Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction:

This chapter presents a background of the study followed by the objectives and justifications of the study. The hypothesis and questions of the study are stated.

1.2 Background of the Study

In a review of the developments in second language reading research Grabe (1991) pointed out that the crucial importance of the reading skill in academic contexts had led to considerable research on reading in a second language. The goal of most second language reading programs is to turn ‘learning to read’ into ‘reading to learn’ Carrell (1989).

Traditionally many psychologists and teachers have insisted that reading is nothing more than decoding written symbols to sounds (i.e. figuring out what the painted word says). The reader was seen as the ‘recipient’ of information or as an ‘empty vessel’ that brought nothing to the text. This motion of ‘text as object’ is now frequently discredited in reading circles because readers are not entirely passive.

In recent years, an increasing number of researchers believe that reading process is an active process in which reading skills can be developed.
Garner (1985) declared that this point of view has moved from the ‘text as object’ to that of the ‘text as process’ by encouraging close interaction between the reader and the text. In addition to model-making in second language reading during the two decades, considerable attention has been paid to understanding what proficient, skilled readers typically do while reading, (1) including identifying the strategies they use and (2) how and under what condition they use those strategies. This line of research has been useful in instructing non-proficient first and second language readers to increase their aware and use of reading strategies to improve comprehension.

English Language Teaching in Libya

Crystal (1997) pointed out that one might wonder why learn English at all in a country like Libya? But, immediately the mind recalls the fact that almost all of the high-tech scientific advances, and political terminologies come from English speaking countries which, in turn, make people obliged to learn English so that they can benefit from them. In addition to learning about different cultures through the medium of English language, Libyan learners will have the opportunity to participate in global interaction, because as Crystal (1997) pointed out:

English is one of the official languages of the UN.

- The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries uses English as its official language.
- “English is used as the sole official language … [of] the All-African People’s Organization”.

Crystal (1997) pointed out.
- The Arab Air Carriers Association uses English as one of its official languages.
- “The overriding impression is that, whenever in the world an organization is based, English is the chief auxiliary language”.
- “The English language has been an important medium of the press for nearly 400 years”.
- English is the language in which most of publications and research findings are published, especially the well-known academic journals.
- “English has long been recognized as the international language of the sea”.
- “Over 180 nations have adopted the recommendations of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) about English terminology”.
- Most of the information on the Internet is in English.

The importance of English and its learning is also pointed out by other researchers.

Ferguson (1981) in Kachru (1982) stated that “… English is as significant… as is the modern use of computers”.

Kachru (1982) had specified certain reason which motivates the learning of English. He argued that “English is often learned because of its heritage, because of the status it may confer on the reader or speaker, because of the doors which it opens in technology, science, trade, and diplomacy”. 
From what have been mentioned above, one can conclude that learning English is a vital tool for gaining knowledge because as Crystal (1997) stated that “English is the medium of great deal of the world’s knowledge, especially in such areas as science and technology”. Moreover, English is increasingly becoming the language of global interaction. Therefore, Libyan educationalists were right in their decision to incorporate English within the national curriculum.

**The Status of English Language Teaching in Libya**

During the 1970s and until the mid-1980s learning English was an obligatory component within the Libyan national curriculum, but in 1986 teaching and learning English were completely banned. This was due to the cultural, political and economical factors which have deeply influenced the educational system at that time. Teachers, students, and pupils, regardless of religious constitutions, were ordered to neglect the learning of foreign languages such as English and French even though Islam encourages the learning of languages. This, in turn, made the teachers of English jobless or otherwise had to teach other subjects such as history and geography. At that time students were unaware of the problem until they finished their secondary school and became university students where then failure to study many subjects in English was evident.

After a while the Libyan educationalists realized the fault and determined to incorporate English in the curriculum again. They decided that not only English must be taught, but other languages must also be learned even
at the very early stages of the learning process. When English was welcomed back at school again (in 1997) teachers who were once teaching English became unable to teach it. The new textbooks which were introduced integrated cultural aspects of the English language that require the application of new teaching methodologies such as the communicative approach. This has created an obstacle in the teaching learning environment. Teachers have forgotten the English language, but they have to teach it. There were only few left who were still capable of teaching languages, particularly English. To deal with this problem, programmes for training teachers of English were designed, but the local educational culture prevalent among teachers and learners had led to nothing but failure, because, in the past, Libyan teachers of English were accustomed to old methodologies and to materials which were solely built on the Libyan culture.

Therefore, in Libya, English is taught as a foreign language, and the purpose of learning English is for communication and to communicate efficiently. Learners need the four skills that are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. But of all these four skills, reading plays a vital role for students in the classroom. Therefore, the ability to read is considered the most firm, tough, and most important skill. This specific difficulty in learning to read was first observed by and documented in the early half of the last century by Hinshelwood (1917).
According to Carrell (2006), ‘effective reading in a second language is critical for students in English as a Foreign Language context, at an advanced level of proficiency or with a need for English Academic Purpose.

