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**Zawia – Libya**

**An Investigation into the Academic Reading  
Difficulties Encountered by EFL Postgraduate  
Students of the English Department at the  
University of Zawia**

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**Degree of Master in English Language.**

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## Declaration

I declare that this study entitled as "An Investigation into Academic Reading Difficulties Encountered by EFL Postgraduate Students of the English Department at the University of Zawia" is a completely original work of my own and has not been submitted anywhere else for any scientific or non-scientific degree or diploma. No part of this study has been plagiarized. All of the information and data sources have been properly acknowledged.

**Signature: Mohannad Abdulmageed**

**Date:**

## **Dedication**

To my beloved parents, I dedicate this humble academic work.

## **Acknowledgements**

This study would not have come to light without the blessing of Allah. I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Alsadiq Salim, for his guidance, support and encouragement throughout the period of my research. Special thanks go to my parents who have never stopped supporting me in many ways. I also appreciate the respondents of this study (EFL postgraduate students at University of Zawia) who shared their experiences and valuable time to make this study possible. Also, special thanks go to the faculty members for their kindness and support which has been the source of motivation during this special experience. I am also grateful to my brothers, sisters and the whole family, as well as to my friends and instructors during my study journey. Many thanks also to all other people who helped to make this study accomplished to whom I am very grateful.

## Abstract

This study explores the academic reading difficulties among Libyan EFL postgraduate students and the factors behind these difficulties. The study also explores the students' awareness of the academic reading strategies and techniques. It was conducted within the English Department of the University of Zawia. A mixed-method approach was applied to collect data using a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The sample of the study involved forty-seven students who were selected randomly to answer the questionnaire. Moreover, five students only were selected for the semi-structured interview to know the reasons behind these difficulties. The SPSS software was used to analyze the quantitative data and a thematic analysis method was used to analyze the qualitative data collected from the semi-structured interviews. The study findings revealed that EFL postgraduate students of the English Department at the University of Zawia encountered some academic reading difficulties related to the comprehension of structurally complex texts, lexical obstacles, including unfamiliar terminology and academic vocabulary needed for fulfilling the demands of critical thinking and managing their reading time effectively. These difficulties are pertinent to key factors such as ineffective explicit vocabulary instruction, limitation of institutional support, lack of access to resources, impact of early education systems, which highly focus on rote learning, the nature of structurally complex academic texts, and the interference of L1. The findings also showed a significant students' awareness of cognitive reading strategies and their usage like translation consultation, skimming and scanning, but on the other hand they show limited awareness of metacognitive strategies and their use such as planning, monitoring, evaluation which impact the students' self-regulation abilities. Furthermore, the study revealed that to meet the academic reading requirements pedagogical approaches that emphasize advanced vocabulary, self-regulation skills and critical thinking skills are significantly needed along with enhancing access to resources and institutional support. These findings shed light on many gaps in academic reading literacy in this context specifically which open new doors for further research.

## ملخص البحث

تستكشف هذه الدراسة صعوبات القراءة الأكاديمية بين طلاب الدراسات العليا في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية والعوامل الكامنة وراء هذه الصعوبات. كما تستكشف الدراسة وعي الطلاب باستراتيجيات وتقنيات القراءة الأكاديمية. أجريت الدراسة في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة الزاوية. تم تطبيق نهج مختلط الأساليب لجمع البيانات باستخدام استبيان ومقابلات شبه منظمة. تضمنت عينة الدراسة سبعة وأربعين طالبا تم اختيارهم عشوائيا للإجابة على أسئلة الاستبيان. تم اختيار خمسة طلاب فقط للمقابلة شبه المنظمة لجعل البيانات الكمية أكثر صحة وموثوقة. تم استخدام برنامج التحليل الإحصائي SPSS لتحليل البيانات الكمية التي تم جمعها من الطلاب. من ناحية أخرى، تم استخدام تحليل المحتوى لتحليل البيانات النوعية التي تم جمعها من خلال المقابلات شبه المنظمة. كشفت نتائج الدراسة أن طلاب الدراسات العليا في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة الزاوية يواجهون بعض صعوبات القراءة الأكاديمية المتعلقة بفهم النصوص المعقدة تركيبيا والعقبات المعجمية، بما في ذلك المصطلحات غير المألوفة والمفردات الأكاديمية اللازمة لتلبية متطلبات التفكير النقدي وإدارة وقت القراءة بشكل فعال. تتعلق هذه الصعوبات بعوامل رئيسية مثل عدم فعالية تعليم المفردات الصريح ومحدودية الدعم المؤسسي وعدم توفر الموارد وتأثير أنظمة التعليم المبكر التي تركز بشكل كبير على التعلم عن ظهر قلب، وطبيعة النصوص الأكاديمية المعقدة تركيبيا، وتدخل اللغة الأولى. يظهر الطلاب وعيا كبيرا باستراتيجيات القراءة المعرفية واستخدامها مثل استشارات الترجمة والقراءة السريعة والمسح التلخيصي، لكنهم من ناحية أخرى يظهرون وعيا محدودا بالاستراتيجيات الإدراكية غير المباشرة واستخدامها مثل التخطيط والمراقبة والتقييم التي تؤثر على قدرات التنظيم الذاتي للطلاب. وتكشف الدراسة أنه لتلبية متطلبات القراءة الأكاديمية هناك حاجة ماسة إلى الأساليب التربوية التي تركز على المفردات المتقدمة ومهارات التنظيم الذاتي ومهارات التفكير النقدي إلى جانب تعزيز الوصول إلى الموارد والدعم المؤسسي. تلقي هذه النتائج الضوء على العديد من الفجوات في دعم القرائية الأكاديمية في هذا السياق على وجه التحديد والتي تفتح أبوابا جديدة لمزيد من البحث.

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## List of Abbreviations

|      |                                                     |
|------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| MA   | Master of Arts                                      |
| EFL  | English as a Foreign Language                       |
| SPSS | Statistical Package for the Social Science Software |
| L1   | First Language                                      |
| ERPs | Extensive Reading Programs                          |
| SBI  | Strategy-based Instruction                          |
| RT   | Reciprocal Teaching                                 |
| QUAN | Notionally Qualitative                              |
| qual | Notionally Quantitative                             |
| CLT  | Cognitive Load Theory                               |
| SCT  | Sociocultural Theory                                |
| VLC  | Virtual Literature Circle                           |
| AMEP | Australian Adult Migrant Education Program          |
| RAP  | Reading for Academic Purpose                        |
| ERIC | Education Resources Information Center              |
| SLL  | Second Language Learning                            |
| REFL | Reading English as a Foreign Language               |
| MMR  | Mixed Method Approach Research                      |
| F2F  | Face to Face                                        |
| S-K  | Smirnov-Kolmogorov Test                             |
| RQ1  | Research Question 1                                 |
| RQ2  | Research Question 2                                 |
| RQ3  | Research Question 3                                 |
| OCR  | Optical Character Recognition                       |
| SCL  | Limitation of Instructional Support                 |

# **Chapter One:**

## **Introduction**

## **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides the importance of academic reading skills in English language learning concentrating on reading proficiency as an essential component for EFL postgraduate students' academic journey.

Also, the role of the capability to read academically in academic research.

Moreover, the difference between academic reading characteristics and reading in general.

It also provides the common difficulties that EFL post graduate students encounter when they read academically such as navigating academic texts, lack of preparation for academic materials, vocabulary and language exposure. Furthermore, the correlation of these difficulties to the overall academic progress to these students.

Moreover, it sheds light on the study theoretical frame work, Sociocultural theory, cognitive theory and integrated approach.

## **1.2 Background and Context**

In the realm of language learning, particularly English, the acquisition of reading skills holds immense importance. Reading proficiency not only allows educators to assess a learner's understanding and proficiency at a particular academic stage but also serves as a fundamental skill for postgraduate students to engage in extensive academic reading, which is integral to their studies. Proficiency in academic reading is crucial for comprehending and analyzing complex texts, which are essential for academic success (Sumaria et al., 2022; Rhead & Little, 2020; Buehl, 2023).

