The library resources and services at the university are sufficiently available*). Only 3% (15 students) strongly agree with the above statement and another 3% (15 students) agree that the library is well-resourced. Libraries can have an effect on students' performance. Well-resourced libraries should offer study space, books, journals, computers, electronic resources, workstations, collections and perhaps a place to get a cup of coffee. None of these

services and resources is available in the small library at Zawia University. There are only some outdated books.

Table 5.20: **The Internet is always accessible at the university.**

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
3.2 The Internet is always accessible at the university.	strongly disagree	35	40%	44	42%	54	45%	69	50%	202	45%
	disagree	43	49%	52	49%	55	46%	60	44%	210	47%
	neutral	3	3%	3	3%	3	3%	3	2%	12	3%
	agree	3	3%	3	3%	4	3%	3	2%	13	3%
	strongly agree	3	3%	4	4%	3	3%	2	1%	12	3%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

Table 5.20 shows that most of the participants either strongly disagree (202 students/ 45%) or disagree (210 students/ 47%) with the statement (*The Internet is always accessible at the university*). While only 3% (12 students) are neutral, 3% (12 students) strongly agree with the above statement and another 3% (13 students) agree that the Internet is always available. The Internet is one of the effective resources for EFL teachers (Chen, 2008). The Internet can enrich materials and help the students to understand native speakers to improve the foreign language they learn (Wu et al., 2013). According to Abdi (2013), some of the benefits of using the Internet in language teaching and learning are: motivating students and teachers, increasing the participation and interaction of students in the classroom, and allowing a deeper integration with the culture of the target language. In line with this, Lo et al. (2013) reveal that online technology allows EFL readers the flexibility to interact with the text in ways not possible with printed texts only. According to Abdi (2013), reading on-line needs the existence of appropriate access to Internet, which is not the case in Libyan universities.

Table 5.21: **Classrooms are provided with IT facilities.**

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
3.3 Classrooms are provided with IT facilities.	strongly disagree	53	61%	64	60%	74	62%	68	50%	259	58%
	disagree	28	32%	33	31%	35	29%	59	43%	155	35%
	neutral	2	2%	3	3%	3	3%	3	2%	11	2%
	agree	2	2%	3	3%	3	3%	4	3%	12	3%
	strongly agree	2	2%	3	3%	4	3%	3	2%	12	3%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

Table 5.21 describes the participants' responses to the statement (*Classrooms are provided with IT facilities*). The majority of students either strongly disagree (259 students/ 58%) or disagree (155 students/ 35%) with the above statement. 11 students (2%) are neutral. Only few students either strongly agree (12 students/ 3%) or agree (12 students/ 3%) that there are IT facilities in their classrooms. It is probable that these students sometimes use the computer room in the University. With the emergence of technology and its fast development, teachers have to integrate technology and the use of computers in teaching reading (Park and Kim, 2011). Using computers in learning can make it possible to design and develop learning environments that take the differences among the individuals into account and that could be modified according to the personal needs of the users (Brusilovsky, 2003). Compared to printed material, computers are preferred by many people because of the accessibility of the information, the ability to change text to the desired size, ease of organisation, the avoidance of paper costs, and environmental benefits by the reduction of paper use (Dundar and Akcyir, 2012). Using computers in teaching English can increase learners' motivation, promote language awareness, stimulate learners' responses to

literary texts and aid comprehension (Zainal, 2012). Unfortunately, in the Department of English at Zawia University, there is only one classroom that is provided with some old computers. This has discouraged teachers from integrating computers and technology in their teaching methods.

Table 5.22: There is an acceptable number of students in each classroom.

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
3.4 There is an acceptable number of students in each classroom.	strongly disagree	38	44%	47	44%	63	53%	75	55%	223	50%
	disagree	39	45%	49	46%	47	39%	52	38%	187	42%
	neutral	4	5%	3	3%	3	3%	3	2%	13	3%
	agree	4	5%	4	4%	3	3%	4	3%	15	3%
	strongly agree	2	2%	3	3%	3	3%	3	2%	11	2%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

As can be seen from the table above, most respondents either strongly disagree (223 students/ 50%) or disagree (187 students/ 42%) with the statement (*There is an acceptable number of students in each classroom*). Few students either strongly agree (2%/ 11 students) or agree (3%/ 15 students) with the above statement. The number of students in classrooms can deeply affect the instruction process either in a positive way when the number is acceptable or in a negative way when classes are overcrowded. In fact, overcrowded classes can be an impeding and demotivating factor for both learners and teachers. It may make teachers' attempt to provide a meaningful teaching session challenging. In Libyan universities, there are on average forty students in a class and sometimes the number exceeds sixty.

Table 5.23: **Students' attitudes to the facilities and resources of the University**

	Statements	Mean	ST.D
1	The library resources and services at the university are sufficiently available.	1.86	.885
2	The Internet is always accessible at the university.	1.71	.868
3	Classrooms are provided with IT facilities.	1.58	.880
4	There is an acceptable number of students in each classroom.	1.67	.880
Overall mean of the dimension about facilities		1.7066	
Scale: 1.Strongly disagree, 2. Disagree, 3. Neutral, 4. Agree, 5. Strongly agree			

The above dimension consists of four questions that try to identify the facilities and resources that are available for students in the Department of English at Zawia University. According to participants' responses, their university lacks the necessary resources and facilities that can help create a motivating learning environment to enhance students' learning and promote their reading performance. Rajendran (2010) stresses that the unavailability of study materials and library resources hinders the process of learning the English language.

Dimension Four: **Teaching strategies** (Students' attitudes toward reading instruction and teaching strategies)

Table 5.24: **My teacher tries to make reading enjoyable.**

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
4.1 My teacher tries to make reading enjoyable.	strongly disagree	57	66%	68	64%	75	63%	99	72%	299	67%
	disagree	14	16%	20	19%	29	24%	20	15%	83	18%
	neutral	4	5%	4	4%	4	3%	3	2%	15	3%
	agree	7	8%	6	6%	6	5%	9	7%	28	6%
	strongly agree	5	6%	8	8%	5	4%	6	4%	24	5%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

The above table shows the dissatisfaction that the majority of students have with the environment in which their teachers deliver reading classes as most students either strongly disagree (299 students/ 67%) or disagree (83

students/ 18%) with the statement “*My teacher tries to make reading enjoyable*” whereas only 28 students (6%) agree and 24 students (5%) strongly agree with this statement. Accordingly, only few teachers seem to try to raise motivation in reading, which may negatively influence students’ attitudes towards English reading comprehension.

Table 5.25: **My teacher gives me the chance to select the topics of the reading texts.**

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
4.2 My teacher gives me the chance to select the topics of the reading texts.	strongly disagree	48	55%	62	58%	79	66%	92	67%	281	63%
	disagree	25	29%	27	25%	23	19%	27	20%	102	23%
	neutral	3	3%	4	4%	2	2%	2	1%	11	2%
	agree	5	6%	8	8%	7	6%	8	6%	28	6%
	strongly agree	6	7%	5	5%	8	7%	8	6%	27	6%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

According to the above table, most of the students (383 students/ 86%) assert that their teachers do not give them the chance to choose the topics of the reading text; that is, 281 students (63%) strongly disagree and 102 students (23%) disagree with the statement “*My teacher gives me the chance to select the topics of the reading texts*”. 12% of the students either strongly agree (27 students/ 6%) or agree (28 students/ 6%). It is the lecturers’ responsibility to decide the syllabus items and select reading texts. Reading materials should be selected to stimulate students’ interests through various interesting topics and different types of texts as well as giving students the opportunity to negotiate the selection of texts according to their purposes of reading.

Table 5.26: **My teacher speaks only in English in class.**

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
4.3 My teacher speaks only in English in class.	strongly disagree	47	54%	53	50%	58	49%	79	58%	237	53%
	disagree	21	24%	29	27%	36	30%	27	20%	113	25%
	neutral	3	3%	4	4%	3	3%	3	2%	13	3%
	agree	7	8%	9	8%	8	7%	10	7%	34	8%
	strongly agree	9	10%	11	10%	14	12%	18	13%	52	12%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

As can be seen from Table 5.26, 78% of students claim that Arabic is usually the language of instruction in reading classes; that is, 237 students (53%) strongly disagree and 113 students (25%) disagree with the statement “*My teacher speaks only in English in class*”. On the other hand, only 20% of them assert that their teachers always use English in class. This reflects the teachers’ lack of confidence and lack of practice in speaking English, which does not inspire the students who look for a role model. In addition, it might also indicate that the students have difficulty in listening comprehension. The excessive use of Arabic in instruction is one of the factors behind the Libyan students’ low proficiency in English (Soliman, 2013); however, it might be essential for teachers to use Arabic to support weak learners.

Table 5.27: **My teacher asks me to use only English in discussing the text in class.**

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
4.4 My teacher asks me to use only English in discussing the text in class.	strongly disagree	46	53%	70	66%	72	61%	85	62%	273	61%
	disagree	21	24%	18	17%	22	18%	21	15%	82	18%
	neutral	3	3%	4	4%	3	3%	3	2%	13	3%
	agree	9	10%	7	7%	11	9%	16	12%	43	10%
	strongly agree	8	9%	7	7%	11	9%	12	9%	38	8%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

The above table indicates that most of the students (356 students/ 79%)

claim that their teachers allow them to use Arabic in discussing the text in class; many students try to translate the text into Arabic and write the Arabic equivalents above the English vocabulary so as a try to comprehend what they read. Thus, 273 students (61%) strongly disagree and 82 students (18%) disagree with the statement “*My teacher asks me to use only English in discussing the text in class*”. 81 students (20%) either strongly agree (38 students/ 8%) or agree (43 students/ 10%) that they are asked by their teachers to use only English in class. Discussing the text in English is a good chance for students to practise speaking in English and gain confidence.

Table 5.28: My teacher arranges the class in groups/pairs in order that we find meaning of texts through discussion.

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
4.5 My teacher arranges the class in groups/pairs in order that we find meaning of texts through discussion.	strongly disagree	65	75%	74	70%	92	77%	107	78%	338	75%
	disagree	10	11%	15	14%	12	10%	13	9%	50	11%
	neutral	3	3%	2	2%	4	3%	3	2%	12	3%
	agree	6	7%	8	8%	4	3%	6	4%	24	5%
	strongly agree	3	3%	7	7%	7	6%	8	6%	25	6%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

As shown in the above table, According to the responses of the majority of the participants, most teachers do not arrange the class in groups or pairs when discussing the meaning of texts. Most students either strongly disagree (338 students/ 75%) or disagree (50 students/ 11%) with the statement “*My teacher arranges the class in groups/pairs in order that we find meaning of texts through discussion*” whereas only 24 students (5%) agree and 25 students (6%) strongly agree with this statement. Many teachers arrange their classes in rows, a traditional way that does not support group working.

To work effectively, some strategies for teaching reading require dividing the class into groups or pairs. For example, in a cooperative learning strategy, which is learner-centred, students have to work in groups so that they build on each other's knowledge and provide feedback on each other's activities (Webb, 2009).

Table 5.29: **My teacher divides the reading lesson into pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities.**

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
4.6 My teacher divides the reading lesson into pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities.	strongly disagree	66	76%	77	73%	89	75%	89	75%	334	74%
	disagree	9	10%	13	12%	17	14%	17	14%	52	12%
	neutral	3	3%	3	3%	3	3%	3	3%	12	3%
	agree	5	6%	7	7%	3	3%	3	3%	24	5%
	strongly agree	4	5%	6	6%	7	6%	7	6%	27	6%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	119	100%	449	100%

Table 5.29 shows that most students at different academic levels either strongly disagree (334 students/ 74%) or disagree (52 students/ 12%) with the statement “*My teacher divides the reading lesson into pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities*” while only 24 students (5%) agree and 27 students (6%) strongly agree with this statement. To be a well-organised teacher, good planning is important for effective teaching and learning (Ceranica, 2009). In reading classes, enhancing reading with activities for pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading stages is essential (Akyol et al., 2014). However, in a traditional reading class, teaching students reading comprehension starts with reading a text by the teacher who may point out the key words in the text and then reading it aloud by students, then answering the questions that follow the text.

Table 5.30: **My teacher asks various questions related to a particular text in order to prepare us to read the text.**

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
4.7 My teacher asks various questions related to a particular text in order to prepare us to read the text.	strongly disagree	52	60%	64	60%	58	49%	75	55%	249	55%
	disagree	14	16%	24	23%	39	33%	30	22%	107	24%
	neutral	3	3%	3	3%	2	2%	2	1%	10	2%
	agree	9	10%	7	7%	10	8%	15	11%	41	9%
	strongly agree	9	10%	8	8%	10	8%	15	11%	42	9%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

According to Table 5.30, most of the students stress that their teachers do not prepare them to read a text through asking different questions about the topic of the text they are going to read. Thus, 249 students (55%) strongly disagree and 107 students (24%) disagree with the statement “*My teacher asks various questions related to a particular text in order to prepare us to read the text*”. On the other hand, some students either strongly agree (42 students/ 9%) or agree (41 students/ 9%). Starting the reading class with some questions about the topic of a text is a pre-reading activity that helps to engage the students’ background knowledge and to make them familiar with the topic and the key words in a text. However, this activity will be beneficial only when the students have pre-knowledge about the topic or the text.

Table 5.31: **My teacher explains the background of the text before we start reading it.**

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
4.8 My teacher explains the background of the text before we start reading it.	strongly disagree	35	40%	59	56%	65	55%	80	58%	239	53%
	disagree	30	34%	25	24%	33	28%	36	26%	124	28%
	neutral	4	5%	4	4%	4	3%	4	3%	16	4%
	agree	8	9%	11	10%	7	6%	10	7%	36	8%
	strongly agree	10	11%	7	7%	10	8%	7	5%	34	8%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

As can be seen in the above table, 81% of students think that their teachers do not provide them with the background of the text at the beginning of the reading class. In more detail, 239 students (53%) strongly disagree and 124 students (28%) disagree with the statement *“My teacher explains the background of the text before we start reading it”*. However, some students either strongly agree (34 students/ 8%) or agree (36 students/ 8%).

Familiarising students with the topic of a reading text is another pre-reading activity that can activate students’ relevant existing schemata and engage their background knowledge to make it easy to insert new information into them.