From personal point of view, which has developed out of my three years experience as a teacher of EFL and a teaching assistant of EFL, EFL teacher’s practices in Libya schools are far from teaching reading skills and strategies. Rather, EFL teachers spend the time devoted for reading in practicing only one skill, ‘Silent Reading’. And on what they believe are ‘Comprehension Questions’. Because of this huge gap between the world’s rapid movement toward teaching reading skills and strategies and the reality of reading instruction in Libya, because of this thought, and according to my experience as an EFL teacher, I think that most second language learners at Libyan University Schools encounter problems in learning reading. A lot of researchers and teachers have tried to discover possible methods to help students read successfully in English. There are many factors which affect the reading proficiency of a second language. Some of these factors are text types (to understand how L2 learners comprehend texts, Hinshelwood has emphasized the need to study the differential contribution of text-based characteristics such as genre, text structure parameters, and textual markers. school and social environments(reading has been described as a social act; it involves interpreting and understanding the communicator; intent or message. It is more likely that this task will be completely successfully if both parties have similar linguistic resources, cultural expectations, and shared background
knowledge. Hinshelwood declared in his theory that **motivational** variables such as self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation predict students’ achievement in different areas such as reading ability, math, language arts, sports, and occupational choice. However, he noted that there is little specific information in the literature about the strength of those activating processes or how they operate. For instance, it is likely, that there are multiple motivational pathways for the energization of students’ behaviors such that some students may be motivated by their self-efficacy beliefs, whereas others may activate cognitive processes through personal interests or contextual factors. **Teaching methods** (Hinshelwood 1917) raised two sets of processing skills that we think are particularly important to teach. The first set includes comprehension monitoring of his or her ongoing processing for possible comprehension failures, and taking remedial action when failure occurs. The second set of processing skills that we advocate teaching involve using clues in the text to generate, evaluate, and revise hypotheses about current and failure events in the text. Since **Learning Strategies**, on the other hand, had a great impact on the learning and understanding of Reading Comprehension of English as a Foreign Language, the thought is being shared by the researcher.

Therefore, the Researcher believes that learning strategies are the most important factor. Therefore, the Researcher has conducted this study to explore The Reading Strategies most often used among Libyan University Students, to show how males and females use Learning Strategies when they face a text in English, and also to show the relationship between the learners’ strategies and
their EFL proficiency level. And to do so, the Researcher has used a Reading Strategy Questionnaire to measure Reading Strategy Use and a Reading Comprehension Test to measure learners’ EFL proficiency level.

**1-3 Questions of the Study:**

This study is designed to explore three things: the use of reading strategies among Libyan EFL college-level-learners; the relationship between reading strategies and gender, and the relationship between the learners’ strategy use and their EFL reading comprehension level.

In this study, the major research question is as follows:

Is there a relationship between language learning strategies, academic achievement, and gender among the English major at the Al-Zawia University Students at Libya?

So, this study has answered the following questions:

1- What language learning strategies do most Libyan EFL learners in Libyan Universities report using? And what are their most frequently used language learning strategies?

2- Does gender play an important role in reading strategies use and reading proficiency?

Is there a relationship between the readers’ strategies used and their EFL proficiencies?
1.4 Objectives of the Study:

- To identify the type of Strategies which most students apply in Reading and Comprehension of English as a Foreign Language and to point up the most often strategy used among the learners in this study.
- To examine the relationship between gender and strategies used in reading comprehension.
- To analyze the relationship between the students’ strategies used and their EFL proficiency level.
- To suggest technical remedies to eliminate the problem. Moreover, to draw out relevant suggestions which would help the students as well as the teachers in learning and teaching of Reading comprehension?

1.5 Hypotheses of the Study:

- There is a statistical significance difference between the uses of the language learning strategies.
- There is no statistical significance difference between males and females in their use of the language learning strategies.
- There is statistical legible difference between low and high proficient EFL learners in their use of the language learning strategies.
- There is no relationship between teachers’ activities and techniques used in the class and students’ reading comprehension achievements.
1.6 Justifications of the Study:

The choice of this topic of the study was based on the assumption that most Libyan University students encounter problems and difficulties in Reading and Comprehension of English as a Foreign Language.

The aim of this study was to identify, categorize and analyze English as Foreign Language reading strategies utilized by Libyan students in an academic setting where English is dealt with mainly in the classroom.

Finally, since L2 reading ability is regarded as the most needed skill for EFL learners in academic setting, the learners’ inability to read and understand L2 materials may hinder the academic and professional development of those whose professions and academic programs require accessing and obtaining information in the target language. Thus, it is important for university EFL programs in Libya to estimate their students’ reading ability in order to design appropriate reading courses.