However, academic reading difficulties are commonly encountered by university students learning English as a foreign language (EFL), including postgraduate students. These challenges impede their ability to comprehend and engage with academic texts, affecting their academic progress and achievements (Anwar & Sailuddin, 2022: p. 309). Academic reading is a fundamental skill which is necessary for success in postgraduate studies, especially in fields that require in-depth engagement with scholarly literature. However, many postgraduate students face challenges when it comes to navigating complex academic texts, which can impede their learning and academic growth. In this study, the researcher investigates the various

obstacles that postgraduate students in the English Department at the University of Zawia encounter when it comes to academic reading.

According to Gee (2014), understanding and critically analyzing academic texts go beyond cognitive abilities; they are heavily influenced by social, cultural, and linguistic factors. Sociocultural Theory provides a valuable framework for comprehending how these influences impact students' reading practices. By exploring the interaction between individuals and their socio-cultural environments, we can better grasp the difficulties faced by postgraduate students in the English Department as they engage with academic texts within the academic community. Moreover, Cognitive Load Theory sheds light on the cognitive processes involved in academic reading challenges. From vocabulary acquisition to comprehension strategies, cognitive aspects significantly affect students' capacity to effectively interact with academic texts. By combining Sociocultural Theory and Cognitive Load Theory, the researcher aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of postgraduate students' academic reading experiences and suggest strategies to enhance their reading skills and academic progress.

Kandel, U., 2025 states that reading is the process of constructing meaning through the dynamic interaction among the reader's existing knowledge, the information suggested by the written language, and the context of the reading situation. This well-worded definition recognizes that the act of reading relies on both cognitive and social processes and embraces a functional complexity. Since reading is a broad concept that has several aspects such as the approach and purpose, Pommiez, Inostroza & Larrain (2021) state that academic reading is one type of reading which involves broad spectrum of purposes and approaches. According to Sohail (2015), academic reading is different from other types of reading because it is complex and discipline-specific. It involves a measured challenging and a multifaceted process in which students are dynamically engaged with a range of reading strategies.

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

EFL postgraduate students in the English Language Department at the University of Zawia encounter significant challenges in acquiring academic reading skills. These difficulties hinder their ability to comprehend and engage with academic

texts, ultimately affecting their overall academic performance and achievements (Abosnan, 2016). This study is intended to explore these difficulties and identify factors behind them.

### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

This study aims to

- a. Explore the difficulties encountered by postgraduate students of the English Language Department in Faculty of Arts at the University of Zawia when reading academically.
- b. Identify the factors contributing to these difficulties.
- c. Investigate the postgraduates' awareness of and familiarity with academic reading techniques and strategies in dealing with reading difficulties.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- a. What are the specific academic reading difficulties encountered by postgraduate students of the English Language Department at the University of Zawia?
- b. What are the potential factors that cause these difficulties?
- c. Are postgraduate students aware of academic reading techniques and strategies?  
If yes, to what extent?

### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of academic reading difficulties among postgraduate students, providing insights into the factors and challenges impacting students' academic reading skills. It may also contribute to the development of theoretical frameworks and models to address these difficulties effectively.

The study has practical implications for supporting postgraduate students by identifying factors hindering their academic reading skills. This knowledge may inform



the development of targeted interventions and support strategies to enhance students' academic reading proficiency. Educators and administrators can benefit from a better understanding of the needs and challenges of postgraduate students, guiding the development of instructional approaches tailored to address these challenges (Anwar & Sailuddin, 2022; Rhead & Little, 2020).

## **1.7 Methodology of the Study**

The current research applies a mixed-method approach, using the pragmatic research philosophy as a guidance. It employs a convergent mixed-method design (QUAN) + qual) which allows the researcher to gather the quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously. The sample size of the quantitative part is 47 EFL postgraduate students of English department at University of Zawia. The data is gathered using five point likert scale questionnaire and analyzed via SPSS generator. The reliability of the questionnaire scored "good" in Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .803.

Quantitative data was supported by collecting qualitative data through 5 semi-structured interviews which were transcribed and analyzed thematically using MAXQDA software. Furthermore, the validity of both the questionnaire items and semi-structured interview questions were approved by experts of the field. All the required ethical issues were considered during all the data collection procedures.

## **1.8 Structure of the Thesis**

The study falls into five chapters;

- Chapter One provides an introduction outlining the research topic, general background, significance, objectives, and research questions.
- Chapter Two reviews relevant literature on academic reading difficulties among EFL postgraduate students.
- Chapter Three presents the research methodology, including the study design, sampling, data collection, and analysis methods.
- Chapter Four discusses the findings of the study.
- Chapter Five concludes the study and provides recommendations and suggestions for future research.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

## **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework of the study and presents the most relevant previous studies. To provide a comprehensive background for investigating the academic reading difficulties encountered by EFL postgraduate students, this review covers several interrelated topics. First, it establishes a foundational understanding of the nature of academic reading by defining the reading process, its importance, and the cognitive models that explain it. This is crucial for contextualizing the specific challenges faced in an academic setting.

The chapter then delves into the core theoretical perspectives on reading difficulties, integrating Schema Theory, Metacognitive Theory, Cognitive Load Theory, and Sociocultural Theory. This framework is essential as it provides the analytical lenses to understand how factors like prior knowledge, self-regulation, mental effort, and the learning environment contribute to the difficulties students face.

A significant portion of the review is dedicated to reading strategies and metacognition, covering cognitive and metacognitive techniques such as skimming, scanning, and summarizing. This topic is directly related to the investigation as the awareness and application of these strategies are fundamental to overcoming reading challenges. The discussion is further enriched by examining instructional approaches and interventions, such as Strategy-Based Instruction (SBI) and Extensive Reading Programs (ERPs), which highlights potential solutions and the importance of pedagogical support.

Furthermore, the review explores the specific factors contributing to reading difficulties, which are categorized into internal factors (e.g., L1 interference, motivation), external factors (e.g., cultural context, instructional support), and textual factors (e.g., complex vocabulary and syntax). This detailed analysis directly addresses the central focus of the research title. Finally, the chapter situates the study within global and local EFL contexts by reviewing previous case studies from various non-Western countries and, most importantly, specific research conducted in Libya. This contextualizes the problem and identifies the existing literature gaps that this investigation aims to fill.

## **2.2 Definition of Reading**

Reading is a crucial demand when it comes to academic success and permanent learning, as a result, its definition is always under evolving. During time, reading definition moved significantly from the basic act of decoding sounds into a more complex term. This means it moved from translation of symbols into sound, shaping more sophisticated social and cognitive act.

According to Snow (2002), reading is a dynamic and a complex process that goes far above the decoding of written letters. It is the mean of extracting meanings from texts using complex engagement between the reader, the author and the content. This definition emphasizes that reading process is not only a passive information reception, it is active, social endeavor and cognitive.

Also, Wallace (2024) states that reading evolution theory has moved to a more interactive and socio-interactive than a one-way transmission.

To sum up, these definitions defined reading as a strategic, a constructive and an active process that consists of a complex interactive between the readers' background and social world, the authors' message in the text, and the particular context itself. This comprehensive vision of reading shapes the theoretical ground of this study to investigate reading and its difficulties.

## **2.3 Importance of Reading**

Reading proficiency is not only an educational demand; it has a core influence on an individual's cognitive involvement, social position and a competence for lifelong learning. The importance of reading goes beyond the classrooms, forming someone's personality, expanding understanding, and guarantees an active participation among society.

According to the cognitive point of view, reading is the main generator of rational growth. Cunningham and Stanovich (2001) argue in their paper 'What reading does for the mind', the vast extent of reading an individual interacts in is a significant determinant of vocabulary size, language proficiency and general knowledge. Reading reveals individuals to a much deeper and more complex vocabulary and grammar structures than is commonly found in spoken language. This exposure itself, serves as

"self-education" method, providing the reader a continuous knowledge and mental abilities such as predicting and critical thinking.

Moreover, reading plays a critical role in social abilities. Particularly, reading and engaging in fiction have a strong link with developing individuals' empathy. According to Mar and Oatley, (2008) narrative fiction works as a social stimulation, when a reader involves himself in a character's life, he interacts with a complicated process of understanding social norms, experiencing new events from different perspective and different emotional motivations. As a result, he trains the brain muscles.