Table 5.32: **My teacher asks us to read the text one by one aloud in class.**

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
4.9 My teacher asks us to read the text one by one aloud in class.	strongly disagree	4	5%	8	8%	8	7%	8	6%	28	6%
	disagree	9	10%	6	6%	7	6%	11	8%	33	7%
	neutral	4	5%	2	2%	2	2%	2	1%	10	2%
	agree	22	25%	39	37%	49	41%	56	41%	166	37%
	strongly agree	48	55%	51	48%	53	45%	60	44%	212	47%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

According to the above table, most students stress that during reading comprehension classes, their teachers ask them to take turns reading the text aloud in class. 212 students (47%) strongly agree and 166 students (37%) agree with the statement *“My teacher asks us to read the text one by one aloud in class”*. On the other hand, some of the students either strongly disagree (28 students/ 6%) or disagree (33 students/ 7%). Arab learners are used to reading aloud when they learn Arabic; consequently, they employ the same strategy when learning English (Wyatt, 2014). Thus, when many Arab

teachers practise teaching reading in English, they apply the same traditional way in which they were taught reading in Arabic. Although reading aloud helps teachers to analyse the mistakes that students make, it is not the normal way in which people read (Alderson, 2000). Moreover, reading aloud may impede reading comprehension and slow reading speed because readers have to focus on every word (Grabe and Stoller, 2002).

Table 5.33: **When I come across a new word, my teacher helps me by providing its meaning.**

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
4.10 When I come across a new word, my teacher helps me by providing its meaning.	strongly disagree	8	9%	8	8%	11	9%	8	6%	35	8%
	disagree	8	9%	8	8%	8	7%	8	6%	32	7%
	neutral	2	2%	4	4%	5	4%	5	4%	16	4%
	agree	18	21%	15	14%	22	18%	21	15%	76	17%
	strongly agree	51	59%	71	67%	73	61%	95	69%	290	65%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

As depicted in Table 5.33, the largest number of participants either strongly agree (290 students/ 65%) or agree (76 students/ 17%) with the statement “*When I come across a new word, my teacher helps me by providing its meaning*” while only 35 students (8%) strongly disagree and 32 students (7%) disagree with this statement. Many teachers of English reading comprehension provide their students with the English meanings of unknown words; i.e. they provide the definitions, synonyms, antonyms and/or explanations of the unfamiliar words. This can enrich students’ vocabulary but it does not guarantee reading comprehension. On the other hand, some Libyan teachers start a reading class by listing the new words in a text and providing their Arabic equivalent. Moreover, when students come across a

new word, the teacher helps them by giving its meaning rather than encouraging them to infer the meaning from context. Although translation is considered a teaching method by some researchers, it can be ineffective as it may produce interference and hinder foreign language learning (Brown 2002).

Table 5.34: **My teacher encourages me to consult an English-Arabic dictionary when I come across unfamiliar words during reading.**

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
4.11 My teacher encourages me to consult an English-Arabic dictionary when I come across unfamiliar words during reading.	strongly disagree	9	10%	7	7%	10	8%	9	7%	35	8%
	disagree	7	8%	12	11%	9	8%	12	9%	40	9%
	neutral	4	5%	4	4%	4	3%	4	3%	16	4%
	agree	20	23%	21	20%	25	21%	49	36%	115	26%
	strongly agree	47	54%	62	58%	71	60%	63	46%	243	54%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

The above table shows that many students strongly agree (243 students/ 54%) or agree (115 students/ 26%) with the statement “*My teacher encourages me to consult an English-Arabic dictionary when I come across unfamiliar words during reading*” whereas some other students either strongly disagree (35 students/ 8%) or disagree (40 students/ 9%) with the statement and 4% of the them are neutral. Consulting a bilingual dictionary might help students understand the meanings of individual words; however, it often deprives them of the chance for more exposure to English and learning more words through using English-English dictionaries. This also discourages students from engaging with the text and contextualising unknown words, especially as some English words have different meanings in spite of having the same spelling and sometimes the same pronunciation, which makes it difficult to determine their appropriate equivalents in Arabic

without consulting the context in which they are used.

Table 5.35: **My teacher encourages me to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words by using contextual clues.**

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
4.12 My teacher encourages me to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words by using contextual clues.	strongly disagree	57	66%	62	58%	73	61%	87	64%	279	62%
	disagree	11	13%	27	25%	22	18%	19	14%	79	18%
	neutral	4	5%	2	2%	3	3%	3	2%	12	3%
	agree	8	9%	7	7%	13	11%	14	10%	42	9%
	strongly agree	7	8%	8	8%	8	7%	14	10%	37	8%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

In the above table, the majority of the participants stress that they are not encouraged by their teachers to use the context of a text to understand the words that they have not seen before. Thus, most students either strongly disagree (279 students/ 62%) or disagree (79 students/ 18%) with the statement “*My teacher encourages me to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words by using contextual clues*” while 42 students (9%) agree and 37 students (8%) strongly agree with this statement. When students come across unfamiliar vocabulary, their teachers might help them through encouraging them to contextualise the targeted words, providing them with their meanings, or telling them to consult a dictionary. Of these three techniques, trying to guess the meaning of the unknown vocabulary from the surrounding context is more preferable for enhancing reading comprehension.

Table 5.36: **My teacher teaches us how to develop inferencing skills.**

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
4.13 My teacher teaches us how to develop inferencing skills.	strongly disagree	56	64%	56	53%	63	53%	97	71%	272	61%
	disagree	15	17%	31	29%	32	27%	20	15%	98	22%
	neutral	3	3%	4	4%	2	2%	2	1%	11	2%
	agree	7	8%	8	8%	13	11%	7	5%	35	8%
	strongly agree	6	7%	7	7%	9	8%	11	8%	33	7%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

As shown in the above table, the greatest number of respondents say that they are not taught how to develop their inferencing skills. That is, 272 students (61%) strongly disagree and 98 students (22%) disagree with the statement “*My teacher teaches us how to develop inferencing skills*”, but some students either strongly agree (33 students/ 7%) or agree (35 students/ 8%). Inferencing is a reading skill that is related to making assumptions and logical conclusions from existing ideas (Cuperman, 2014). It affects the interpretation of a text to a large extent, helps the students to read texts more quickly and makes use of their intelligence, making reading more enjoyable (Nuttall, 2005).

Table 5.37: **My teacher teaches us how to skim a text (i.e. to read a text in the shortest possible time to get an overall idea about it).**

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
4.14 My teacher teaches us how to skim a text (i.e. to read a text in the shortest possible time to get an overall idea about it).	strongly disagree	51	59%	76	72%	83	70%	96	70%	306	68%
	disagree	16	18%	14	13%	12	10%	15	11%	57	13%
	neutral	3	3%	2	2%	3	3%	3	2%	11	2%
	agree	8	9%	9	8%	10	8%	14	10%	41	9%
	strongly agree	9	10%	5	5%	11	9%	9	7%	34	8%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

According to the above table, 81% of students think that their teachers do not

advise them to use the reading skill of skimming. In further detail, 306 students (68%) strongly disagree and 57 students (13%) disagree with the statement “*My teacher teaches us how to skim a text (i.e. to read a text in the shortest possible time to get an overall idea about it)*”. Other students either strongly agree (34 students/ 8%) or agree (41 students/ 9%).

Table 5.38: **My teacher teaches us how to scan a text (i.e. to read a text quickly, though not carefully, to find out a piece of information).**

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
4.15 My teacher teaches us how to scan a text (i.e. to read a text quickly, though not carefully, to find out a piece of information).	strongly disagree	52	60%	62	58%	63	53%	71	52%	248	55%
	disagree	14	16%	27	25%	36	30%	38	28%	115	26%
	neutral	3	3%	4	4%	3	3%	2	1%	12	3%
	agree	9	10%	6	6%	8	7%	13	9%	36	8%
	strongly agree	9	10%	7	7%	9	8%	13	9%	38	8%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

As illustrated in the above table, most students state that their teachers do not advise them how to check a text quickly to look for a specific piece of information. Thus, 60% of Year 1, 58% of Year 2, 53% of Year 3, and 52% of Year 4 strongly disagree with the statement “*My teacher teaches us how to scan a text (i.e. to read a text quickly, though not carefully, to find out a piece of information)*”. Few students either agree (36 students/ 8%) or strongly agree (38 students/ 8%) with this statement.

Table 5.39: **My teacher emphasises language learning (i.e. structure, pronunciation etc.) in a reading class.**

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
4.16 My teacher emphasises language learning (i.e. structure, pronunciation etc.) in a reading class.	strongly disagree	13	15%	12	11%	13	11%	12	9%	50	11%
	disagree	12	14%	13	12%	17	14%	14	10%	56	12%
	neutral	3	3%	3	3%	3	3%	3	2%	12	3%
	agree	26	30%	31	29%	45	38%	53	39%	155	35%
	strongly agree	33	38%	47	44%	41	34%	55	40%	176	39%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

The above table shows that many students strongly agree (176 students/ 39%) or agree (155 students/ 35%) with the statement “*My teacher emphasises language learning (i.e. structure, pronunciation etc.) in a reading class*” while some other students either strongly disagree (50 students/ 11%) or disagree (56 students/ 12%) with the statement. Teaching grammar and structural rules as well as correcting students’ pronunciations of all the words of a text have received emphasis in reading classes at the expense of reading comprehension. When discussing a text, teachers usually stop students and provide corrective feedback immediately when they commit linguistic mistakes, which might discourage them from engaging in class discussions and obstruct their learning process. It acts more as an inhibiting factor rather than a motivating factor.

Table 5.40: **My teacher asks us to make questions about texts.**

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
4.17 My teacher asks us to make questions about texts.	strongly disagree	53	61%	62	58%	67	56%	61	45%	243	54%
	disagree	12	14%	26	25%	30	25%	41	30%	109	24%
	neutral	4	5%	3	3%	3	3%	3	2%	13	3%
	agree	9	10%	7	7%	10	8%	16	12%	42	9%
	strongly agree	9	10%	8	8%	9	8%	16	12%	42	9%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

In Table 5.40, most participants either strongly disagree (243 students/ 54%) or disagree (109 students/ 24%) with the statement “*My teacher asks us to make questions about texts*” while 42 students (9%) agree and another 42 students (9%) strongly agree with this statement. Questioning the writer and generating questions from a reading text are reading skills that can help students interact with the text, support setting a purpose for reading and promote active and responsive readers (Castek, 2013).

Table 5.41: **My teacher teaches us how to evaluate a text critically.**

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
4.18 My teacher teaches us how to evaluate a text critically.	strongly disagree	61	70%	77	73%	68	57%	72	53%	278	62%
	disagree	12	14%	13	12%	24	20%	35	26%	84	19%
	neutral	3	3%	3	3%	2	2%	3	2%	11	2%
	agree	6	7%	9	8%	12	10%	14	10%	41	9%
	strongly agree	5	6%	4	4%	13	11%	13	9%	35	8%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

According to the above table, most of the students state that their teachers do not teach them how to critically evaluate a reading text. Thus, 278 students (62%) strongly disagree and 84 students (19%) disagree with the statement “*My teacher teaches us how to evaluate a text critically*”. On the other hand, some students either agree (41 students/ 9%) or strongly agree (35 students/ 8%) with this statement. Evaluation is a meta-cognitive strategy that is often activated after reading in order to assess the reading experience (Dabarera et al., 2014). With appropriate guidance from their teachers, students’ evaluation skills can be very effective in making them aware about the difficulties they encounter in reading comprehension (Akyol et al., 2014).

Table 5.42: **My teacher teaches us how to summarise.**

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
4.19 My teacher teaches us how to summarise.	strongly disagree	52	60%	72	68%	89	75%	88	64%	301	67%
	disagree	23	26%	26	25%	12	10%	21	15%	82	18%
	neutral	3	3%	3	3%	2	2%	3	2%	11	2%
	agree	5	6%	3	3%	10	8%	12	9%	30	7%
	strongly agree	4	5%	2	2%	6	5%	13	9%	25	6%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

As shown in Table 5.42, most participants either strongly disagree (301 students/ 67%) or disagree (82 students/ 18%) with the statement “*My teacher teaches us how to summarise*”. However, 30 students (7%) agree and 25 students (6%) strongly agree with this statement. Summarising a text is a post-reading activity that students might be asked to do after finishing reading to increase their comprehension monitoring and evaluation. Good readers are able to identify the key ideas that are included in the text and to paraphrase them in their own words. Checking the summaries written by students offers teachers a good opportunity to evaluate students’ reading comprehension and to identify some of their problems in reading and writing. It also helps teachers recognise good readers and low-level readers, which can effectively help in dividing the class into groups with mixed ability.

Table 5.43: **My teacher makes us take note of text organisation.**

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
4.20 My teacher makes us take note of text organisation.	strongly disagree	56	64%	68	64%	71	60%	66	48%	261	58%
	disagree	13	15%	21	20%	22	18%	39	28%	95	21%
	neutral	3	3%	3	3%	3	3%	3	2%	12	3%
	agree	9	10%	7	7%	14	12%	15	11%	45	10%
	strongly agree	6	7%	7	7%	9	8%	14	10%	36	8%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

As the above table illustrates, most students state that their teachers do not make them aware of how texts are organised. Thus, 261 students (58%) strongly disagree with the statement “*My teacher makes us take note of text organisation*”. Some students either strongly agree (36 students/ 8%) or agree (45 students/ 10%) with this statement. Identifying the internal structure of sentences and textual patterns and how the ideas hang together makes it easier to interpret difficult sentences (Nuttall, 2005). Understanding text organisation seems to be too important to be ignored by many teachers.

Table 5.44: **My teacher helps us to link reading with purposeful communication.**

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
4.21 My teacher helps us to link reading with purposeful communication.	strongly disagree	65	75%	62	58%	75	63%	81	59%	283	63%
	disagree	11	13%	22	21%	16	13%	29	21%	78	17%
	neutral	3	3%	2	2%	3	3%	3	2%	11	2%
	agree	4	5%	10	9%	13	11%	14	10%	41	9%
	strongly agree	4	5%	10	9%	12	10%	10	7%	36	8%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

According to the above table, the largest number of respondents assert that their reading comprehension teachers do not promote their communication abilities through reading as 283 students (63%) strongly disagree and 78 students (17%) disagree with the statement “*My teacher helps us to link reading with purposeful communication*”. In contrast, some other students either strongly agree (41 students/ 8%) or agree (41 students/ 9%). Because reading comprehension has a cross-sectional nature, it can affect the rest of the learning areas (Gayo et al., 2014) and it can help to enhance communication abilities through developing linguistic competence and enriching vocabulary as well as improving other language skills such as

speaking and writing (Patesan et al., 2014). Teaching English reading comprehension according to the communicative approach can make it purposeful and more useful for improving learners' English.