In summary, reading is not distinguished in its use for learning in academic settings only, but it is also crucial skill for individuals to fuel their mental and social capabilities

## **2.4 Types of Reading**

Reading skill in the postgraduate studies settings is not a rigid act, it is a multifaceted activity which demands the use of several strategies and techniques depending on the context and the reader's objectives. moreover, the transition from general reading (commonly passive) into reading for academic purpose (active) arises a massive challenge for many students, especially for those who are in the EFL context. Academic reading requires advanced reading skills to apply reading strategies effectively in order to navigate complex academic texts. Therefore, understanding the basic reading types is crucial to evolve the required reading proficiency for postgraduate students. Reading types can be categorized in two terms, how the reader processes the materials (reading models) and the purpose of the reader (reading for pleasure or for academic purpose);

### **2.4.1 Models of Reading**

Understanding the mental approach by which readers process the materials is fundamental. Literature has historically rounded on two models: the bottom up and the top down approaches. In the recent literature, these two approaches have combined into an interactive model. This model is now accepted as the most effective description of reading proficiency.

#### **2.4.1.1 Bottom up Model**

Pearson, P.D., (2000) illustrates that this model highlights decoding as the core act of reading. Comprehension is seen as a direct result of processing the linguistic codes accurately, and the reader is a passive element of the reading process. Therefore, the bottom-up model is a structured and data guided approach which starts with the smallest units (letters): comprehending the meaning of materials is a sequential process that begins with the bottom (the material) and the transmit to "up"; a higher procedure of cognitive understanding.

**Letters – Word – Phrases – Sentences – Overall Meaning**

#### **2.4.1.2 Top-Down Model**

Goodman (1967) argues that reading with the top-down approach is psycholinguistic inference game in which the reader grasps the meaning of the materials by calling his prior knowledge to the text. This approach begins from the top (the reader's cognitive capacity) and goes down to the material.

Furthermore, the reader who uses this approach would use titles and subtitles to guess the meaning of the core idea before reading details and main emphasize is to comprehend the overall meaning despite not knowing the whole text's words.

#### **2.4.1.3 Interactive Model**

In modern scholar communities, both of the previous reading approaches are insufficient when used individually. According to Rumelhart (1981) and Stanovich (1984) reading proficiency is not strictly laying in one approach, but it is an interactive process in which bottom- up and top down approaches are combined and used simultaneously to grasp meaning.

Grabe (2009, p. 86) argues that "fluent reading is rapid, efficient, interactive, comprehending and strategic process. In other words, the two approaches complete each other. While a proficient reader decoding the texts (bottom-up), he actively applying his prior knowledge (top down). To sum up, how the reader processes the texts can be described in three approaches, bottom-up, top down and interactive model. The purpose of reading is another category which arises different types of reading.

### **2.4.2 Reading for Pleasure**

Beyond the models of processing text, the reader's purpose fundamentally shapes the reading experience. One of the most general types of reading is reading for pleasure, often referred to as extensive reading. This type of reading is characterized by its voluntary nature, where individuals read for enjoyment, entertainment, and general interest rather than for a specific academic or instrumental purpose. According to Krashen (2004), reading for pleasure is a powerful driver of language acquisition, as it provides comprehensible input in a low-anxiety situation.

The materials for this type of reading are typically self-selected by the reader and are at a comfortable level of difficulty, allowing for a smooth and engaging experience. The primary goal is not to analyze a text critically or memorize information, but to become immersed in the story or topic. This engagement fosters a positive attitude towards reading and can significantly contribute to linguistic and cognitive development. Research has shown that regular engagement in reading for pleasure leads to incidental vocabulary growth, increased reading speed, and improved overall reading comprehension (Nation, 2011). This form of reading builds a foundation of fluency and confidence that is essential before tackling the more demanding nature of academic reading. The transition from reading for pleasure to reading for academic purposes often presents a significant hurdle for EFL students, as the latter requires a more strategic, critical, and analytical approach to texts that are often dense and complex.

## **2.5 Reading Strategies and Techniques**

Efficient use of reading techniques and strategies is fundamental for handling the challenges of academic reading. Previous literature illustrates that several postgraduate learners in EFL seek explicit instruction on metacognitive strategies that enhance their reading, specifically in understudied areas such as Libya. Phakiti and Li (2011) state that strategies such as scanning, skimming and inference are crucial to handle a wide range of scholarly literature. However, according to Rashed (2016) many learners in institutions such as the University of Zawia lack explicit instruction on how to apply these strategies and techniques. As a result, their academic progress is impacted by this instructional gap because it restricts their ability to comprehend and interact with complex texts. More details about reading strategies and techniques will be discussed later in this chapter.

### **2.5.1 Cognitive Strategies**

Cognitive strategies like taking notes, underlining and documenting are often used along with metacognitive techniques in order to enhance comprehension in general and help learners handle complex materials. Carrell (1989) stresses that cognitive approaches are crucial for learning since they enable students to concentrate on the most significant key ideas in the text. For example, when EFL postgraduate students demonstrate a text, they actively engage with the subject, which helps them to recall ideas and develop a comprehensive understanding of the material.

### **2.5.2 Metacognitive Strategies**

Recent literature indicates the importance of the metacognitive techniques for EFL students to apply and organize cognitive processes by themselves when they read, and this has started a new era of reading. The significant role of these tactics in supporting students' interaction and engagement was examined by many studies which emphasize providing explicit instructions for EFL students to teach them how to regulate and evaluate their reading. The base of understanding metacognitive strategies was initiated by Chamot and O'Mally (1996). They claim that these strategies assist students to enhance their ability for self-regulation

In the late 1990s, the significance of metacognition in second language learning (SLL) was further examined by Wenden (1998). She pointed out that along with using basic reading strategies such as scanning, skimming, inferencing and summarizing, second language learners are required to know when and how to utilize these strategies efficiently. In the early 2000s, more significance was given to metacognition in second language learning by Anderson (2002). According to him, learners who can apply metacognitive strategies are more capable of overcoming the complexity of academic reading. He focused on specific strategies like setting goals, guessing and evaluation, which can assist students in handling reading difficulties such as linguistic and contextual barriers.

Consequently, research has developing our understanding of these strategies. In the postgraduate-level specifically, Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) illustrated metacognitive strategies such as skimming and scanning, and how they can assist EFL students to regulate enormous amounts of reading texts efficiently. They claimed that scanning helps to find particular information. On the other hand, skimming assists



students to understand key ideas quickly. Such strategies are significant for learners to engage with the intricacy of academic texts. Grabe (2009) emphasized inference (a technique that helps students to comprehend the meaning of unfamiliar words or contexts). He focused on the role that inference plays to enhance reading comprehension, especially for EFL learners. Based on previous studies, Graham and Harris (2017) and Grabe and Stoller (2020) have stressed the importance of the summarizing technique as an essential metacognitive strategy. The authors stated that summarizing is fundamental for academic progress as it helps students to memorize materials and enhance their academic reading by conscious, meditative tactics.

Elmadwi and Shepherd (2014) focused on the reading techniques and strategies often used by the Libyan university students emphasizing the metacognitive strategies. They used a questionnaire on reading strategies and tests for collecting data about reading comprehension. 80 Libyan undergraduate students were involved (50 males and 30 females) from the University of Zawia. The results show that metacognitive strategies were the most often used with noticeable differences between both genders in using the strategy. Another study investigating the use of strategies within postgraduate learners was conducted by Puteh et al (2022) focusing on the correlation between cognitive, metacognitive and self-regulation strategies. A quantitative survey was used using Likert scale to collect data. 200 postgraduate students were involved (120 females and 80 males) from different academic disciplines in a large public university in Malaysia. The study highlighted the use of metacognitive strategies and illustrated their effectiveness in enhancing overall academic performance.

The reading strategies and techniques applied by EFL undergraduate and postgraduate students vary significantly. EFL undergraduate students frequently focus on the skill of recognizing the main key words, while postgraduate students deal with more complex and challenging academic texts that demand more sophisticated critical thinking and more advanced abilities to analyze texts. According to Valerozo and Aggabao (2020), students in higher education levels are more capable of applying higher-order metacognitive strategies such as analyzing debates and integrating data from different sources. Kirmizi (2010) notes that EFL postgraduate students need systematic training to enhance advanced strategies in view of rising cognitive requirements.

## **2.6 Different Case Studies in Global EFL Contexts**

Different settings have different perspectives to employ reading tactics, specifically metacognitive methods. Investigating case studies from different areas that deal with challenges and effective tactics in teaching metacognitive strategies can help understand the variation in challenges and ways of dealing with them. A case study conducted by Hassan et al., (2021) investigated the effectiveness of reading progress and habits among high school final year students in Malaysia. The findings illustrated that students with more exposure to reading tactics lean to accomplish the best outcomes. The authors claim that applying effective reading habits can make overall academic performance better. This study also sheds light on the role of motivation, variation in reading materials, and reading conditions, which can lead to better reading practices among learners. The study pointed out that students' awareness of reading strategies can improve their proficiency via improving strong reading habits.

A study by Mizumoto and Takeuchi (2009) resulted to, despite EFL postgraduate students were totally aware about metacognitive strategies. The study observed that their application was shrank. Despite that they were common with skills such as scanning, skimming, and they sometimes unsuccessfully use advanced skills like summarizing and inference. The authors pointed out that cultural factors like instructional emphasis on memorization and test preparation restrict learners' exposure to tactics that focus on comprehension over memorization. This study recommended more emphasis on training and instruction in metacognitive techniques among EFL postgraduate.

Another study conducted in Saudi Arabia by AL-Nujaidi, (2003) examined reading strategies used by Saudi EFL postgraduate learners. It concluded that students depend mainly on bottom-up techniques, focusing on individual vocabulary decoding more than the comprehensive understanding of the text. The learners encounter significant challenges like the lack of adequate of exposure to metacognitive techniques such as synthesizing data and summarizing. The study recommended that integrating top-down methods can help students overcome their reading difficulties, specifically when they concentrate on the comprehensive meaning and form of the text.

## **2.7 Effective Programs in EFL Classrooms and Reading Strategies**

Many programs and instructional approaches have immersed metacognitive techniques successfully within EFL classrooms. These programs have illustrated how to enhance reading when these techniques are introduced clearly. The following is a brief review of the reading instruction types.

### **2.7.1 Extensive Reading Programs (ERPs)**

These programs are structured to facilitate language learning and reading proficiency among EFL students as they are designed according to the students' prompts and skills level. According to Mbato, C.L, (2013). EFL postgraduate students who engaged in extensive reading programs are more capable of using metacognitive techniques efficiently, especially in skills such as self-regulation and inference. ERPs increase students' exposure to many different types of academic texts, which is crucial to assist them in developing their metacognitive strategies. The author claimed that the students were selecting and monitoring their reading subjects in order to enhance their independent reading strategies.

### **2.7.2 Strategy-based Instruction (SBI)**

This strategy emphasizes on the explicit instruction and how to apply metacognitive and cognitive techniques. Yang (1999) investigated the efficiency of Strategy-Based Instruction among students in Taiwan and demonstrated that students showed better results in reading comprehension tests when they engaged in educational programs that included reading strategies than students with no instruction. He claimed that SBI emphasizes the significance of immersing metacognitive techniques instruction within the syllabus and presents a variety of chances to students to experience these techniques in several types of dialogues.

### **2.7.3 Reciprocal Teaching (RT)**

RT is another approach used for the intervention in teaching reading techniques, especially the metacognitive ones. It encourages learners to take a role within a group of students and discuss a text applying reading strategies one by one like explicating, guessing, summarizing and questioning. Palincsar and Brown (1984) also explained the efficiency of Reciprocal Teaching and how it enhances reading comprehension for

EFLs. Zhang and Zhang (2021) conducted a study in the EFL Chinese context and noted that EFL Chinese postgraduate students who engaged with RT were successful in interacting with academic contents since RT improved their ability to apply reading strategies.

## **2.8 Theories of Reading**

In order to investigate the academic reading difficulties that EFL postgraduate students in the English Department at University of Zawia encounter, the researcher sheds light on four related theories. The theories include Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller (1991), Metacognitive Theory (Flavell (1979), Schema Theory (Bartlett 1932 & Anderson 1984) and Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978). This integration provides a comprehensive understanding of the difficulties that students encounter when reading academic texts.

### **2.8.1 Cognitive Load Theory**

Jean Piaget (1936) propounded the cognitive load theory, also known as CLT. This theory emphasizes the language usage and how the human's brain processes it, and explains how the lack of memory affect learning. Sweller (1988) adjusted it later and pointed out three main types of cognitive load: intrinsic load which involves textual complexity, specifically in a second language context where it requires high intrinsic load due to new vocabulary, abstract concepts and syntax. These arise due to the second type that Sweller called Extraneous Load, which deals with the difficulties caused by the limitation of instructional support and insufficient reading strategies. The last type of cognitive load is the Germane Load, i.e., the mental effort that helps students to integrate the new information with the existing knowledge in order to structure understanding.

By understanding these types of cognitive load, the researcher can pinpoint particular sources of cognitive barriers that hinder comprehension. Thus, addressing the question: What are the difficulties encountered by the EFL postgraduate students when they read academically? Moreover, it helps to dig for the potential factors causing these difficulties by understanding the differences between textual difficulties and those contributing to how information is processed and presented.

### 2.8.2 Metacognitive Theory

Flavell (1979) introduced metacognitive theory to explain EFL students' awareness of reading strategies and their self-regulation when they handle the reading process. In an academic reading context, metacognition consists of reading comprehension strategies such as planning before reading, monitoring during the reading process and evaluating after finished reading. The researcher can apply this framework to assess students' awareness of reading strategies. Based on metacognition theory, awareness is significant due to its role in controlling reading strategies and enhancing comprehension. Thus, the lack of metacognitive skills can be considered as a significant factor that can students' reading efficiency. In addition, Flavell (1979) highlights the importance of crucial strategies such as planning which precedes the reading process. He suggests that firstly, students should preview the material, secondly, set objectives and stimulate their prior knowledge. Thirdly, monitoring, i.e., during reading, students check their comprehension, declare difficulties and apply appropriate strategies to tackle challenges. Lastly, evaluating, i.e., after reading, students assess their understanding and check the effectiveness of the strategies they used.

### 2.8.3 Schema Theory

Schema Theory emphasizes that prior knowledge and cognitive load (Schemas) are fundamental factors for the comprehension process. According to Bartlett's (1932) argument, which was adjusted later by Anderson (1984), Schemas facilitate individuals' organization and analyzing of the new information by activating their prior knowledge. This theory discusses academic reading difficulties by providing the following concepts:

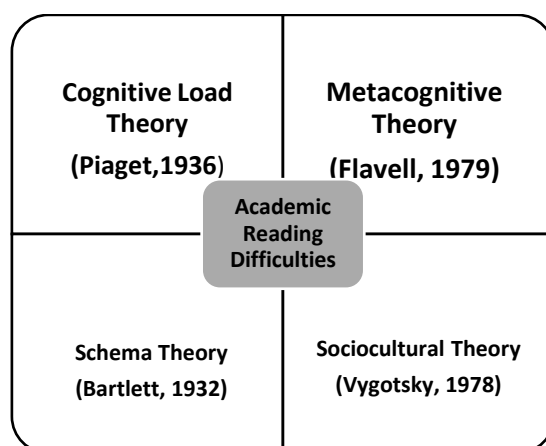
- a. *Cultural and Linguistic Obstacles*: Schema theory suggests that reading difficulties occur when students face new vocabulary and metaphors, as well as when their existing prior knowledge differs from the culture of the new text's author.
- b. *The Limitation of Prior Knowledge*: Schema theory claims that EFL students frequently encounter challenges with comprehension due to disciplinary knowledge and limited prior exposure to academic idioms.
- c. *Relevant Schemas' Activation*: Previewing, guessing and linking new information with schema. Such effective reading strategies enhance understanding.

For the researcher, schema theory is a path to find and explore the causes contributing to insufficient prior knowledge. It also helps the researcher distinguish between the students' existing knowledge and the schema assumed by the author's material's. In addition, it is directly relevant to strategic awareness including activating schema by previewing or another similar strategy.