Table 5.45: **My teacher changes texts according to the purpose of reading in the class.**

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
4.22 My teacher changes texts according to the purpose of reading in the class.	strongly disagree	58	67%	64	60%	76	64%	72	53%	270	60%
	disagree	10	11%	24	23%	22	18%	36	26%	92	20%
	neutral	4	5%	3	3%	2	2%	3	2%	12	3%
	agree	8	9%	8	8%	12	10%	13	9%	41	9%
	strongly agree	7	8%	7	7%	7	6%	13	9%	34	8%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

It can be seen from the table that most participants either strongly disagree (270 students/ 60%) or disagree (92 students/ 20%) with the statement “*My teacher changes texts according to the purpose of reading in the class*”. On the other hand, 41 students (9%) agree and 34 students (8%) strongly agree with this statement. When teaching reading classes, teachers' goals and perceptions about their students' purposes of reading affect their material selections. Sometimes these goals and perceptions of teachers contradict with their students' purposes of reading, which can be one of the factors that impact directly on the quality of teaching and learning of reading comprehension. In addition, different students usually do not have the same purposes for reading; and this issue can be more influential in the overcrowded classes in the Libyan universities. Still, teachers need to make their students aware of the clear purposes of their reading materials.

Table 5.46: **My teacher points out my problems regarding reading.**

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
4.23 My teacher points out my problems regarding reading.	strongly disagree	43	49%	54	51%	66	55%	71	52%	234	52%
	disagree	22	25%	28	26%	18	15%	31	23%	99	22%
	neutral	3	3%	3	3%	3	3%	3	2%	12	3%
	agree	10	11%	11	10%	18	15%	18	13%	57	13%
	strongly agree	9	10%	10	9%	14	12%	14	10%	47	10%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

In the above table, more than half of respondents (234 students/ 52%) strongly disagree and 99 students (22%) disagree with the statement “*My teacher points out my problems regarding reading*”. In contrast, the rest of the students either strongly agree (47 students/ 10%) or agree (57 students/ 13%) with the statement and 12 of them (3%) are neutral. It is helpful to know what the difficulty is. When students are made aware of the problems that they have in reading comprehension, they may find it easier to deal with these problems and try to avoid them.

Table 5.47: **My teacher provides me with a further reading list to read on my own.**

		Academic Level								Total	
		Y1		Y2		Y3		Y4			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
4.24 My teacher provides me with a further reading list to read on my own.	strongly disagree	72	83%	82	77%	95	80%	105	77%	354	79%
	disagree	6	7%	10	9%	9	8%	18	13%	43	10%
	neutral	2	2%	3	3%	3	3%	3	2%	11	2%
	agree	4	5%	6	6%	5	4%	6	4%	21	5%
	strongly agree	3	3%	5	5%	7	6%	5	4%	20	4%
	Total	87	100%	106	100%	119	100%	137	100%	449	100%

Table 5.47 shows that the majority of the participants stress that their teachers do not give them any lists of books that they can read out of class. Thus, most students either strongly disagree (354 students/ 79%) or disagree (43 students/ 10%) with the statement “*My teacher provides me with a further*

reading list to read on my own” while 21 students (5%) agree and 20 students (4%) strongly agree with this statement. By providing students with a further reading list for private study, teachers encourage extensive reading, which is the most effective way to improve reading skills and linguistic abilities (Nuttall, 2005). Students’ reading on their own is a source for them to practise language, learn more vocabulary and develop their skills; that is, it is a means to be fluent readers.

Table 5.48: Teaching strategies

NO	Question	Mean	Std. D
1	My teacher tries to make reading enjoyable.	1.65	1.145
2	My teacher gives me the chance to select the topics of the reading texts.	1.70	1.165
3	My teacher speaks only in English in class.	2.00	1.381
4	My teacher asks me to use only English in discussing the text in class.	1.87	1.330
5	My teacher arranges the class in groups/pairs in order that we find meaning of texts through discussion.	1.55	1.137
6	My teacher divides the reading lesson into pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities.	1.57	1.159
7	My teacher asks various questions related to a particular text in order to prepare us to read the text.	1.93	1.336
8	My teacher explains the background of the text before we start reading it.	1.89	1.250
9	My teacher asks us to read the text one by one aloud in class.	4.12	1.157
10	When I come across a new word, my teacher helps me by providing its meaning.	4.23	1.272
11	My teacher encourages me to consult a dictionary when I come across unfamiliar words during reading.	4.09	1.277
12	My teacher encourages me to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words by using contextual clues.	1.84	1.320
13	My teacher teaches us how to develop inferencing skills.	1.80	1.251
14	My teacher teaches us how to skim a text (i.e. to read a text in the shortest possible time to get an overall idea about it).	1.75	1.302
15	My teacher teaches us how to scan a text (i.e. to read a text quickly, though not carefully, to find out a piece of information).	1.88	1.289
16	My teacher emphasises language learning (i.e. structure, pronunciation etc.) in a reading class.	3.78	1.370
17	My teacher asks us to make questions about a text.	1.96	1.337
18	My teacher teaches us how to evaluate a text critically.	1.82	1.297
19	My teacher teaches us how to summarise.	1.66	1.165
20	My teacher makes us take note of text organisation.	1.89	1.312
21	My teacher helps us to link reading with purposeful communication.	1.82	1.308
22	My teacher changes texts according to the purpose of reading in the class.	1.82	1.288

23	My teacher points out my problems regarding reading.	2.07	1.413
24	My teacher provides me with a further reading list to read on my own.	1.46	1.056
overall mean of the dimension of teaching strategies		2.1731	
Scale: 1.Strongly disagree, 2. Disagree, 3. Neutral, 4. Agree, 5. Strongly agree			

The goal of this dimension is to gauge students' opinions about the way they are taught reading comprehension and to check what teaching techniques their teachers use. It is noticeable that according to the responses of the majority of students, most teachers do not create an enhancing environment that can encourage their students and help them develop their reading skills and improve their reading comprehension. However, it should be noted that some teachers do. In more detail, according to the means of the items (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24) which attempt to measure to what extent teachers do specific positive practices when teaching reading comprehension, the largest number of students either strongly disagree or disagree that teachers employ good practices. In contrast, the means of the statements (9, 10, 11, 16) that are related to negative teaching practices that many Libyan teachers are known to do, the majority of the respondents either strongly agree or agree that teachers use negative practices.

5.1.3 Statistical Analysis

After running the normality test (Skewness and Kurtosis) and making sure that the data is normally distributed, three parametric tests were conducted to compare the variables. The tests are independent t-test, one-way Anova, and Pearson correlation.

5.1.3.1 Independent T-test

Independent-samples T-test is conducted to compare the mean scores of two groups from the sample with each other (Field, 2009, Wooldridge, 2005; Pallant, 2013). In this study, an independent-samples T-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of the participants according to their gender (males and females).

Table 5.49: Independent T-test for the four dimensions of the questionnaire

Group Statistics							
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	P-value
Reading attitude	Male	189	2.1358	1.19733	.08709	1.751	.081
	Female	260	1.9487	1.05569	.06547		
Reading strategies	Male	189	1.9636	.88618	.06446	1.053	.293
	Female	260	1.8745	.88440	.05485		
Facilities	Male	189	1.7791	.51746	.03764	2.642	.009
	Female	260	1.6538	.47969	.02975		
Teaching strategies	Male	189	2.2108	.69066	.05024	1.068	.286
	Female	260	2.1457	.59556	.03694		

Table 4.49 shows that one out of the four dimensions of statements was statistically significant when an independent-sample T-test was conducted to compare the scores for males and females. That is, in the third dimension of the questionnaire, which is concerned with students' views about the availability of facilities, there was a statistically significant difference in scores between males ($M = 1.7791$, $SD = .03764$) and females ($M = 1.6538$, $SD = .02975$); $t = 2.642$, $p = .009$. According to the mean scores for males and females, both of them think that the University lacks important facilities and resources; however, the female students were less satisfied than the male students were. On the other hand, the above table indicates that there were no significant differences between males and females with regards to their attitudes towards English reading comprehension, their abilities and strategy

use when reading, and their attitudes toward reading instruction and teaching strategies. This means that regardless of their gender, students (both males and females) have negative attitudes towards English reading comprehension as the mean scores for males ($M = 2.1358$, $SD = 1.19733$) and females ($M = 1.9487$, $SD = 1.05569$); $t = (1.751)$, $p = .081$. Moreover, both male and female students tend not to use most of the reading strategies that could enhance their reading abilities, which might assume that most of the participants lack the reading skills as shown by the mean scores of males ($M = 1.9636$, $SD = .88618$) and females ($M = 1.8745$, $SD = .88440$); $t = (1.053)$, $p = .293$. Furthermore, most students whether they are males or females do not agree that their teachers try to teach them how to develop their reading skills. This is shown by the mean scores for males ($M = 2.2108$, $SD = .69066$) and females ($M = 2.1457$, $SD = .59556$); $t = (1.068)$, $p = .286$.

5.1.3.2 One-way Anova and academic level

The Anova test is performed to examine the differences among the means for several various groups as a whole (Field, 2009) and to highlight the significance of differences among respondents based on sizes. A one-way Anova between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of the academic levels of students on their reading comprehension performance. Participants were divided into four groups according to their academic levels (Group 1: Year 1, Group 2: Year 2, Group 3: Year 3, Group 4: Year 4).

Table 5.50: One-way Anova and academic level for the four dimensions of the questionnaire

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Reading attitude	Between Groups	15.313	3	5.104	4.155	.006
	Within Groups	546.682	445	1.228		
	Total	561.995	448			
Reading strategies	Between Groups	19.575	3	6.525	8.759	.000
	Within Groups	331.513	445	.745		
	Total	351.088	448			
Facilities	Between Groups	.410	3	.137	.547	.650
	Within Groups	111.243	445	.250		
	Total	111.653	448			
Teaching strategies	Between Groups	.342	3	.114	.280	.840
	Within Groups	181.665	445	.408		
	Total	182.008	448			

According to the above table, the first two out of the four dimensions of the questionnaire have statistically significant differences between groups (.006, .000), whereas in the third and fourth dimensions, there are no significant differences (.650, .840). The academic level seems to influence some students' attitudes towards reading in English and also their use of reading strategies. However, the academic level of students does not affect their attitudes about the availability of facilities and resources in the University nor their views about the teaching strategies in which they are taught. Most students strongly agreed that the University lacks many facilities and resources. In addition, regardless to their academic level, the majority of students disagree that their teachers try to teach them how to develop their reading skills. In order to identify where the differences are in the first two dimensions, Duncan test was run.

Table 5.51: Reading attitude and Duncan test

Duncan^{a,b}

Academic Level	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
Year 1	87	1.7931	
Year 2	106	1.8616	
Year 3	119	2.0812	2.0812
Year 4	137		2.2579
Sig.		.069	.239

The above table shows that some students in Year 4 and Year 3 have positive reading attitudes. Four-year students' reading attitude is higher than reading attitudes of students in Year 1 and Year 2.

Table 5.52: Reading strategies and Duncan test

Duncan^{a,b}

Academic Level	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05		
		1	2	3
Year 1	87	1.6595		
Year 2	106	1.7264	1.7264	
Year 3	119		1.9475	
Year 4	137			2.1852
Sig.		.567	.059	1.000

The above table indicates that students of Year 4 use reading strategies more than other students in Year 3 and Year 2, and students of Year 3 use more reading strategies than students in Year 1. Thus, some students in Year 3 and Year 4 have agreed that they are able to apply some reading skills when they read English texts.

5.1.3.3 Pearson Correlation

Pearson Correlation analysis is used to express the strength and direction of the relationships between two variables (Pallant, 2013). It is conducted here to check the relation among the different variables in the questionnaire such as students' attitudes to reading, their use of reading strategies, their views about the availability of facilities and with their attitudes toward their lecturers' teaching strategies.

Table 5.53: Pearson Correlation among the four dimensions of the questionnaire

Correlations				
	Reading attitude	Reading strategies	Facilities	Teaching strategies
Reading attitude	1	.762**	.532**	.777**
		.000	.000	.000
	449	449	449	449
Reading strategies	.762**	1	.498**	.787**
	.000		.000	.000
	449	449	449	449
Facilities	.532**	.498**	1	.575**
	.000	.000		.000
	449	449	449	449
Teaching strategies	.777**	.787**	.575**	1
	.000	.000	.000	
	449	449	449	449

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

NB: 449 refers to the number of pairs tested.

The above table reveals that there are significant positive strong correlations among most of the dimensions of the questionnaire. Accordingly, there is a strong correlation between students' reading attitudes and their use of reading strategies ($r = .762$). This indicates that positive attitudes towards reading comprehension can enhance the use of reading skills and vice versa; that is, the ability to develop and use the reading skills could encourage students to have positive attitudes to English reading comprehension. In addition, students' reading attitudes correlates with both their views about the availability of facilities ($r = .532$) and with their attitudes toward reading instruction and teaching strategies ($r = .777$), which might indicate that reading instructions can influence students' attitudes towards English reading comprehension.

This study is concerned with the EFL Libyan students' reading skills and reading comprehension proficiency. According to the results of Pearson

Correlation test, students' reading abilities and strategy use has a strong relation with their attitudes to reading comprehension ($r = .762$), their views about the availability of facilities ($r = .498$) and the teaching instructions they receive in reading classes ($r = .787$). Therefore, students' poor reading comprehension and their lack of reading skills are highly influenced by their negative attitude to reading in English, lack of facilities and lack of training to develop their reading skills by their teachers.

5.1.4 Summary of questionnaire data analysis

The first part of the questionnaire sought some demographic data about respondents such as their gender, ages and academic levels. The questionnaire has a five-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) 'strongly disagree' to (5) 'strongly agree'. It consists of 39 questions that are divided into four dimensions: Dimension One (3 questions) investigates the attitudes of students towards reading comprehension and reading in English. Dimension Two (8 questions) gauges the students' reading abilities and use of the different skills and strategies of reading comprehension. Dimension Three (4 questions) checks students' opinions about the facilities and resources of their university, and Dimension Four (24 questions) concerns students' attitudes towards their lecturers' teaching strategies in the reading classes.

The overall means of the four dimensions are low (2.02, 1.91, 1.70, 2.17), which indicates disagreement by most participants. This means that the majority of students have a negative attitude towards reading in English, lack reading skills, state that Zawia University lacks necessary facilities

and that their teachers do not teach them how to develop their reading skills. The majority of students appear to be unable to predict, skim, scan, analyse or summarise reading texts, which reflects their inadequate comprehension when they read English texts.

The questionnaire was analysed through conducting a number of parametric tests: independent T-test, one-way Anova, and Pearson correlation. According to Independent T-test results, there were no significant differences between males and females regarding their attitudes towards English reading comprehension, their abilities and strategy use when reading in English, and their attitudes toward reading instruction and teaching strategies. There was a statistically significant difference in scores between males and females in the third dimension of the questionnaire, which is concerned with students' views about the availability of facilities. Both male and female students think that the University lack important facilities and resources; however, female students were less satisfied than male students were.

When a one-way Anova test was conducted to explore the impact of the academic levels of students on their reading comprehension performance, there were no significant differences among groups concerning their attitudes about the availability of facilities and resources in the University nor their views about the teaching strategies in which they are taught. However, there were statistically significant differences between groups with regards to their reading attitudes and their reading abilities. Duncan test was conducted to identify where the differences are. A number of students in Year 3 and Year 4

appear to have better reading abilities and positive reading attitudes than students in Year 1 and Year 2.

Based on Pearson correlation test, students' reading performance and strategy use is affected by the teaching instructions they receive in reading classes, their attitudes to reading comprehension, and the availability of facilities and resources. That is, students' poor reading comprehension and their lack of reading skills are negatively influenced by the way they have been taught, their negative attitude to reading in English, and the lack of facilities and resources at university.

5.2 Interview analysis

5.2.1 Introduction

The results of data analysis from the questionnaire indicated that there was a statistical significance which confirmed that reading comprehension is challenging for the majority of students and that most students disagreed that their teachers try to teach them how to develop their reading skills. This part of the chapter interprets the results of the qualitative data obtained from the semi-structured interviews. The sample involved seven lecturers who have taught reading comprehension at the Department of English at Zawia University. Firstly, the background of the participants is provided. Secondly, the lecturers' perspectives regarding teaching and learning of English reading comprehension module is analysed. Thirdly, it assesses the interviewees' perceptions about the teaching environment. Fourthly, it gauges the lecturers' views concerning some issues related to their roles in motivating students to read, and fifthly, it provides a summary of the interview analysis.

5.2.2 Participants' profiles

In view of the turmoil and unrest taking place in Libya following the political change of the former regime, the researcher was unable to travel to Libya to conduct face-to-face interviews. As a result, the researcher held the interviews via Skype and phone calls. Out of nine lecturers who teach reading comprehension at the department, seven lecturers agreed to participate in the interview. As the situation is worsening by the day, there is an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty. Thus, most interviewees refused to be recorded, which might have limited the interaction between the interviewer and interviewees. Besides, this resulted in not using the NVIVO software programme in analysing the interviews.

Table 5.54 Participants' profiles

Interviewee	Gender	Qualification	Years of teaching experience
Lecturer 1	Female	PhD	18 Years
Lecturer 2	Female	MA	9 Years
Lecturer 3	Male	MA	17 Years
Lecturer 4	Female	MA	3 Years
Lecturer 5	Male	MA	5 Years
Lecturer 6	Male	PhD	23 Years
Lecturer 7	Female	PhD	21 Years

5.2.3 Lecturers' responses regarding teaching and learning of English reading comprehension

In response to the first question (*Is teaching an English reading comprehension module a choice or imposed?*), all interviewees stressed that teaching reading comprehension is often imposed; they do not have the choice to teach what they want. The Head of the Department decides who teaches what. For example, Lecturer 1 said, "*We do not have the opportunity to choose which module we would like to teach*". This reveals the pressure that lecturers encounter through having to teach a module without

consultation and without taking into account their wishes and preferences according to their expertise and experience, and above all their skills and capabilities. Consequently, this might be demotivating for lecturers and not beneficial for students.

When the interviewees were asked (*Are there textbooks available or do you prepare your material and select reading texts?*), they all indicated that they have to select some reading texts from different sources to prepare the reading material for their students to the best of their abilities. Lecturer 4 stated:

“There is a lack in the English resources in the library of the university, so all the lecturers at the Department of English have to prepare the materials for their lectures from their own sources such as books and the Internet.”

Lecturer 7 further elaborated that

“Most of us select some reading texts from the general courses for teaching EFL. Some teachers suggested a textbook but it was very expensive and ran out of stock soon; I mean, there were not enough copies of it for students and photocopying it was a mess. In addition, it focused on the English culture, which made it really difficult to be understood by students.”

The main recurring theme that emerged from the discussions was that lecturers have the freedom to select and compile their teaching material for reading comprehension as best they can. This freedom entails a double-edged sword approach. This laissez faire approach provides the freedom for selecting material that suits the students' levels; however, this also leads to inconsistency and lack of homogeneity and standardisation. Students at the same level are assessed differently and learning outcomes are measured

differently.

The question (*Do you choose the reading material according to the interests of the students?*) is related to the previous question as it concerns selecting the reading material. Two of the interviewees said that they sometimes consider their students' interests when they choose the texts. For example, Lecturer 5 said, "*The reading material is chosen according to both the requirements of the Department and the learners' needs and interests*". However, five of them stated that they do not consider their students' interests although they wish they could. According to them, the reason behind this is the large number of students in each class. Lecturer 4 explained that

"Because I teach big numbers of students, I cannot choose the materials according to their interests due to the variety of interests. In other words, what is of interest to one student probably will not be to the others."

Overcrowded and mixed ability classes seem to be one of the impeding factors for both learners and teachers of English reading comprehension in Libyan universities. It is burdensome for teachers to manage classes with a big number of students with mixed levels. However, lecturers could discuss the choices of topics with their students to help them work out what topics students tend to read about and what texts may be suitable.

In response to the question (*What techniques and activities do you implement in a reading class?*), three of the interviewees said they usually ask their students to skim and scan the text. The other four lecturers followed the traditional way in teaching reading. Lecturer 2 said, "*After I read the passage, I ask the students to read it then answer the related questions and*

after that I teach them the grammatical rules used in the text", and Lecturer 4 stated that

"I read the text loudly to enable students to know the correct pronunciation of the new words after explaining their meanings. After asking students to read the text one by one, I try to check their comprehension by asking some questions. I ask them to work in groups of different levels to enable them to learn from each other during answering the questions. Sometimes I divide them into two teams challenging each other to make them remember the new words."

During the reading comprehension class, some teachers focus on grammar and pronunciation rather than comprehension, which may probably confuse their students about the nature and purpose of reading comprehension. This approach to teaching makes grammar seem to be the central area of language around which other areas revolve, which is not helpful for students in their efforts to understand a reading text. Moreover, the focus on pronunciation can lead to greater confusion about the standard pronunciation because of the diversity of lecturers. There are multinational lecturers with different linguistic backgrounds such as Libyans, Indians, Iraqis, Egyptians, Filipinos, etc.

When asked (*Before you start a reading lesson, how do you present the new text?*), the participants' reactions were mixed. While Lecturer 1 said, *"I often start the reading class by discussing the topic of the new text"*, Lecturer 2 said, *"I give the students a brief overview about the text"*. On the other hand, Lecturer 7 said, *"the first thing I do is writing the difficult words and their meanings on the board"*, and Lecturer 4 explained that:

"I start my lesson usually by asking the students questions that make them guess what the new text is going to be about, but if the students do not have any idea about the

topic, I introduce it directly by writing the title on the board."

Lecturer 3 also explained that:

"I start by splitting the students into small groups of 4 students each then allow them to skim the text and discuss the difficult words and the ideas of the paragraphs. Then I help them with new words and structures."

Most lecturers start the reading classes in a traditional way through concentrating on vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar, which could be a demotivating factor for the students. The lecturers are not to blame because they teach reading comprehension the way they have been taught themselves decades ago. They do not know any other way due to the lack of training workshops.

When the lecturers were asked (*Do you teach students the reading skills and how to use them?*), it was noticeable that most of the interviewees started their answers by saying "*honestly speaking*" or "*to be honest*" that they usually teach reading in a traditional way but sometimes they try to encourage their students to use some reading skills when reading. Lecturer 5 elaborated that:

Honestly speaking, in Libya as in some other EFL settings, reading is taught differently from how it should be taught. Most of the reading comprehension strategies are ignored or not fully covered. Reading is mainly used to teach vocabulary and grammar. Because of the large numbers of students in one class and the time allocated for each lesson, when I teach reading, the only skills I focus on are guessing and skimming.

Lecturers 3 and 6 said that they try to make students monitor their reading comprehension to identify the source of difficulties they face when reading. Lecturer 7 said, "*After reading, I usually ask students to summarise the reading text but usually I do not have enough time to check most of the*

summaries.” This suggests that the lecturers “*work as they go*”. They have no comprehension strategies; that is, they improvise as they go along. As each method has its strengths and weaknesses, it remains open to debate whether teaching reading comprehension in a traditional way, where the focus is on grammar and vocabulary and overlooking the reading skills, could enhance the students’ reading comprehension and improve their reading abilities.

In response to the question (*What are the difficulties that you face in teaching reading comprehension? How do you deal with them?*), all the lecturers complained about the overcrowded classes, limited time devoted to the reading comprehension module, and lack of resources, in addition to some other difficulties with students. Lecturer 2 explained that

“Because of the large number of students in each class, I cannot focus on individual problems, but in general, students often ask about unfamiliar vocabulary and I tell them the meanings. When they mispronounce words, I correct them. When they do not understand, I ask them to join the ideas together.”

Lecturer 4 said that

“The library is ill-resourced, so I use my own books or the Internet when it is available. Many students’ level is inadequate, so I encourage them to read out of class to improve their vocabulary and reading ability. Moreover, the classes are very crowded, which does not give the chance to each student to read and ask questions during the lecture, thus, I give them the opportunity to ask me after the class.”

On the other hand, Lecturer 5 spoke about another type of difficulty. He said that

The problems range from learners’ beliefs to contextual factors like limited time and large numbers of learners. The biggest problem is the beliefs of the Libyan EFL learners; they join university with the previous experience of

secondary school learning culture. For them, reading comprehension classes are a source of grammar and vocabulary knowledge as well as question and answer format rather than a story and ideas to perceive. I always encourage my students to change their beliefs and learning habits.

It is the responsibility of the Libyan government and the Ministry of Higher Education to improve the infrastructure of universities and provide classroom spaces, update libraries and make the Internet connections available in classes to encourage integrating technology in teaching. This will ultimately alleviate the educational system from many problems and move the teaching and learning processes many steps forward.

Regarding the question, (*What language do you use most in class? What about students?*), they all had almost the same responses. They said they try to speak in English most of the time but they sometimes use Arabic in limited cases; and students are asked to use English in class but they are allowed to speak in Arabic when they do not know how to express themselves in English. Lecturer 5 said, *"I try my best to speak in English to encourage students to use it but I use Arabic too in order to overcome comprehension problems and save time"*. Lecturer 4 also said, *"Sometimes I use the first language to explain some difficult words"*. In Libya, classes of English are almost the only places where students practise and communicate in English. However, when they are allowed to use their first language in English classes and when their teachers speak to them in Arabic in different situations, students lose chances of exposure to English and improving their language abilities.

When the interviewees were asked (*In your opinion, what causes the*

students' most problems in reading comprehension? Why?), there was a variety of viewpoints. Lecturer 1 focused on the fact that most students do not read for pleasure in both Arabic and English, which resulted in having poor reading skills. Lecturer 2 and Lecturer 6 believed that unfamiliar vocabulary is the students' main source of difficulty in reading English texts. According to Lecturer 3, the inadequate level of many students who joined the English Department led to this problem. For Lecturer 4, the limited exposure to English is the cause. Lecturer 7 believed that *"it is difficult for Libyan students to understand texts written in English because of the difference between the English culture and the Arab culture"*. Lecturer 5 said that

Factors such as poor vocabulary banks and lack of grammatical awareness are the main issues that caused students' problems in reading. Besides, learners cannot relate the bits of the paragraph to each other nor can they understand the overall idea of a text. When they read, they do not know what they are looking for.

None of the responses elicited here can be underestimated. The cause of the students' poor reading comprehension can be all the reasons mentioned by the interviewees and there might be other causes too. However, it can be noticed that most lecturers stress poor knowledge of grammar and vocabulary as the main source of difficulty in reading comprehension, which might explain to some extent the way they teach reading comprehension.

5.2.4 Lecturers' perceptions and attitudes about the learning-environment

Unsurprisingly, when the lecturers were asked (*What facilities do you have for teaching English reading comprehension?*), the responses were almost

the same. For example, Lecturer 5 said *“Actually, nothing apart from the learners and the classroom”*, and Lecturer 7 elaborated that

“At least if there are computers and Internet, we could teach better and students would learn better. Our country, Libya, is rich and can afford that and more; the universities could and should be better. We teach based on our experience, but that is not enough. We need technology to improve our way of teaching.”

The researcher strongly agrees with Lecturer 7. The teaching methods used in the Department need radical reform and probably it would be useful to merge technology in the teaching process. The new generation started to be addicted to using the technological gadgets; therefore, it might be argued whether teaching them in the same style that their teachers were taught could still be effective. Hence, using technology in education provides accessibility to a wide range of materials in the English language, which might help develop the quality of learning and teaching methods and techniques. This will also help the Libyan teachers to shift from traditional methods with ‘talk and chalk’ mode to other technological approaches. However, some problems hinder the teaching staff in Libyan universities from using technological aids. One of the difficulties that face Libyan English language teachers when trying to integrate technology in teaching EFL students is the lack of administrative support. The Ministry of Higher Education should provide the universities with the necessary resources.

When asked (*How do you keep your reading comprehension teaching materials current and up-to-date?*), all the interviewees said that they either browse the Internet or check the bookstores for new books from which they

can select some texts to teach. It seems that every module is taught through teachers' personal efforts. They use the online resources when the Internet connections are available and that is not always the case. Some of them go to bookstores and choose books that they think are suitable. However, this results in a variety of reading materials that are based basically on the lecturers' interests and abilities. Each teacher of reading has his or her own syllabus. Thus, classes run by different lecturers study different materials. This is not conducive to learning English with enthusiasm.

In response to the question (*What sources do you use when you select the reading material (authentic material or books)?*), most lecturers said that they mainly choose the reading texts from books for teaching general English. Lecturer 6 added, "*Sometimes I use some authentic materials from electronic newspapers from the Internet*". On the other hand, Lecturer 1 said that

"The authentic materials are neither available nor suitable for the levels of most students. They are usually too long, too difficult and not adjustable to suit the students' learning styles."

There is a debate about the suitability and advantages of authentic materials in reading classes. Selecting real texts with authentic features could be preferable to using the traditional reading materials which focus on the structural usage rather than teaching reading skills. However, the identification, preparation and organisation of authentic materials and the tasks that can suit the learners' levels may become very time-consuming for the teacher, or may provide the learner with boring or irrelevant material. Using a combination of both authentic texts and textbooks could be suggested by someone who has little knowledge about the Libyan

educational system. This is a good idea in theory but in practice, it is unrealistic as there are no textbooks nor any English newspapers in Libya.

The answers of the interviewees to the question (*Is it difficult to access English materials on the Internet and the social media?*) were all “yes, it is difficult.” and the reason behind that was always the poor Internet connections. Because of the poor Internet accessibility in Libyan universities, it could be difficult to adopt technology-oriented teaching methods. This could prevent teachers from a good source of texts that can motivate students to read.