#### 2.8.4 Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky propounded sociocultural theory (SCT). It highlights the social interaction role, cultural methods and sufficient learning in developing cognitive skills. SCT suggests that learning emerges from a zone of adjacent development. Learners can accomplish better tasks when they find guidance from instructors or more experienced peers. The theory is highly related to the topic of this study as it discusses the following themes:

- a. The Limitation of Instructional Support (SCL) which claims that several EFL students encounter difficulties when they engage with academic texts due the ineffective instruction and the lack of support especially in analyzing academic materials.
- b. Cultural Differences and their role in comprehension, which suggests that exposure to a different academic cultural discourse develops students' abilities to comprehend the target language background.
- c. Instructors and peers' support: according to SCT, instructors and peer feedback, discussions and collaborative learning fill gaps of comprehension and improve reading strategies and techniques.



**Figure 2.1: Theoretical Framework**

To sum up, the above-mentioned theories indicate the necessary conceptual tools to interpret the nature of difficulties based on the cognitive load theory, students' self-regulation and their internal processing with the help of metacognitive theory, and the crucial role of prior knowledge i.e., schema. Finally, the external environment impact as indicated by the sociocultural theory. This integration allows for a deeper investigation of the academic reading difficulties, their potential factors and students' awareness of reading strategies and techniques.

## **2.9 Academic Reading Difficulties among EFL Postgraduate Students**

This section provides an overview of the previous studies on the reading challenges faced by EFL postgraduate students when they read academic texts. This overview sheds light on the factors that lead to these challenges like linguistic factors, and the exposure to complex English dialogues. Also, it reviews the studies that deal with students' awareness and use of reading strategies and techniques in Western and non-Western contexts. Additionally, it lays the groundwork to comprehend the difficulties encountered by postgraduate students in English department at University of Zawia. Developing academic reading skills is a big issue for EFL learners especially when it comes to postgraduate students who are required to reach a high level of literacy. According to Mohamed (2016) and Anwar & Sailuddin (2022), students at this level are required to interact with high level of complexity texts, to analyze theoretical frameworks and produce academic pieces of writing that suit the global standards of academia. However, Harvard (2023) noted that EFL students at the postgraduate level face many difficulties, specifically in areas where the standard language used in teaching is not English. The complexity of academic texts that learners need to read, restricted exposure to academic contexts in English and their heavy reliance on their mother tongue are significant factors to the challenges they encounter. These difficulties are more addressed in fields that depend significantly on reading like the social sciences and humanities where students are expected to comprehend theoretical terms.

Previous literature demonstrates that EFL learners' main obstacles at postgraduate level are mainly due to lack of vocabulary, reading comprehension issues and insufficient exposure to academic texts (Hudson, 2007 and Hirvela, 2004). In cases where English is not the first language, such as in Libya, these challenges are more

exacerbated in addition to the lack of systematic support and explicit language instruction. According to Rashed (2016), as a result of several factors, such as linguistic, cognitive and cultural barriers, undergraduate students in English Department of University of Zawia struggle to acquire the skills needed for their degrees. This study also indicates that many students in the English Department encounter challenges in understanding English dialogues, specifically caused by the lack of basic reading skills, like comprehending the core idea of the dialogue and guessing word meaning from the context. These shortcomings lead to inhibition and disability in interacting with academic texts successfully.

Obstacles in language are not only restricted to the challenges encountered by EFL learners. Some previous studies address the cultural and environmental challenges hindering students in academic reading. In some areas, such as Libya, students start their postgraduate programs in which training and educational organizations focus more on memorization rather than critical thinking and analysis, thus ignoring the needed skills to overcome reading difficulties. According to Nation (2011), several learners are not ready for reading required at postgraduate level due to their lack to exposure to academic texts during the previous level of their education. In the Libyan context, Hadoud (2020 )investigated the merging process of critical thinking within EFL Libyan instructors in the English Department at the University of Zawia and noted that substantial obstacles impeded the effective application of critical thinking inside classes. These obstacles include like over-loaded classes, unqualified teachers, insufficient teaching programs, ineffective teaching aids, unsuitable subject, inflexible testing criteria and learners' restricted comprehension of critical thinking. These difficulties hinder the successful merging of critical thinking abilities in higher levels of education in Libya. In other studies, Mohamed (2016) and Aldbea, K.A (2025) state that the lack of vocabulary and insufficient grammatical skills impede the comprehension of academic texts among Libyan postgraduate students. Abosnan (2016) also investigated the teaching of reading as a foreign language and understanding academic texts among students in the English Department at Aljufra University. He points out that EFL students encounter difficulties in using words correctly and struggle to understand phrasal verbs. Also, Elmadwi (2014) explored the reading strategies that students in the English Department at University of Zawia use when they read academically. He reported that metacognitive strategies were the most



used strategies among those students. In addition, Ghuma (2011) observes that both strong and weak readers interfere reading strategies between L1 and EFL with the emphasize on the proficient readers only use holistic strategies which support complex discourse level.

## **2.10 Factors Causing Academic Reading Difficulties**

In this section, the researcher pinpoints out the potential factors that cause academic reading difficulties among EFL postgraduate students. These factors are classified into three main factors: internal factors, external factors and textual factors.

### **2.10.1 Internal Factors**

This section discusses the potential internal factors that cause academic reading difficulties such as students' abilities and reading habits, their reading routines, first language interference, prior knowledge, motivation and self-regulation.

First, the lean to shift cognitive processes and reading routines from students' first language to English is one of the most significant cultural factors that impact EFL students' reading. According to Nation (2011), in the Arabic context, especially in Libyan, EFL learners are frequently instructed to read materials in their first language with a method that concentrates only on repetition and literal understanding. English needs more interferential reading and explanatory skills and applying these habits to English language materials can lead to undesirable results. In different context, the such as the Asian context, a study conducted in Australia by Phakiti and Li's (2011) illustrates that several EFL students from Japan, South Korea and China encountered difficulties when shifting reading habits from their first language to English. They frequently implement bottom-up reading techniques (emphasizing on words decoding) more than top-down techniques (using pragmatics to understand the overall meaning), leading to a negative impact on their comprehension. The interference of culture in these contexts to emphasize accuracy in language rather than comprehending the overall meaning of the material makes it worse for students when they interact with English complex texts.

Second, despite their experience with English, many EFL postgraduate students encounter challenges when they apply metacognitive strategies. According to Zhang and Seepho (2013), numerous EFL Chinese students lack the experience and self-

confidence to apply these strategies. Also Gan (2009) found out that despite the fact that students in Hong Kong were aware of the metacognitive strategies, they could not implement them successfully because they were not able to know when and how to utilize them. Applying metacognitive strategies is a difficulty which also occurred among international students in Western areas. For instance, a study was conducted by Oxford and Amerstorfer (2018) observed that numerous EFL Asian students in Europe and the United States encounter difficulties in applying metacognitive techniques. They noted that the difficulties were because of the shortage of instructional training, which hindered the students' capability to regulate academic dialogues that require a strong critical thinking skill. In the Libyan context, Alashouri (2023) stated that the shortage of strategy training in the Libyan educational organizations led students to apply passive strategies, which impeded their ability to engage with academic contents critically. These findings shed light on the need for instructional support and students' awareness of metacognitive strategies including when and how to use them correctly.

Third, Motivation and self-regulation are often consistent with efficient implementation of reading strategies. According to Zimmerman (2002), self-regulation process is the ability to guide how students learn, including how they set goals, track progress and apply techniques when required. Thus, self-regulated learners are usually capable of implementing metacognitive strategies. Similarly, Phakiti and Li (2011) found out that students with a high level of self-regulation are capable of applying many techniques to increase their understanding in order to handle the reading challenges. Another study conducted by Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) illustrated that EFL students with no motivation either face difficulties in understanding complex texts or use basic reading strategies only such as skimming and scanning.

### **2.10.2 External Factors**

This section reviews the potential external factors contributing to academic reading difficulties involving context, culture, education paradigms, models, training programs, institutional support and digital tools.

First, Context and culture are substantial factors that affect academic reading because they form how students interact with and translate materials. Several studies have investigated how they influence students' ability to read academically. For example, Li and Zhang (2023) confirm that students' schemas and prior knowledge are

affected by their cultural background, leading to implications for their reading comprehension positively or negatively. Also, contextual elements, like environment and resource's availability, play a crucial role in reading comprehension. According to Blanchard (2021), since instructional systems provide different levels of exposure to English materials and reading strategies, students cover only what they have been taught, leading to variation in their proficiency and achievements. In addition, Anderson and Li (2023) point out that metacognitive techniques such as inference and evaluation are impacted by culture. They claim that in Western areas, students are frequently supported efficiently to be self-regulated which helps to facilitate their application of metacognitive techniques. On the other hand, Chen (2022) stresses that students from contexts where teachers' authority is highlighted apply less self-regulated strategies and this affects their reading progress. In non-Western contexts such as Libya, traditional teaching approaches like memorizing employed by the Libyan educational system restrict students' capability to interact successfully with the reading materials (Giaber 2014). Thus, the interference between context and culture creates several difficulties for instructors.

Second, Regardless of the noticeable significance of metacognitive strategies, shortage of training for teachers can also have implications for the teaching/learning process. According to Nakatani (2010), a large number of teachers need effective awareness to use metacognitive strategies in contexts where languages are taught particularly. This often results in a lack of sufficient instruction among students especially on how to engage actively with academic texts. At the University of Zawia, Ahmed (2020) points out that teachers were unfamiliar with many metacognitive strategies, and as a result they neglect using them inside their classes thus learners were left to tackle complex subjects on their own.

Third, Models in teacher training that concentrate on literacy of instruction, frequently highlight maintained permanent training programs more than individual workshops. D'Agostino, Osirus and Lucien (2022) confirm that successful programs demand explicit syllabus instructions, regular training, and peripheral coaching. According to this study, the University of Notre Dame's ACE Haiti program applied a consistent and organized program to improve teachers' literacy guidance, which lead to improve reading proficiency within their students. Furthermore, organizational models structured to merge metacognitive and cognitive reading techniques are crucial for

better reading comprehension. Whankhom et al (2016) note that models that instruct learners by organized reading programs including practicing reading techniques, modelling and presenting feedback might significantly improve students' reading abilities, particularly with students who learn English as a foreign language. According to D'Agostino et al (2022), the concentration on the teaching of reading techniques, organized instruction and in-process teacher's support are essential for enhancing students' skills to comprehend and decode materials efficiently. Moreover, Freeman (1998) supports the Decision-Making Model emphasizing that instructors should be knowledgeable, skillful and open-minded for successful instructional outcomes.

Fourth, Previous literature highlights the important role of instructional support for EFL students to enhance their capability to handle reading difficulties efficiently. According to Ericsson (2023), instructors' provision of efficient training for their students on how to implement reading strategies successfully enhances their performance. Le et al (2024) note that educational institutions where students are encouraged and supported with activities like language workshops and academic support centers, the students acquire more self-confidence and better performance. On the other hand, in under research contexts such as Libyan, Louka (2020) illustrated that EFL students in the University of Zawia frequently encounter challenges because of the lack of support by the institution, the limited exposure to English academic materials and the unavailability of organized reading programs leading to a negative impact on their academic achievements. In respect of providing a direct relationship between students' critical reading skills and the organizational proficiency, Wafiroh et al (2024) states that teachers who apply more engaged approaches like the Virtual Literature Circle (VLC) tend to engage students actively and encourage them to enhance their critical thinking abilities, leading to more comprehensive understanding of complicated materials. VLC is an instructional support that sheds light on the lack of teachers' training programs, concentrates on high levels of advanced reading techniques in areas where learners lack the exposure to English complex text specifically.

Fifth, D'Agostino et al (2019) emphasize literacy intervention to improve teacher support in Haiti using multi-tiered professional development program with instructional and annual training. Teachers from 350 schools were involved. The programme demonstrated improved outcomes via ongoing professional development and teacher support. Also, Freeman (1989) investigated the collaborative curriculum

development for teachers' training by applying an ethnographic study with surveys and interviews. 1500 teachers including males and females in the Australian Adult Migrant Education Program (AMEP) demonstrated the impact of decentralized teacher-led curriculum in improving the education outcomes.

Sixth, in the last decades, the use of digital tools that provide classical structures of support for EFL learners has noticeably increased. Kim and Lee (2015) emphasize that online programs like Kahoot, Moodle and Blackboard merged within many EFL training programs in order to allow students to enter online training, interactive reading materials and learning modules that suit their proficiency level. Such program emphasizes several gaps in organizational materials and instructors' training. For instance, Chang and Lan, (2019) noted that Moodle, a free learning website is frequently used in different areas in order to conduct a tailored module for language learning that focuses on reading, metacognitive techniques and vocabulary structure by means of interactive tasks, peer-works debates and reading comprehension practices. Moreover, Moran and Swerling, (2016) illustrate how apps such as Google Classroom and Quizlet have been integrated among EFL training programs and how such tools can be supplemental for students by presenting accurate-timing feedback, flexible learning strategies and online explanation abilities, leading students to observe their achievements and enhance their overall reading comprehension. Integrating tools like those can improve the instructional support for EFL postgraduate students within contexts where teacher's one to one support is unavailable.

To sum up, the role of teachers and institutions in aiding EFL postgraduate learners in reading skills is fundamental for the purpose of the overall academic success. Teachers seek more instructions in advanced reading techniques to be able to teach their students how to handle complicated English materials. On the other hand, organizations have to present the necessary materials needed like websites access tools and language program that assist EFL learners to handle reading difficulties they might encounter. Both Western and non-Western contexts emphasize the importance of teachers' organizational support and how they can improve these areas. At Universities and provide EFL postgraduate students the academic reading requirements.

Seventh, the philosophy of education and instructional approaches are significantly integrated within the cultural contexts leading to clear variations in worldwide education systems. In contexts like EFL classrooms, the methods by which

the students are instructed are influenced by the typical education paradigms within their environment. Therefore, distinguishing between the worldwide major pedagogical approaches is crucial to address the potential factors that impede students' reading proficiency and the overall academic progress. The following section provides an analysis of education systems via a comparative overview between Middle Eastern, Asian and Western contexts.

Eighth, according to Layman (2018), the education systems in Asian and Middle Eastern paradigms are based on social norms including highlighting admiration for the authority, cooperation and the formed methods for the learning process. Ying & Or-Kan (2019) claim that rote memorization is the key approach to master the content, forming a knowledge theory that emphasizes hierarchical publishing of knowledge directly from teachers to students. Marinette and Hui, (2021) also points out that the curriculum deliberates Confucian ideals where education is an ethical task and an approach to afford to nation and family. However, according to Layman (2018), the Western educational system highlights students-self-sufficiency and critical thinking, encouraging them to ask questions, independently search for knowledge and analyze it by themselves. The study added that the pedagogy in this education system is a learner-centered, which encourage students towards creativity, exploration and problem solving, while instructors work as assistants helping students to find their own ways to knowledge, providing freedom to say what they think (Marinette and Hui, 2021).

Layman (2018) and Ying & Or-Kan (2019) claim that in the Middle Eastern and Asian education systems the most significant emphasis is on technology, engineering, science and mathematics. These materials work as a method to enhance the economic system. Layman (2018) adds that the systemized tests are crucial to assess students' progress, and students' academic future is shaped by providing them entrance to high education levels and better work opportunities. The curriculum is conducted in a rigid structure with inflexible methods, focusing on regularity and stickiness to a framework that suits their national norms (Layman, 2018). Layman (2018) also claims that the Western education systems highlight arts education, immersing science, humanities and arts in order to serve well educated students. The study also claims that the curriculum provides students with choice and adaptability, and encourage learners to be multifaceted and independent. Furthermore, according to Ghimire (2024), the assessment methods used in this education system apply alternative tests such as

collaborative tasks, presentations and projects rather than traditional assessments, seeking to enhance students' abilities in critical thinking, innovation and creativity.