In response to the question (*Do you arrange the class in groups or pairs to discuss a text?*), most lecturers said they sometimes divide the class into groups, but it is often difficult to control large groups. Lecturer 1 said, “*Because of the large number of students in each class, I usually tend to arrange my classes in one big square or circle when we discuss reading texts*”. Lecturer 3 said “*I sometimes do this but not for the whole lecture because it is difficult to control the large number of students*”. Lecturer 6 said, “*My students sit in rows in one big group*”. Sometimes the infrastructure of classrooms does not allow for the arranging of students in groups as explained by Lecturer 5:

Most of the time I use whole class discussions because the arrangement of many classrooms does not support moving the students around as the seats are long benches fitted to the floor in rows, the classes are too large and the time is too limited.

The majority of the recommended strategies for teaching reading

comprehension require arranging the class into groups or pairs. However, this is difficult because of the overcrowded classes and limited time for reading classes in Libyan universities. There is a negative impression about the environment in which reading comprehension is taught in the Department of English at Zawia University. When working in groups, students with mixed abilities can help each other, build on each other's knowledge and provide feedback on each other's activities, which helps maximise students' learning. However, this is usually effective in relatively small classes. When arranging large numbers of students in groups, teachers do not usually have enough time to check and give feedback to all the students, which might reduce the benefits of such strategies.

When asked (*What is the average number of students you usually have in one class? What do you think the ideal number of students in a reading class should be?*), all the lecturers said the average number is around 45 students in a class. They all wish that they had fewer students in each class. Lecturer 1 said "*the less the number of students is, the better the teaching is and the more the students benefit from reading classes*". Lecturer 2 and Lecturer 5 said that ideally, they would rather have a class with twenty students only, whereas Lecturer 3 said "*30 students in maximum*". Lecturer 4 and Lecturer 6 said they want classes with not more than 25 students. On the other hand, Lecturer 7 dreams of having fully equipped classes with twelve students only. Overcrowded, however, classes should not stop teachers from trying to improve their teaching practices.

Throughout the interviews, all the lecturers repeatedly stated that the

curriculum time devoted to reading classes is not enough; therefore, instead of asking them (Do you think that the time dedicated to reading classes is enough and satisfactory?), they were asked (in your opinion, how many reading classes should there be?). Three of the lecturers said there should be at least three classes a week while the other four said it should be every day. Lecturer 7 said that

“Reading is an important skill and it can strongly affect the other skills. Students benefit a lot from the information and vocabulary they learn in reading classes. It helps them in writing, speaking and listening. The time allocated to reading is less than two hours a session and only twice a week. Reading should be taught daily.”

There is a significant relationship between the time devoted to reading and the use of reading comprehension strategies by learners. In addition, skilful teaching can be effective and can improve students’ reading when there is enough time for teaching reading. In other words, the short time allocated for teaching reading and reading skills can be one of the obstacles that affect teachers’ effectiveness in improving students’ reading. Dedicating more time for reading classes can be suggested; however, the effectiveness of this action cannot be guaranteed with the large number of students in each class.

5.2.5 Lecturers’ responses about motivating their students to read

In response to the question (*How do you raise your students’ motivation to read?*), lecturers highly appreciated the role of motivation in enhancing students’ reading; however, they admitted that it is quite difficult to motivate students to read, especially due to the fact that reading is not a common habit in the Libyan society. It is not common even to read newspapers.

Lecturer 1 believes that

“The teacher plays an important role in inspiring and increasing the students’ motivation to read and selecting the topic is the key. When the topic is interesting, students will enjoy reading the text.”

Lecturer 5 had expressed the same opinion as Lecturer 1 that selecting interesting and recent topics can motivate students. Lecturer 2 and Lecturer 4 ask their students some challenging questions to answer while and after reading to make them focus on the reading text. Lecturer 3 said that he sometimes allows students to select topics that they are interested in to make them involved in reading classes. Lecturer 6 said he usually gives students a short test after reading a text to keep them active and motivated. On the other hand, Lecturer 7 said that she always encourages her students to do extensive reading and reminds them of the benefits and success that they can achieve through reading.

There is a potential relationship between reading motivation and L2 reading comprehension and strategy use. To increase students’ reading motivation, teachers should select texts with interesting topics and tasks. The stimulus to succeed and get a better job can motivate learners to read and work harder. The limited time devoted to English classes, overcrowded classes and lack of facilities are some of the reasons that make Libyan teachers ignore introducing interesting activities, which has led to making learning English demotivating and Libyan learners passive with little competitive spirit.

When discussing the question (*When students come across unfamiliar words, how do you support them? a) tell them the meaning, b) ask them to*

guess the meaning by using clues from the context, c) advise them to consult a dictionary? d) Other means?), most of the lecturers said it is according to the topic. If the topic is familiar, they all try to use some clues from the text to make their students guess the meaning. When the topic is not familiar or has some specific terminology; e.g. medical, economic, etc., they usually tell the students the meaning or ask them to look it up in a dictionary.

Another two questions emerged from the discussion of this question. The first question is (*What type of dictionary do you ask students to use?*) whereas the second question is (*When you tell them the meaning, how do you do that?*). In response to the question (*What type of dictionary do you ask students to use?*), most of the interviewees said that the majority of students use e-dictionaries. Lecture 1 said, *"e-dictionaries are effective, quick and light"*. Lecture 4 said, *"It does not matter what type of dictionary they use because the ultimate goal of using a dictionary is to know the meaning"*. Lecturer 5 commented, *"Some students are too weak to use even English-Arabic dictionaries"*. On the other hand, Lecturer 7 explained that

"I usually advise the students to use an English-English Oxford Dictionary to get many benefits. First, they can learn the pronunciation from the transcription provided. Second, it tells them what type of word it is: a verb, a noun, an adjective ...etc. Third, students can enrich their vocabulary when they learn the meaning in English. Fourth, it can improve their English in general as it gives some examples for using words in different contexts."

Overall, a dictionary is a useful tool; and using it may benefit students, especially, the English-English dictionary for the advantages that Lecturer 7 identified. However, when reading a text, using dictionaries can help in understanding the primary meaning of words but it does not guarantee

comprehension and understanding the text as a whole because it cannot provide the secondary meaning of words; i.e. the contextual and cultural background of words in texts.

There were mixed responses when the lecturers were asked (*When you tell them the meaning, how do you do that?*). Lecturer 1 and Lecturer 4 said they give examples such as putting the unfamiliar word in different sentences. Lecturer 2 said, "*To save time, I translate difficult words into Arabic*". Lecturer 5 said "*I try to use visual aids; something in the class or I draw on the board when it is possible*". Lecturer 6 said, "*I use affixation knowledge; I analyse words and highlight the prefixes and suffixes to make it easier for students to guess the meaning*". Lecturer 7 said, "*I give explanations, synonyms, antonyms and sometimes facial or body gestures. However for abstract words, I usually use translation*".

It is good to support students in various ways when they do not understand key vocabulary, but to stick to the same techniques all the time can be demotivating. In addition, students should be taught how to be independent readers and not to rely completely on their teachers for each obstacle they may encounter. Reducing the teacher-centred approach, which is still predominant in Libyan schools and universities, is necessary. Many Libyan teachers teach in the same way that they were taught, where teachers control and command and students obey and follow instructions. Consequently, the focus of teaching reading comprehension is on structure rather than meaning and content.

In response to the question (*Do you allow your students to select some of the*

reading texts? Why/ why not?), almost all the interviewees answered “No!” Lecturer 5 said, *“To be honest no, not really. It is difficult to satisfy everyone”*. That is, they cannot allow their students to select the reading texts because of the large numbers of students with different interests and mixed ability. Lecturer 7 stated, *“It is according to the students’ level range. In other words, when they are at the same level, I may sometimes allow them to decide what to read”*. Selecting texts for reading classes is a big responsibility and needs teachers with high qualifications and broad experience. But still, discussing text choices with students and involving them in decision-making can raise their motivation to read.

When asked (*Do you involve your students in interesting and challenging tasks? How?*), all the lecturers said “yes”, but each of them has their own ways. For example, Lecturer 1 said

“After reading a text, I ask the students to answer the questions after the text and then each two students have to discuss the questions and try to answer them together. In the meanwhile, I try to check how they work but unfortunately, I cannot give feedback for them all because of the limited time and big number of students.”

Lecturer 3 said, *“I try to vary the tasks by varying the text types and increasing the level of the language used”*. Lecturer 4 said

“We hold competitions; I ask them to work in groups and answer the questions after the text. The winning group is the one with the best answers in the shortest time. They enjoy it.”

Lecturer 5 said, *“Sometimes I ask them to take some notes then write a summary”*. Similarly, Lecturer 6 said, *“I ask them to write an essay based on the reading text”*, and Lecturer 7 explained that

“Every year I ask students to work in groups to design an English newspaper; which will be evaluated by a group of lecturers at the end of the year. This makes them do much extensive reading about different topics and keeps them interested and active throughout the academic year.”

A key feature in the successful teaching of reading skills is based on the choice of comprehension tasks; therefore, task types can affect students' comprehension significantly. Teachers should break the dullness of learning and make the tasks interesting. However, the reading tasks sometimes appear to be testing the students rather than helping them to understand. Reading tasks should not be too easy or too difficult. They ought to be challenging but achievable to create a motivational drive for reading.

The learner's conscious choice and application of the appropriate strategy to a certain learning task is valuable as it can make the difference between effective and less effective language learners. In other words, good students establish adeptness at matching the strategies to the task they are working on whereas the less successful learners lack the meta-cognitive knowledge about task requirements that help in selecting the appropriate strategies.

In response to the question (*From your experience, what are the activities that you think are useful and motivating in teaching reading comprehension for students? How useful?*), there was a variety of answers. Lecturer 1 said

“I suggest presenting the texts in different ways, giving the students the chance to choose the topics and allowing them to read at their pace to make them feel comfortable.”

Lecturer 2 said, *“The best activity is to make students guess meanings of words and the main idea of the text from the context”*. Lecturer 3

recommends using authentic materials because, as he thinks, *“they reflect the culture of the natives and develop the way of thinking”*. Lecturer 4 said:

“to help students memorise new vocabulary, I ask them to play games to guess the meanings of new words. Making challenges in pronunciation might help students to pronounce words correctly. Making competitions for reading quickly and correctly may encourage students to challenge each other and read better.”

Lecturer 5 explained:

The type of activities depends on the situation. With small groups, I would suggest group and pair work where learners work on tasks. This can be useful for improving learners’ comprehension and speaking skills, and for supporting their involvement and boosting their motivation.

Lecturer 6 said *“I encourage learning vocabulary as well as intensive and extensive reading to expand student’s abilities”*. The researcher got the impression that despite the fact that lecturers were doing their best, they were not too concerned about diversifying their approach and integrating reading comprehension activities, which the students would find stimulating and useful. The majority of the interviewees focus on activities that involve dealing with vocabulary, grammatical aspects and pronunciation rather than concentrating on activities that can develop students’ reading skills and enhance their reading comprehension abilities. There is nothing wrong with teaching the structural and linguistic aspects of a reading text as this might help manage the reading processes; however, it is a mistake to prioritise form over content as comprehending a text is the purpose of reading.

The responses were exactly the same when discussing the question (*Does the Department provide the students with a further reading list to read on their own?*). All the lecturers said that the Department of English has never

provided the students with a further reading list to read on their own and neither do the lecturers because of the absence of Internet access at university and lack of up-to-date books in the small library in the Department. For instance, Lecturer 5 said, *"I suggest extra topics and encourage them to find out more about them in the Internet"*, and Lecturer 7 said, *"I always encourage my students to read on their own whatever they like so that they can improve their English and develop their reading habits"*. It is noticeable that many lecturers stated that it is difficult to make students read in English for pleasure because they are not used to reading in Arabic for pleasure. Most students read and study only for setting exams and passing them.

Extensive reading has a positive effect on EFL students' reading attitude as it helps them to be better readers and better comprehenders. Extensive reading can improve EFL students' reading comprehension, vocabulary and grammar achievement and can increase their cultural knowledge. Teachers can encourage students to benefit from extensive reading as students can read at their own pace and they do not have to answer questions on the texts they read, which may make them enjoy reading and develop their reading skills and reading habits.

5.2.6 Themes and findings of the interviews

Table 5.55: Themes and findings of the interview

Themes	findings
Lecturers' responses regarding teaching and learning of English reading comprehension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading comprehension is very important; however, it is challenging for many students. • Teaching a reading comprehension module is not a choice and is not based on lecturers' expertise. • Many students face many difficulties when reading English texts. • The source of difficulty that many students experience in reading comprehension is: • Learners' limited vocabulary and mispronunciation of words, • lack of grammatical awareness, • failure to understand the main idea of a text, • their limited exposure to English language and little knowledge about English culture, • rare reading habits.
Lecturers' perceptions and attitudes about the learning environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zawia University lacks many facilities and basic resources: • limited library resources • limited Internet access, • lack of textbooks which led to inconsistency of syllabi, • limited time devoted to English classes, • overcrowded classes owing to inadequate infrastructure.
Lecturers' responses about motivating their students to read	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some teachers' practices that appear to demotivate students to read are: • overlooking students' interests when selecting topics, • teaching reading comprehension in a traditional way, • no attention to enhance activities for pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading stages, • focusing on linguistic accuracy rather than reading fluency and comprehension, • little group or pair work, • no training provided to students to develop their reading skills, • no focus on individual problems due to limited time and overcrowded classes, • reading loudly and asking students to read loudly one by one.

5.2.7 Summary of interview data analysis

The conclusion that can be drawn from the data analysis of the semi-structured interviews shows that the research objectives that are related to the lecturers' perceptions were achieved. These interviews aimed to gauge the perceptions and views of the lecturers in the Department of English at Zawia University towards the teaching and learning of the reading

comprehension module.

The interviewed lecturers' replies show that reading comprehension is very important but it is challenging for many students; therefore, a lot of students face many difficulties when reading English texts. In addition, they stated that Zawia University lacks many facilities and basic resources. There is no doubt that this has negatively influenced the students' reading comprehension.

According to the reading comprehension lecturers, what make students experience difficulty in reading comprehension are their limited vocabulary, mispronunciation of words, lack of grammatical awareness and failure to understand the main idea of a text. Some other problems that face students can be drawn from the responses of the interviewees such as being demotivated and confused by the focus on linguistic accuracy rather than reading fluency and comprehension, being marginalised through applying teacher-centred approaches where no reading skills are effectively taught and being kept passive as a result of little group or pair work.

The lecturers mentioned several factors that impact directly on the quality of teaching and learning of reading comprehension such as lack of facilities, limited library resources and Internet access, lack of textbooks which led to inconsistency of syllabi, limited time devoted to English classes, overcrowded classes owing to inadequate infrastructure, and learners' limited exposure to English language, little knowledge about English culture and rare reading habits. Besides, most lecturers in the Department of English at Zawia University in Libya teach reading comprehension in a traditional way. After writing the key words of the text on the board, the teacher reads the text and

asks the students to read it then answer the related questions, and after that, the teacher deals with the grammatical rules used in the text. Moreover, no reading lists are provided to students who are interested and no chances to select topics due to students' large numbers and mixed ability.

Most of the interviewees complained about the time constraints and blamed overcrowded classes for avoiding interactive activities such as arranging the class in groups or pairs because they fear losing control over the class or wasting too much time. In fact, group work requires teachers to reduce their control over the class, but this challenges the traditional teaching that most lecturers follow, which is based on teacher-centred approaches. It cannot be ignored that the class size and time allocated to reading classes can largely affect teachers' instructional practices; however, such factors should not be excuses for teachers in order to stop making efforts to diversify their teaching approaches and integrate reading comprehension activities.

Overall, the lecturers' responses provided in the semi-structured interviews support to a large extent the findings of the questionnaire. Students' lack of reading skills negatively affected their reading performance. Lecturers should train their students to develop the reading skills; however, it was noticed that many lecturers are not aware of many reading skills. Thus, lecturers themselves need training to improve their teaching strategies and update their knowledge. The lack of facilities and inadequate environment are partly to blame in the process of teaching and learning of reading comprehension. In the following chapter, the conclusions and recommendations will be presented.

5.2.8 Triangulation of the findings from questionnaires and interviews

Table 5.56: Triangulation of the findings from questionnaires and interviews

Main research objectives	Findings from the questionnaire	Findings from the interview
The challenges and problems that face Libyan students in reading comprehension	<p>English reading comprehension is difficult.</p> <p>Students have a negative attitude towards reading in English.</p> <p>Students tend not to do any extensive reading.</p> <p>Most students are not able to use reading skills.</p> <p>The source behind students' difficulties in reading in English is their negative attitude towards reading, and their lack of training to develop reading skills.</p>	<p>Reading comprehension is challenging for many students.</p> <p>Students face many difficulties when reading English texts.</p> <p>Students do not read for pleasure in Arabic or English.</p> <p>Most lecturers are not aware of the reading skills that students should acquire.</p> <p>The source of difficulty that many students experience in reading classes are learners' limited vocabulary and mispronunciation of words, lack of grammatical awareness, failure to understand the main idea of a text and their limited exposure to English language and little knowledge about English culture.</p>
The factors that impact directly on the quality of teaching and learning of reading comprehension at Zawia University	<p>The library resources and services at the university are not sufficiently available.</p> <p>The Internet is not always accessible at the university.</p> <p>Classrooms are not provided with IT facilities.</p> <p>There is a large number of students in each classroom.</p>	<p>Zawia University lacks many facilities and basic resources:</p> <p>Limited library resources, limited Internet access, lack of textbooks, which led to inconsistency of syllabi, limited time devoted to English classes, no focus on individual problems, overcrowded classes owing to inadequate infrastructure.</p>
The way English reading comprehension is taught in the Department of English at Zawia University	<p>Most teacher do not try to make reading enjoyable.</p> <p>Students are not given the chance to select topics for reading classes.</p> <p>Many teachers do not train students to develop reading skills.</p> <p>Students are asked to learn the pronunciation of words and structural aspect of text and to read the text loudly one by one.</p> <p>Most teachers do not point out students' problems in reading.</p>	<p>Most lecturers teach reading in a traditional way.</p> <p>Most lecturers select topics according to their own interests.</p> <p>Most lecturers pay no attention to enhance activities for pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading stages.</p> <p>Lecturers focus on linguistic accuracy rather than reading fluency and comprehension.</p> <p>Most lecturers encourage little group work.</p> <p>Lecturers do not focus on individual problems due to limited time and overcrowded classes.</p>

Chapter Six:

Conclusion and recommendations

6. Introduction

This chapter draws the conclusions from the findings of the research and interprets these findings in line with the research objectives with link to the literature review. Subsequently, recommendations are made based on the findings. This chapter also highlights the contribution to knowledge and identifies the limitations of this study, and suggests areas for further research.

My study investigates the main challenges that face Libyan students in reading comprehension within the English language programme at Zawia University, Libya, through the perceptions of lecturers and students at the Department of English. This study also evaluates the current teaching practices of reading comprehension at the Department of English at Zawia University, and based on the findings, recommendations on how to enhance students' comprehension skills are made. The findings of the study have revealed that students at the Department of English at Zawia University lack the reading skills and the culture of reading and face difficulties in English reading comprehension. Many lecturers are not aware of reading skills and they teach reading comprehension in a traditional way with over-emphasis on decoding and accuracy. The insufficient learning environment at the department has a negative impact on the process of learning and teaching because of the lack of facilities and library resources, overcrowded classes, and limited time allocated to reading classes.

6.1 Key literature

Reading comprehension as a research topic has been extensively debated, and it is still of current interest because of the great importance and impact of comprehension skills on students' performance. The literature (Cain, 2010; Nassaji, 2011; Ahmadi et al., 2013; Grabe and Stoller, 2002; Hudson, 2007; Wyatt, 2014) indicates that there is a general consensus about the importance and complexity of reading comprehension; however, the definition of the term reading comprehension is not clear-cut. Many linguists (Grabe, 2009; Lipka and Siegel, 2012; Russell, 2013; McLean, 2014; Turkyilmaz et al., 2014; Akyol et al., 2014) agree that reading is mainly a comprehending process; however, they have different arguments on how comprehension is approached. These arguments fall mainly into two categories. They follow either the bottom-up approach or the top-down approach to reading. The bottom-up approach focuses on decoding as a means of text understanding while the top-down approach regards readers' prior knowledge as essential to fully comprehend a text. It can be argued that the comprehension process requires decoding of words and sentences in addition to background knowledge of readers, which makes it easier to understand the text as a whole. This is embodied in the interactive approach, which strikes a balance between the differing processes of bottom-up and top-down approaches. In other words, an interactive process requires the use of background knowledge, expectations, and context. At the same time, it also includes notions of rapid and accurate feature recognition for letters, words and lexical forms, and the concept of processing them automatically. In the Libyan context, where the English culture is quasi absent, teachers and learners

usually emphasise decoding individual words to understand a text. This is revealed from the findings where most of the interviewed lecturers stated how they focus on teaching the key words and grammatical rules in reading classes. The majority of them indicated that they could not develop their students' reading skills because of the limited time of reading classes and the overcrowded classrooms. Furthermore, most of the students do not use any reading skills. In this study, it is argued that the focus on mere decoding of new words in a text is one of the reasons behind the poor reading comprehension performance of many Libyan students.

Several different views (Nuttall, 2005; Brown, 2007; Lin, 2010; Brantmeier, 2003) attempted to define reading comprehension; however, none of these accounts for the cultural factors of L1 (mother tongue) on L2 (target language) reading comprehension, which can be problematic when trying to look at L2 reading patterns across various cultures because readers from different cultures may read the same passage and gain different interpretations of the text. Thus, a reader may face difficulty when reading something written by someone in a language with different cultural assumptions (McDonough and Shaw, 2003; Kuzborska, 2012). Culture can also affect structuring texts, which means that genres may vary in their representations across cultures. More importantly, to develop some reading skills such as inferencing which requires reconstructing the writer's unstated ideas, students need to be familiar with L1's cultural assumptions. That is, the more a reader is culturally familiar with a text, the more likely an L2 reader is going to be able to comprehend it (Hill, 2011). Readers can make use of syntactic and cultural clues to discover the meaning of implicit elements

(Grellet, 2010). However, because the English and Arab cultures are totally different, it might be difficult for Libyan students to gain such a skill and apply it effectively, especially as Libya is not a culturally diverse country.

There are complications regarding distinguishing between reading skills and reading strategies as these terms are often used interchangeably by many researchers and educators. On the other hand, some researchers distinguish between reading skills and reading strategies by seeing skills as subconscious and strategies as conscious activities. In this research, skills and strategies are often used interchangeably for the purpose of this study and due to the current situation that the targeted students' reading comprehension is inadequate because of their lack of these skills or strategies. In other words, there is no point at this stage to distinguish between reading skills and reading strategies as the ultimate goal is to improve the students' comprehension performance and help them develop any abilities related to reading comprehension. Text comprehension is a complex task that involves many different cognitive and meta-cognitive skills and strategies. Learners' conscious choice and application of the appropriate strategy to a certain learning task can make the difference between effective and less effective language learners. Harmer (2002) lists a number of sub-skills of reading such as predicting, guessing word meaning, reading for specific information, scanning, skimming, reading for general comprehension, inferring from texts, interpreting texts, surveying text organisation, and critically evaluating texts. In addition to this list of reading skills, Madhumathi and Ghosh (2012) mention other reading skills like using mental images, envisaging, and asking questions. On the other hand, researchers mention

three types of meta-cognitive reading strategies: planning, monitoring, and evaluation. These meta-cognitive skills help readers direct the ways they arrange their interaction with the text and what cognitive strategies to use to achieve effective reading comprehension. Teachers should train students to use meta-cognitive strategies effectively in order to enable them to avoid focusing only on decoding words rather than trying to understand the meaning of text as a whole. The findings reveal that decoding words is the main focus of many teachers of reading comprehension module.

The process of learning reading comprehension at school or university involves three main elements: learners, teachers and reading materials. There are some factors that influence the learning process such as learners' attitudes and motivation. Having a positive attitude towards reading can enhance learners' reading frequency. Linguistic deficiency could negatively affect readers' attitude to reading as it may hinder the reading comprehension process, and limited language proficiency can lead to inefficient processing of text (Nassaji, 2003). That is, there is a strong relationship between the reader's linguistic ability and their reading ability. Linguistic abilities include word-level processes and text-level processes. Word-level processes usually include orthographic processing, vocabulary identification and size, morphological awareness, and phonological awareness, which facilitate reading comprehension through the linguistic knowledge of words in a text. On the other hand, text-level processes are related to knowledge about grammar and syntactic structures, and schemata, which help readers access understanding a reading text as a whole based on their background knowledge. Overall, it can be noticed that these abilities are

applied in the interactive approach as they are a combination of the bottom-up approach processes and the top-down approach processes. However, in the Department of English at Zawia University, the bottom-up approach, which relies on decoding, is predominantly followed. In reading classes, the main concern of many lecturers at the Department is to provide students with the meanings of the key words and to teach the grammatical rules. In other words, they focus on decoding the words and sentences of a text in order to help their students understand it. This can be effective in the pre-reading and while-reading activities of the reading class especially with beginners and low-level readers (like most Libyan students). However, underestimating the role of previous knowledge is seen by this study as the most prominent drawback of the bottom-down approach.

Teachers' beliefs and perceptions about teaching can determine the success of the teaching process as their beliefs have a large effect on their instructional practices in reading comprehension. In order to teach reading comprehension effectively and improve comprehension instruction, teachers should monitor their own thinking processes, reflect on and discuss their reactions and insights with others. Some of the issues that teachers have to consider in teaching reading comprehension are motivating students to read, having a work design and teaching the reading strategies explicitly using different techniques. There are different strategies for teaching reading comprehension; however, most of them were originally designed for teaching L1 reading comprehension. There is limited empirical evidence that they suit L2 contexts. Different researchers believe in the efficacy of different teaching strategies. For example, while Armbruster et al. (2003), Jalilifar (2010) and

Bolukbas et al. (2011) highlight the effectiveness of the cooperative learning strategy in maximising students' learning in reading classes, Taguchi et al. (2012), Yeganeh (2013), Ari (2015), Chang and Millett (2013), and Dundar and Akyol (2014) highlight the effect of repeated reading on improving comprehension levels, and Ahmadi and Gilakjani (2012), Stricklin (2011) and Castek (2013) think that the reciprocal teaching strategy is an important factor to improve reading comprehension. There are some issues that challenge each strategy. The cooperative learning strategy can be effective with small classes but in Libyan universities, there are on average over forty students in one class and sometimes the number exceeds sixty. The repeated reading strategy needs plenty of time to be applied efficiently in reading classes. In Libyan universities, reading classes are usually for a limited time (only two to three hours a week). In fact, there is a significant relationship between the time devoted to reading and the use of reading comprehension strategies (Kirmizi, 2010; Pfof et al., 2013). The reciprocal teaching strategy is very effective when it is applied in a stable and conducive learning environment. It keeps students working efficiently throughout the reading class. However, it needs much time and requires teachers to play different roles flexibly and smoothly.

The type of reading material affects the level of learners' reading comprehension. Selecting appropriate reading materials in terms of genres, difficulty, interest and cultural background and choosing topics that suit students' interest is the core of teaching reading as this helps students improve their reading skills (Harmer, 2002; Adam et al., 2013). Teachers' selection of materials can also affect students' involvement in the class.

Suitability of content is a basic criterion in text selection. Texts should interest students to engage them fully with the reading activity as their lack of engagement may be a major hindrance to their reading comprehension performance. In addition, to approach comprehension while reading, it is important for students to know how texts are organised, what sort of information to expect, where to look for the main idea and how supporting ideas are marked. When students do not realise how the ideas of a text are expressed and messages are presented, they might have problems in reading comprehension especially as various kinds of texts have different structural elements, which needs the application of different types of reading skills.

6.2 The challenges and problems that face Libyan students in reading comprehension

Based on students' responses in the questionnaire, most of them find English reading comprehension difficult and tend not to do any extensive reading. Consistently, the interviewed lecturers believe that reading comprehension is much challenging for many students; therefore, a lot of them face various difficulties when reading English texts. In consonance with this, many researchers state that L2 reading comprehension is complex and challenging for students to develop (Grabe and Stoller, 2002; Hudson, 2007; Alkhawaldeh, 2010; Zoghi et al., 2011; Lipka and Siegel, 2012; Ahmadi et al., 2013; Hollenbeck, 2013; Sahin, 2013; Yogurtcu, 2013; Norris, 2013; Wyatt, 2014; Patesan et al., 2014; Ahmadi and Gilakjani, 2012; Nassaji, 2011). There are two types of comprehension difficulties: difficulties at the word level and difficulties at the text level (Lipka and Siegel, 2012). When reading in the

first language, many lower-level processes like decoding are automatically activated but this is not usually the case when reading in a second or foreign language. Decoding a new word needs processing it orthographically, phonologically, morphologically, and semantically. However, understanding the meaning of individual words does not mean understanding the text as a whole. In other words, comprehension is a complex process involving inferential and reflective thinking. Libyan students' lack of confidence due to poor general knowledge and absence of training make the reading comprehension class quite daunting. This study agrees with the literature (Pathan, 2012; Abidin et al., 2012; Omar, 2013; Jha, 2014) that many Libyan EFL learners have a negative attitude towards learning English and most of them regard reading comprehension as a difficult module. This attitude has a direct bearing on their language achievement and performance in English reading comprehension.