Ninth, in the Asian and Middle Eastern area, a study was conducted by Ying & Or-Kan (2019) indicating that educators are highly authorized, respected and treated as the root of knowledge, and classes are highly disciplined. The central teaching approach is teacher-centered, i.e., teachers provide knowledge and students listen with less interaction (Layman, 2018). The study adds that despite improvements made in some areas like Singapore, the traditional approaches remain crucial and is still applied.

In the Western context, educators work as facilitators, mentoring and organizing debates among students and providing them freedom to criticize theories and establish their own ideas (Layman, 2018). This study points out that the teaching methods applied by teachers in this context are more flexible including discussion, peer work, group work and project-based activities.

Tenth, social and parental impact, according to Layman (2018), households in East Asia frequently employ a demanding restricted styles, which is called "Tiger Parenting". Academic achievements reflect social discipline and family honor. Ying & Or-Kan (2019) believe that in this context, instruction is a cooperative responsibility between society and family by playing an active role in learners' success. Layman (2018) states that parents in the Western education systems frequently adopt a flexible style, concentrating on providing their children with knowledge individuality and independency encouraging them towards exploration, creativity and self-decision making. Moreover, according to Ghimire (2024), the education system is considered as a method to achieve self-realization over family honor or financial expectations.

To conclude, the Asian, Middle Eastern and Western educational systems have advantages and disadvantages. While Asian and Middle Eastern systems foster social cohesion, discipline and knowledge achievements, the Western system emphasizes individualism, adaptability and creativity. Culture, philosophy and history are reflected in both systems. The Asian and Middle Eastern educational system emphasizes cooperative achievements and discipline, while the Western educational system highlights exploration and self-realization. The in-process improvements in both contexts emphasize the lack to immerse theoretical knowledge with creativity and practicality to get learners ready for a sufficient academic study.

### **2.10.3 Textual Factors**

This section reviews text-based factors that lead EFL postgraduate students to struggle when they read academically. These factors include vocabulary, syntax and grammar.

First, vocabulary challenges. A study by Anwar and Sailuddin (2022) investigates EFL postgraduate students' difficulties when they read academic texts, focusing on vocabulary challenges. In their research, they use a mixed-method approach, close-ended questionnaires and one open-ended question to gain responses from 60 Indonesian University participants at Khairun University. The study findings indicate that understanding the meanings of complex words was the main difficulty for students when they read academic texts.

Another study conducted by Alghail and Mahfoodh (2016) also investigates the academic reading difficulties within international postgraduate learners, focusing on vocabulary and difficult texts. This study uses qualitative approach applying interviews and surveys. A mix of 50 male and female international postgraduate students studying at Universiti Sains Malaysia were involved. The researchers found out that vocabulary was a fundamental obstacle preventing students from engaging with academic texts, and thus impacting their reading proficiency negatively.

The above-mentioned studies confirm that reading for academic purposes requires strong vocabulary, specifically for postgraduate EFL learners. Lack of vocabulary is a well-known obstacle when EFL learners read academic texts. Nation (2011) states that acquiring fundamental vocabulary of a language is challenging for EFL students exacerbated by advanced, domain-jargon and technical terms. At the postgraduate level, students are required to interact with more complex academic texts containing sophisticated abstract notions and specific-domain terms.

Previous research indicates that postgraduate students at the University of Zawia often face difficulties when they read academic texts. According to Mohamed (2016), this struggle is due to the limited exposure to English academic materials that many students have had during their earlier levels of study. This limited exposure hindered them from interacting with advanced English texts efficiently. Mohamed also states that the linguistic aspect is not the only difficulty they encounter, but also their lack of organizational resources and support. Due to this, postgraduate students at the



University of Zawia often face difficulty to understand the academic vocabulary used in texts (Berardo, 2006).

The Libyan context is not the only one where students encounter this challenge, Anwar and Sailuddin (2022) investigated the Indonesian context and found out that EFL students face similar challenges in understanding complex technical terms in academic articles, thus creating a disability to engage with and analyze texts critically.

Daily English vocabulary can be adequate for communication purposes, but the comprehension of academic texts requires more knowledge to understand specialized terminology. According to Berardo, (2006), EFL postgraduate students often struggle with the specialized language of their domain, even those students with advanced skills of general English. Students in domains such as engineering, law and medicine for instance, are not only required to understand advanced English vocabulary in general, but also the specific terms in their domains, which are not included in a standard English syllabus. According to Mohamed (2016), EFL students at the University of Zawia find it challenging to interact with writings that involve unfamiliar technical vocabulary. Students frequently had to look for the meanings of new words, which consume their time and interrupt their reading flow. In different places like Indonesia, similar results have been reached by Anwar and Sailuddin (2022) who confirm that technical words are a substantial difficulty for EFL learners.

In the EFL literature, many studies note that accurate instruction of vocabulary for EFL learners is crucial when they read academically. Hudson (2007) and Hirvela (2004) point out that developing learner's comprehension needs adequate exposure to texts involving advanced terms. To achieve this, it requires the use of techniques involving specific training on academic vocabulary by immersing within the EFL educational program that include significant vocabulary pre-teaching and term-based reading drills. Instructional support for this training is not often enough in several EFL areas. Anwar and Sailuddin (2022) have observed this. at the University of Zawia. Mohamed (2016) states that students are often left to overcome reading difficulties by themselves with little or no support or instruction on how these difficulties can be handled.

Previous literature sheds light on the vocabulary learning strategies and techniques and their fundamental importance for EFL students in order to facilitate their

vocabulary development by themselves. According to Nation (2011), mediums such as contextual guessing (inferring word meaning by using pragmatics), morphological analysis (returning words to their roots) and using tools like dictionaries to help understand new words are fruitful. Pigada and Schmitt, (2006) notes that learners with such skills are more capable of overcoming academic reading difficulties than others because they maintain reading without interruption or pauses, and manage to identify the meanings of new words without any help.

Instructional in Libya and other countries emphasize memorization, which typically includes word lists memorizing with none of the comprehension needed to understand their pragmatic use. This makes the EFL students struggle to develop their analytical thinking and use the memorized words in an academic content. Orafi and Borg (2009) state that in English subjects, Libyan instructors often rely on memorization and repetition rather than the competence of communication. This can lead to the inability to use vocabulary efficiently in daily English. Furthermore, some studies indicate that teachers in Libya are not well-prepared to immerge vocabulary in their syllabi. Louka, (2020) investigated the vocabulary teaching strategy at primary schools in the Libyan context. She found that teachers frequently seek to training and materials to apply efficient vocabulary teaching, which make them rely only on repetition and memorization. According to ERIC (2015), this frequently leads learners to navigate the academic English complexities on their own which results in frustration and the inability to interact with the taught materials.