There are some differences among the students in different academic levels regarding their attitudes to English reading comprehension and their use of the reading skills as few students in year 4 and year 3 have a positive attitude to reading comprehension and they try to use most reading skills. This indicates that most students did not have a good chance to be trained to develop their reading comprehension skills, but some of them might have done self-study or they could have benefitted from some positive teaching instructions. On the other hand, regardless of their gender or academic level, the majority of students are dissatisfied with the poor resources and lack of facilities at their university as well as the way English reading comprehension is taught. Unfortunately, Zawia University lacks the necessary resources and

facilities that can help create a motivating learning environment to enhance students' learning and promote their reading performance. According to both lecturers and students, the library resources and services at the university are not sufficiently available. Libraries can have an effect on students' performance. Well-resourced libraries should offer study space, books, journals, computers, electronic resources, workstations, collections and perhaps a place to get a cup of coffee. Almost none of these services and resources is available in the small library at Zawia University. There are only some outdated books and few old computers. Moreover, the Internet is very often inaccessible at Zawia University. The Internet is one of the effective resources for EFL teachers (Chen, 2008). It can enrich materials and help the students to understand native speakers to improve the foreign language they learn (Wu et al., 2013). That is, it can motivate both students and teachers, increase the participation and interaction of students in the classroom, and allow a deeper integration with the culture of the target language (Abdi, 2013). In fact, only two small classrooms at Zawia University are provided with IT facilities, which has discouraged teachers from integrating computers and technology in their teaching methods. In addition, there is a shortage of classrooms in the university, which resulted in overcrowded classes. This makes teachers' attempts to provide a meaningful teaching session challenging.

It is evident from the findings that most of the students are not familiar with how to process a text for comprehension as they lack the necessary reading skills that can help them comprehend English texts. The majority of students appear to be unable to predict, skim, scan, analyse or summarise reading

texts, which reflects their inadequate comprehension when they read English texts. Without developing reading skills, learners will struggle and continually focus on decoding letters and words instead of focusing on meaning and understanding (Grabe and Stoller, 2002; Machado, 2010; Karasakaloglu, 2012). To become effective readers, students have to develop their reading comprehension skills. Taking into account the reading skills and strategies which should be acquired by proficient readers, most Libyan students might be considered as less effective readers. However, it is unfair for Libyan students to be categorised as such without having any opportunity to be taught such strategies and skills or at least to be made aware of them at all.

On the other hand, according to the reading comprehension lecturers, what make students experience difficulty in reading comprehension are their limited vocabulary, mispronunciation of words, lack of grammatical awareness and failure to understand the main idea of a text. This probably reflects that most lecturers are not aware of the reading skills that students should acquire. In Libya, learning English as a foreign language is viewed as a matter of mastering grammatical rules, and building vocabulary, and memorisation is considered the perfect way to promote these aspects of language. It is argued in this study that the focus on grammar and vocabulary in reading classes can confuse the students about the nature and purpose of reading comprehension. Students are demotivated and confused by the focus on linguistic accuracy rather than reading fluency and comprehension. Motivation is an important issue that influences reading development. There are strong relationships between motivation and L2 reading (Matsumoto et al., 2013). Motivation can increase the rate of reading and thus improve the

reading abilities and comprehension proficiency.

One of the issues that might be a source of problems for students is the freedom that their teachers have in selecting and compiling their teaching material for reading comprehension. This laissez faire approach has led to lack of homogeneity, standardisation and consistency of syllabus design and resulted in random and improvised selection of texts, which include the language of texts, the topics, the tasks to be performed by students, and the purposes they have of reading. Consequently, students at the same level are assessed differently and learning outcomes are measured differently. When discussing how lecturers select reading texts, the findings revealed that lecturers tend to refer to their personal views and interests rather than their students' interests and needs. Teachers sometimes get suggestions from the head of the Department or colleagues who recommend books that they used or were taught before. Whenever possible, some lecturers browse the Internet to choose the reading material. The Internet is one of the effective resources for EFL teachers. However, considering students' levels and the differences between English and Arabic cultures, the Internet is not necessarily the most suitable source to use for teaching reading. Moreover, using technology needs the existence of appropriate access to Internet and classrooms that are provided with IT facilities. This is not the case in Libyan universities. There are only busy classes with old boards and poor copies of old repeated material. Boards are the only equipment that teachers use in classes and students are asked to photocopy the selected text by themselves, which usually causes chaos and wastes time. Some lecturers believe that if there are computers and Internet at the University, they could

teach better and students would learn better. They do need technology to improve their ways of teaching.

6.3 The factors that impact directly on the quality of teaching and learning of reading comprehension at Zawia University

The majority of students have problems in reading comprehension and encounter difficulty in understanding English texts. It is known that reading comprehension is complex and it can be challenging for EFL students to develop their reading skills. Thus, some of the students' problems can be attributed to their lack of reading skills, the learning environment in which they learn and unavailability of facilities, and their teachers' lack of training. In other words, students were not trained to read texts efficiently and they did not have the proper chance to develop their comprehension skills and improve their reading abilities. In fact, teachers themselves need support for their professional development (Sailors and Price, 2015) as most lecturers seemed to teach in the same way they were taught. Teachers lack training and they never had any opportunity to receive in-service training or professional support; therefore, most Libyan teachers depend on their teaching experience without any critical analysis of their practice. Surprisingly, the Libyan universities do not provide such workshops based on the belief that lecturers or university teachers are already qualified enough to teach any module (Elabbar, 2011), which puts burden on these teachers. All interviewees stressed that teaching reading comprehension is often imposed; they did not have the choice to teach what they want. The Head of the Department decides who teaches what. This reveals the pressure that lecturers encounter through having to teach a module without consultation

and without taking into account their wishes and preferences according to their expertise and experience, and above all their capabilities. Consequently, this might be demotivating for lecturers and not beneficial for students. Furthermore, the Department lacks the facilities to make the process of teaching and learning adequate. Students' reading abilities and strategy use depend on the teaching instructions they receive in reading classes, their attitudes to reading comprehension and the availability of facilities. Therefore, students' poor reading comprehension performance and their lack of reading skills are negatively influenced by the way they have been taught, their negative attitude to reading in English, and the lack of facilities.

The findings revealed that both students and lecturers believe that Zawia University lacks several facilities and basic resources, which has destructively influenced the teachers' delivery methods and the students' reading comprehension attitudes and proficiency. For instance, the University suffers from limited library resources, degraded language labs, textbook unavailability and Internet inaccessibility. The lack of study materials and library resources hinders the process of learning the English language (Rajendran, 2010). In addition, the lecturers complained about the limited time devoted to English reading classes, and overcrowded classes because of the inadequate infrastructure. Most of the interviewees kept complaining about the time constraints and blaming the overcrowded classes for avoiding interactive activities such as arranging the class into groups or pairs because they fear losing control over the class. Many teachers arrange their classes in rows, a traditional way that does not support group working. To work

effectively, some strategies for teaching reading require dividing the class into groups or pairs. For example, in cooperative learning strategy, students have to work in groups. Group work requires teachers to reduce their control over the class, but this challenges the traditional way of teaching that most lecturers follow, which is based on teacher-centred approaches. It cannot be ignored that the class size and time allocated to reading classes can largely affect teachers' instructional practices; however, such factors should not impede teachers from making efforts to diversify their teaching approaches and integrate reading comprehension activities as much as possible.

The findings also highlighted some other factors that contributed to the problems that Libyan students face in English reading comprehension such as little exposure to English language, slight knowledge about English culture, and rare reading habits even in Arabic. Learners with little exposure to the second language have difficulty in reading that language (Hudson, 2007). The findings indicated that some teachers use and allow students to use Arabic instead of English in English reading classes. This might reflect the teachers' lack of confidence and lack of practice in speaking English, which does not inspire the students who look for a role model. This might also indicate that the students have difficulty in listening comprehension. The researcher agrees with Soliman (2013) that the excessive use of Arabic in instruction may be one of the factors behind the Libyan students' low proficiency in English.

6.4 The way English reading comprehension is taught in the Department of English at Zawia University

This study found out that most of the students think that their teachers do not teach them how to develop their reading skills, which could have negatively influenced their reading comprehension performance. Despite the fact that lecturers were doing their best, they were not too concerned about diversifying their approaches and integrating reading comprehension activities, which the students would find stimulating and useful. It is noticeable that most teachers do not follow an enhancing environment that can encourage their students to develop their reading skills and improve their reading comprehension performance. According to their answers in the interviews, most lecturers in the Department of English at Zawia University in Libya teach reading comprehension in a traditional way. After writing the title and key words of the text on the board, the teacher reads the text and asks the students to read it then answer the related questions, and after that, the teacher deals with the grammatical issues in the text. When students come across unfamiliar words in the text in hand, some lecturers ask them to guess the meaning by using clues from the context if the topic is familiar; otherwise, they just tell them the meaning or advise them to consult a dictionary to save time. Although enhancing reading classes with activities for pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading stages is very effective (Akyol et al., 2014), almost none of the lecturers stated that they follow this constructive process and also most students disagreed with the statement “*My teacher divides the reading lesson into pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities*”. This suggests that the lecturers “work as they go”. They have no comprehension strategies and they improvise as they go along. The

researcher takes the view that applying fruitless techniques to teach reading comprehension with over emphasis on decoding and accuracy can be a major problem. Most of the class time is spent explaining grammatical points and giving the meaning of individual words, and translating passages from English into Arabic, which may be regarded by this study as inefficient reading strategies that take EFL reader's attention away from trying to understand the whole text. Teaching the structural and linguistic aspects of a reading text can help manage the reading processes, but it should not be prioritised in reading classes. Students are marginalised and kept passive through applying teacher-centred approaches where no reading skills are effectively taught and little group work is done. Learners need to be encouraged to be active and to employ some more effective reading strategies that can enable them to comprehend a text. When working in groups, students with mixed ability can help each other, build on each other's knowledge and provide feedback on each other's activities, which helps maximise students' learning.

University teachers have to select reading texts from different sources to prepare the reading material for their students to the best of their abilities. Selecting texts for reading classes is a big responsibility that requires teachers with high qualifications and broad experience. Teachers play an important role in inspiring and increasing their students' motivation to read and selecting the topic is the key. When the topic is interesting, students will enjoy reading the text. Students will be less motivated and less confident in reading a text with content that they are not interested in. Thus, discussing text choices with students and involving them in decision-making about the

topics can raise their motivation to read. However, the majority of lecturers stated that they do not consider their students' interests when they prepare the reading material because of the large number of students with different interests and mixed ability in each classroom. The limited time devoted to English classes, overcrowded classes and lack of facilities are some of the reasons that make Libyan teachers ignore introducing interesting activities and avoiding group work, which has led to making learning English demotivating and Libyan learners passive with little competitive spirit.

6.5 Recommendations

This study makes a number of recommendations to decision makers and key stakeholders of Zawia University and the Libyan Ministry of Higher Education, and to teachers of English reading comprehension in order to improve teaching instructions and learning environment. These recommendations are based on the findings of the study. They also take advantage of some views in the literature, taking into consideration the Libyan context.

6.5.1 To decision makers at Zawia University and the Libyan Ministry of Higher Education

Training teachers to have the necessary expertise in teaching is fundamental and beneficial as this can enable them to help their students develop their skills and improve their learning abilities. The Department of English should organise effective workshops on a regular basis to the lecturers in order to train them well and enhance their skills and knowledge. The problems experienced by students in learning reading appear to be as much to do with the teaching of reading comprehension as with the students' inability to

master and develop their reading skills. Although reading is an individual activity, it requires guidance to develop basic reading skills (Yazar, 2013). One of the obstacles that negatively affect teaching reading is the lack of expertise among educators who can effectively teach reading skills (Duke and Block, 2012). To improve the reading achievement and ability of students to comprehend texts, it is essential to improve the ability of teachers to effectively teach their students (Sailors and Price, 2015). Workshops can enhance teachers' practical skills (Richards and Farrell, 2005). Experienced teachers and high profile academics who are experts in reading comprehension should be invited to run these workshops. Afterwards, the performance of students should be evaluated to make sure that their lecturers benefit from the workshops they attend.

A committee of specialised lecturers should be designated to outline a proforma for each module in the Department of English. Having a consistent programme of study should be made a requirement by the Department to improve students' English and develop their skills in a gradual and steady way. In addition, lecturers should teach what they are good at and according to their expertise.

The infrastructure of the university should be improved and more classrooms should be provided. Language labs should be well-equipped and libraries should be updated and resourced regularly. Training librarians to guide students in the world of books can help save students' time and efforts. Because students can benefit from strategic reading instruction offered in a technology-enhanced learning environment (Levine et al., 2000), access to

the Internet should be made available to help teachers integrate technology in teaching and encourage them to shift from the traditional methods based on 'talk and chalk' style to more technological approaches.

6.5.2 To teachers of reading

This study has realised that the best way to improve reading is by reading; therefore, some suggestions were put forward to increase students' motivation to read on their own and under their teachers' supervision and guidance. Setting up a book-reading club can promote the reading culture. This can be effective by asking for students' feedback on the books they read. Encouraging students to do much intensive reading and extensive reading. While intensive reading is very effective for the development of the reading skills of students, extensive reading is the easiest way for improving these skills (Nuttall, 2005). To make students willingly do much extensive reading about different topics and to keep them interested and active throughout the academic year, lecturers can ask them to work in groups to design an English newspaper; which ought to be evaluated by a group of lecturers at the end of the year to create a competitive environment. Providing students with a further reading list to read on their own may also encourage some of them to read for pleasure. Students' reading on their own is a source for them to practise language, learn more vocabulary and develop their skills; that is, it is a means to be fluent readers.

Teachers should be well-organised in selecting the teaching techniques and learning activities and organising the classroom according to these techniques and activities (Carlisle et al., 2011). Good planning is important

for effective teaching and learning. Setting objectives for a reading text and telling students about the objectives and purpose of reading a particular text can help teachers facilitate difficult and challenging texts for students and can influence students' attitudes towards reading. Selecting the reading material to stimulate students' interests through various interesting topics and different types of texts as well as giving students the opportunity to have a say in the selection of texts and topics according to their interests and purposes of reading can increase students' motivation to read. Students might use the skill of browsing when they are asked to select topics or texts, especially when they have a definite purpose of reading. Students need to be given time to read and interact with texts (Lau et al., 2011). Thus, giving students the text a week in advance to do some research and generate questions from the text can promote active and responsive readers and could help students to take advantage of the cross-sectional nature of reading comprehension to improve the students' English. Reading can affect the rest of the learning areas and it can help to enhance the communication abilities through developing the linguistic competence and enriching the vocabulary as well as improving other language skills such as speaking and writing. When discussing a text in reading classes, using English can increase students' reading abilities and provides a chance for students to practise speaking and listening in English and gain confidence.

Enhancing reading with activities for pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading stages is effective. Familiarising students with the topic of a reading text is a pre-reading stage. This can activate students' relevant existing schemata and engage their background knowledge. When students have

pre-knowledge about the topic of a text, it can be beneficial to ask them some questions about it and train them to guess what the text is about. Guessing helps readers understand a text through trying to predict what is coming, and making assumptions about the content. While reading, helping students to guess the meaning of unknown key vocabulary from the context saves time and benefits the comprehension process. Working on developing students' reading skills is a crucial goal for reading classes. To become effective readers, students have to develop their reading comprehension skills. Training students to skim and scan helps them acquire a confident reading competence and teaches them to differentiate between main ideas and supporting details. Teaching students how to figure out the topic idea of a text helps them understand the text as a whole. Training the students to realise the main idea of a text is considered one of the ways through which EFL reading instruction helps to improve their comprehension. Training students to understand text organisation of the different types of texts makes it easier for them to identify the main and supporting ideas. Training students to inference and make assumptions and logical conclusions from existing ideas affects the interpretation of a text, helps students to read texts more quickly and makes use of their intelligence making reading more enjoyable (Nuttall, 2005). After finishing reading, asking students to summarise a text and/or paraphrase the key ideas can also increase their comprehension abilities. Besides, checking the summaries written by students offers teachers a good opportunity to evaluate students' reading comprehension and to identify some of their problems in reading and writing. It also helps teachers recognise good readers and low-level readers, which can effectively

help in dividing the class into groups with mixed ability. Guiding students to do evaluation and assess their reading experience can be very effective in making them aware about the difficulties they encounter in reading comprehension, which can make it easier for them to deal with these problems and try to avoid them. It is helpful to know what the difficulty is as diagnosis is halfway to remedy.

Varying the teaching methods and approaches in order not to be monotonous and demotivating, and trying to follow the assumptions of the communicative approach can enhance real-time communication and meaning-centred learning. Updating and diversifying the teaching strategies can help maximise students' learning. A number of strategies such as cooperative learning and reciprocal teaching include various activities that make students interact in an active way and can help improve their reading comprehension proficiency. These activities usually require dividing the class into groups or pairs to make reading motivating and help students to build on each other's knowledge and provide feedback on each other's activities. This can be effective when classes are not overcrowded and the number of students in each class is acceptable. Moreover, the use of computers and Internet resources should be maximised to diversify materials, motivate students and teachers, increase the participation and interaction of students in the classroom, allow a deeper integration with the culture of the target language, promote language awareness and consequently aid comprehension.

6.6 Research Limitations

All research has limitations and this study is no exception. The main limitations are as follows:

This study was limited to only one university in Libya, Zawia University. However, although Zawia University has been rather recently established (in 1988), it is the only university in the whole area west to Tripoli; therefore, many students and lecturers are affiliated to it. Besides, the researcher of this study is a staff member in this university, which facilitated the access to the participants in this study. As the context in Libyan universities is believed to be similar, the findings of this study might be generalisable to several universities in Libya; thus, the recommendations can benefit all Libyan students.

Due to the turmoil taking place in Libya, the researcher was unable to travel to Libya to conduct face-to-face interviews; therefore, the semi-structured interviews were held via Skype and phone calls. In addition, because the situation in Libya is worsening by the day, there was an atmosphere of fear and apprehension. Thus, most interviewees refused to be recorded, which resulted in not using the NVIVO software programme.

The sample size could have been greater. The questionnaires were distributed at the end of the academic year. Perhaps this resulted in decreasing the response rate as students were preparing themselves to sit for the final exams. In addition, in order to avoid bias and influencing participants' responses, the questionnaires were distributed by the researcher's colleagues in the Department of English at Zawia University.

However, in doing this, respondents did not have the chance to ask for clarification.

There was a possibility of bias for being a member of staff. Bias could have been introduced when conducting and analysing interviews as well as in discussing the results from interviews and questionnaires.

Based on the tools of data collection, this study relies on the attitudes and viewpoints of students in the questionnaires and lecturers in the interviews. Observation, for example, could have been more effective for investigating how reading comprehension is taught and learnt and whether students use the reading skills; however, it was difficult for the researcher to make any observation of students in Libya.

6.7 Contributions to knowledge

This study has contributed to knowledge in several ways:

This study has added a theoretical contribution through expanding the literature, which brings about academic benefits for future researchers in education in the Arab world, particularly in Libya. Future researchers can use the conceptual model for reading comprehension that is presented by the researcher in Figure 6.1. This model can help them investigate what is involved in teaching and learning of reading and what factors influence this process. This model is based on both the findings of this study and the key literature that was reviewed. It highlights key issues concerning teaching and learning of reading comprehension module: learners, teachers, reading material, and resources. When learners are involved, issues like reading skills, motivation, attitude, schemata and linguistic abilities are raised.

Teaching of reading requires teachers to be well-organised and make clear plans and set goals for reading classes and choose the teaching strategies that can benefit their students. The number of students in each class and the time allocated to reading classes can deeply affect the teaching instructions and the way students are organised in class can influence their interaction with their teachers and the text in hand. The selection of reading materials is the responsibility of lecturers. Suitability of content, exploitability, and readability of texts are the main criteria that influence the choice of texts. In order to be suitable in content, texts should interest learners. The exploitability of texts refers to the facilitation of learning whereas readability refers to the combination of structural and lexical difficulty. For course improvement, it was discussed what instructional materials are satisfactory and where change is needed. As shown in the results, the facilities and resources of universities had a direct impact on students' learning achievement and reading performance as well as lecturers' teaching strategies and resources for selecting reading material. Availability of IT facilities and internet access can be a good resource for lecturers to select reading materials and adopt variety of teaching practices. On the other hand, this can highly influence students' motivation and attitude to read. The quantity and quality of classes can also affect lecturers' teaching methods and students' learning abilities. Providing more classes can lead to having less number of students in each class. The quality of classes can involve the facilities with which classes are occupied and also the organisation, brightness and cleanness of classes.

Figure 6.1: A conceptual model of reading comprehension



This study has practical implications, as it will benefit the key stakeholders of the educational system (decision-makers, teachers and students). This piece of research draws attention to the problems that students encounter when reading English texts and it raises awareness about the root causes of the decline of English reading comprehension performance of Libyan students. The results of this study can be used to make significant and necessary changes to the current programme of reading comprehension module. Recommendations have been made based on the findings of this study. These recommendations will benefit the process of teaching and learning of

reading comprehension in Libyan universities. Although lecturers were blamed for the absence of student training, it appeared that lecturers themselves lack training and support. Thus, the whole educational system is in need of reform. Administrative regulations should be innovated for the sake of providing the support to university improvement of teaching and learning of English. The findings will benefit teachers of reading and EFL curriculum designers, particularly in their development of suitable learning and teaching resources for reading comprehension module. Decision makers have the responsibility of improving the infrastructure of the university to create an inductive environment to reading.

6.8 Suggestions for Future Research

This research focused only on Zawia University but the same study can be conducted on other universities in Libya or other countries to compare and contrast findings. Furthermore, this study used questionnaires and conducted semi-structured interviews. Similar studies can be undertaken using other tools of data collection. Observations, focus groups, or tests can be used to investigate the reading skills of students.

Further research can involve the decision makers, managers and the Libyan Ministry of Higher Education to provide a wide range of opinions that could benefit English language programmes in the future. In particular, more research is needed to enhance staff training and development and show the benefits and advantages of in-service workshops.

More research is needed to decide which approach to reading is suitable to be followed by teachers of English in Libyan and Arab universities. The

approaches to reading are western-oriented and were basically designed for English as a first language. Further research might suggest adapting the current approaches or even designing new approaches to reading in English as a second language.

Extensive research on the different language skills should be conducted. A balanced knowledge about the four skills (reading, listening, writing, and speaking) can improve students' English. Some research can focus on the process of reading comprehension in both Arabic and English and whether there are any differences.

6.10 Summary

This study investigated the main challenges facing Libyan students in reading comprehension within the English language programme at Zawia University, Libya. It also evaluated the current teaching practices of reading comprehension at the Department of English at Zawia University. This chapter presented the conclusions from the findings of the research and interpreted these findings in line with the research objectives and questions. The findings of the study have shown that most students realise the complexity of reading comprehension; however, it was obvious that most of them were not trained to use reading skills. Regardless of their gender or academic level, the majority of students have problems in reading comprehension and encounter difficulty in understanding English texts. Some of these problems can be attributed to their lack of reading skills, the learning environment in which they learn, and their teachers' lack of training. This study made a number of recommendations to decision makers and key

stakeholders of Zawia University and the Libyan Ministry of Higher Education, and to teachers of English reading comprehension in order to improve teaching instructions and learning environment. The contribution to knowledge was also highlighted, suggesting a model to illustrate the elements involved in learning and teaching of reading comprehension module. The limitations of this study were identified, and areas for further research were suggested.

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Appendices



Questionnaire

Name: **Sakina Mustafa Mohamed**

Title of the study: **Evaluating EFL (English as a foreign language) students' reading comprehension skills with reference to the Department of English at Zawia University**

Dear respondent

I am currently undertaking research as part of a PhD at Liverpool John Moores University (UK). The following questionnaire is to gauge your views and perceptions regarding "reading comprehension" module that you are studying at the university. Your cooperation and support are crucial to achieve the objectives of this study.

.....

Please, complete the following information by ticking (✓) the appropriate box:

Gender: Male: ☐ Female: ☐

Age: 17- 19: ☐ 20 - 22: ☐ 23 - 25: ☐ 26 +: ☐

Academic Level: 1st year: ☐ 2nd year: ☐ 3rd year: ☐ 4th year: ☐

.....

Dimension One: **Students' attitudes towards English reading comprehension**

No	Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1	I find English reading comprehension simple.					
2	I read additional materials (stories, magazines etc. written in English) out of class.					
3	I use English-English dictionaries.					

Dimension Two: **Students' reading abilities and strategy use**

No	Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
4	Before starting reading, I try to guess what the text will be about.					
5	I can read a large text quickly to get an overall idea about it.					
6	While I am reading, I can find out the main topic idea of a text.					
7	I can distinguish the main ideas from supporting details.					
8	I can find out specific information from the text quickly.					
9	I can analyse long sentences and phrases.					
10	I can give a title to a reading passage.					
11	After finishing reading, I can summarise a reading text.					

Dimension Three: **Students' perceptions about facilities and resources**

No	Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
12	The library resources and services at the university are sufficiently available.					
13	The Internet is always accessible at the university.					
14	Classrooms are provided with IT facilities.					
15	There is an acceptable number of students in each classroom.					

Dimension Four: **Students' attitudes toward reading instruction and teaching strategies**

No	Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
16	My teacher tries to make reading enjoyable.					
17	My teacher gives me the chance to select the topics of the reading texts.					
18	My teacher speaks only in English in class.					
19	My teacher asks me to use only English in discussing the text in class.					
20	My teacher arranges the class in groups/pairs in order that we find meaning of texts through discussion.					
21	My teacher divides the reading lesson into pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities.					
22	My teacher asks various questions related to a particular text in order to prepare us to read the text.					
23	My teacher explains the background of the text before we start reading it.					
24	My teacher asks us to read the text one by one aloud in class.					
25	When I come across a new word, my teacher helps me by providing its meaning.					
26	My teacher encourages me to consult an English-Arabic dictionary when I come across unfamiliar words during reading.					
27	My teacher encourages me to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words by using contextual clues.					

No	Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
28	My teacher teaches us how to develop inferencing skills.					
29	My teacher teaches us how to skim a text (i.e. to read a text in the shortest possible time to get an overall idea about it).					
30	My teacher teaches us how to scan a text (i.e. to read a text quickly, though not carefully, to find out a piece of information).					
31	My teacher emphasises language learning (i.e. pronunciation, structure, etc.) in a reading class.					
32	My teacher asks us to make questions about a text.					
33	My teacher teaches us how to evaluate a text critically.					
34	My teacher teaches us how to summarise.					
35	My teacher makes us take note of text organisation.					
36	My teacher helps us to link reading with purposeful communication.					
37	My teacher changes texts according to the purpose of reading in the class.					
38	My teacher points out my problems regarding reading.					
39	My teacher provides me with a further reading list to read on my own.					

Thank you for your participation



Interview

Name: **Sakina Mustafa Mohamed**

Title of the study: **Evaluating EFL (English as a foreign language) students' reading comprehension skills with reference to the Department of English at Zawia University**

Interview Questions

Gender: Male Female

What is your highest qualification: Masters PhD Other (please state):

How many years of teaching experience do you have?

Theme one: Issues on teaching reading:

1. Is teaching an English reading comprehension module a choice or imposed?
2. Are there textbooks available or do you prepare your material and select reading texts?
3. Do you choose the reading material according to the interests of the students?
4. What techniques and activities do you implement in a reading class?
5. Before you start a reading lesson, how do you present the new text?
6. Do you teach students the reading skills and how to use them?
7. What are the difficulties that you face in teaching reading comprehension?
How do you deal with them?
8. What language do you use most in class? What about students?
9. In your opinion, what causes the students' most problems in reading comprehension? Why?

Theme Two: Learning-environment:

1. What facilities do you have for teaching English reading comprehension?
2. How do you keep your reading comprehension teaching materials current and up-to-date?
3. What sources do you use when you select the reading material (authentic material or books)?
4. Is it difficult to access English materials on the Internet and the social media?
5. Do you arrange the class in groups or pairs to discuss a text?
6. What is the average number of students you usually have in one class?
What do you think the ideal number of students in a reading class should be?
7. Do you think that the time dedicated to reading classes is enough and satisfactory?

Theme Three: Students' motivation to read:

1. How do you raise your students' motivation to read?
2. When students come across unfamiliar words, how do you support them?
 - a) tell them the meaning, b) ask them to guess the meaning by using clues from the context, c) advise them to consult a dictionary? d) Other means?
3. Do you allow your students to select some of the reading texts? Why/ why not?
4. Do you involve your students in interesting and challenging tasks? How?
5. From your experience, what are the activities that you think are useful and motivating in teaching reading comprehension for students? How useful?
6. Does the Department provide the students with a further reading list to read on their own?

Thank you for your time