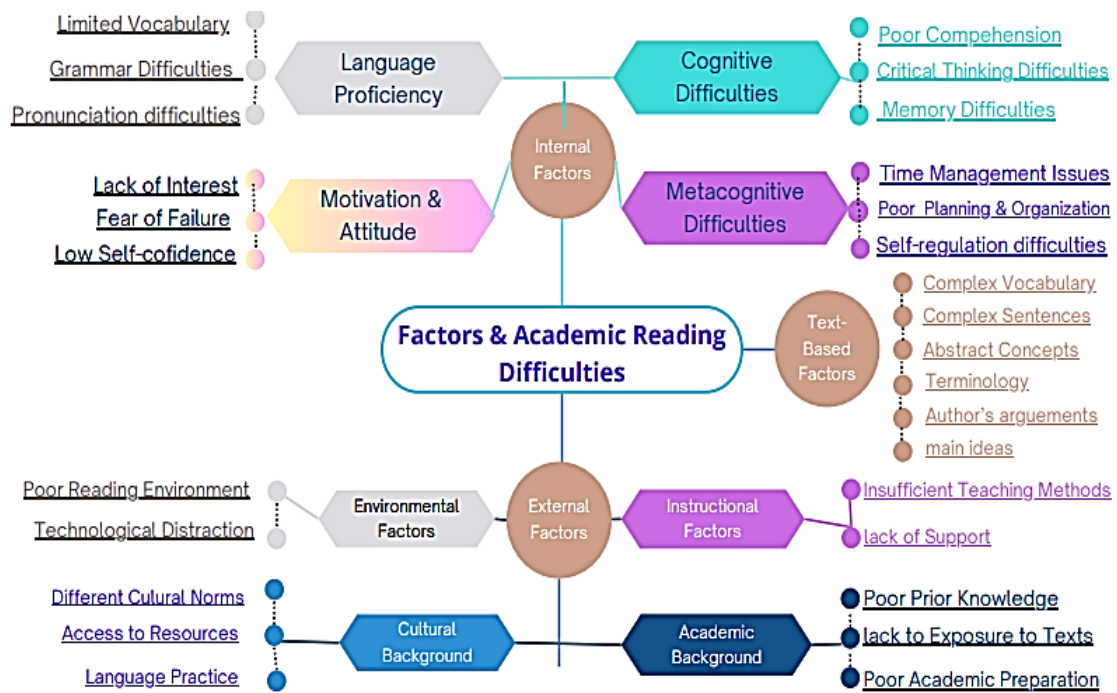
To sum up, the lack of adequate vocabulary is one of the most significant difficulties that EFL postgraduate students encounter when they read for academic purposes which requires specific terminology like technical and domain-specific jargon. In the University of Zawia and similar contexts, the students' lack of enough exposure to academic English materials in their prior levels of education frequently hinders their capability to interact efficiently with advanced academic dialogues. In the Libyan and Indonesian contexts these difficulties are complicated by the lack of instructional support and the heavy reliance on repetition and memorization. These factors limit students' ability to develop efficient vocabulary learning techniques. Previous literature recommends the instructional training on academic vocabulary and vocabulary-learning techniques, like inference and morphological analysis which are crucial to develop students' reading skills. These factors frequently result in students

handling these challenges with no help, which might frustrate them and hinder their academic progress.

#### **2.10.4 Syntax and Grammar**

Syntax and grammar constitute another major difficulty that EFL postgraduate students encounter, especially in the Middle Eastern context and North Africa including Libya. According Ibrahim (2022), academic texts frequently involve syntactically complex structures, passive voice, compound and complex sentences and embedded clauses. Moreover, Adam (2024) points out that EFL learners, especially those belonging to Arab cultures, find it difficult to engage with complex sentence structure, due to the nature of differences between their native language and English. Another study by Omer (2020), explains that English academic writing prioritizes awareness and accurate meanings, whereas Arabic has a different word arrangement and leans towards redundancy.

To summarize, many studies have investigated reading difficulties faced by EFL undergraduate students, but few studies only were conducted to explore reading difficulties among postgraduate students in non-Western areas such as Libya. Hence, this review of literature provides groundwork for improving instructional academic support for postgraduate EFL students by addressing the potential factors of reading challenges with the overall aim of enhancing students' academic progress. According to this previous literature review, the researcher highlights the most common academic reading difficulties and the factors causing them. The following visual diagram illustrates the problems and related factors:



**Figure 2.2; factors of academic reading difficulties**

## 2.11 Previous Studies

Locally, Rashed (2016) explored "the reading difficulties that students face in English Department at university of Zawia when comprehending a text". In her study, Rashed applied a test in reading comprehension with 100 participants. Her findings indicated that students encounter difficulties to handle the main ideas within texts, and guessing vocabulary meanings. The researcher focused on undergraduate students, highlighting the presence of reading comprehension difficulties in the Libyan EFL context aligning with the current study emphasis on addressing these reading difficulties. In another study, Elmadwi and Shepherd (2014) investigated the reading techniques and strategies applied by students at the University of Zawia, with a significant emphasis on metacognitive strategies. In particular, they explored the students' use of reading strategies and their effect on improving students' comprehension of a text within an EFL context. The study employed a mixed method approach. A questionnaire and reading test involved 80 participants, 50 males and 30 females. The study results indicated that the most used reading strategies among these students were the metacognitive strategies. Similar to the previously discussed study, this research dealt with EFL undergraduate students only. Despite that, it is relevant to

the current study as it forms a groundwork to investigate the reading strategies employed by the Libyan EFL postgraduate students.

A similar study related to the Libyan context was conducted at the University of Glasgow by Abosnan (2016). The study is entitled "The teaching of reading English in a foreign language in Libyan universities: methods and models". The study investigated the difficulties within the Libyan educational system and their effects on students in view of historical and political factors. This study also addressed the reading habits and strategies, as well as the teachers' instructional methods. Its findings emphasized the need for reading English as a foreign language (REFL) to enhance reading comprehension and techniques. Thus, Abosnan's study indicates a significant groundwork for the topic under study due to the valuable insights it provided for the particular difficulties within the Libyan education system, and the emphasis on employing critical thinking skills.

Hadoud (2020) also investigated the integration of critical thinking skills into the Libyan EFL context as an attempt to address the related difficulties. This study adopted a qualitative design integrating observation, interviews and surveys with Libyan EFL students and teachers at the University of Zawia. The findings revealed that unqualified teachers, overcrowded classes, ineffective teachings methods and rigid assessment criteria were the main obstacles, but the study suggested no solutions. Also, the study highlighted limited instructional interventions. To sum up, Hadoud, (2020) addressed instructional challenges that hinder academic reading proficiency among Libyan EFL students.

Recently, Al-trabulsi (2024) investigated the reading strategies' assessment used by Libyan EFL teachers at the University of Tripoli and the difficulties they face. In this study, the researcher employed a mixed method approach to gather data including a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews from 40 teachers. Although the results revealed that the majority of the teachers showed a sufficient awareness of several aspects of reading assessment such as fluency, accuracy, reliability, pronunciation and vocabulary, they still struggle with effective and consistent application of these aspects in real classrooms. Some of teachers were aware of specific strategies like setting objectives, expressing the purpose of tasks and indicating instructions. Less than half of the participants applied strategies such as paraphrasing, summarizing and critical thinking. This study highlighted significant difficulties including applying the

appropriate approach, ensuring scoring valid and reliable results, overcrowded classroom management, limitation of resources and insufficient instructional programs.

All in all, Al-trabulsi, (2024) highlights the gap between the teachers' theoretical knowledge and their practical implementation of reading strategies' assessment in the Libyan EFL context.

Internationally, Phakiti and Li (2011) explored the effect of applying reading strategies such as scanning, skimming and inference particularly in the EFL contexts highlighting the correlation between the use of effective reading strategies and reading proficiency. In their study, a qualitative method was adopted to collect data from different EFL postgraduate students. The findings revealed that reading strategies such as scanning and skimming are crucial for students to manage their reading of texts, and that inference enhances vocabulary. While this study explored the impact of using reading strategies in several contexts abroad, its findings might be generalized. Thus, this study is linked to the current one.

Similarly, Alghail and Mahfoodh, (2016) explored the academic reading difficulties encountered by EFL international postgraduate students. They emphasized vocabulary, text-complexity and the need for successful interventions. The study employed a mixed method approach involving interviews and surveys with 50 EFL international male and female postgraduate students at Universiti Sains Malaysia. The study concluded that the lack of vocabulary is a fundamental factor that impedes EFL postgraduate student abilities to engage with academic texts, thus it impacts the students' overall reading proficiency. Finally, this study is related the topic under study as it indicates a groundwork for the investigation of the academic difficulties encountered by the Libyan EFL students.

Another study conducted by D'Agostino et al (2019) emphasized the intervention role and the effectiveness of multi-tiered programs to improve teachers' support in Haiti applying a professional development program. The study employed a mixed-method approach including surveys, literacy tests and instructional blogs. The study showed that professional intervention programs improve teachers' literacy outcomes by consistent professional teacher support. The study explored a large sample size of teachers. While it emphasized the teachers' achievements and outcomes, no students' outcomes have been provided. To summarize, the study indicated methods to

enhance teacher support in a non-Western context such as Libya and claimed that Instructional challenges might be a crucial factor that impedes postgraduate students' academic reading efficiency.

Pommiez, Inostrá and Larrin (2021) conducted a study entitled "Assessing academic reading in students entering higher education" at a university in Chile called University of Castilla-La Mancha – Center for the Study of the Promotion of Reading and Children's Literature. They explored the academic reading skills of university students by applying a diagnostic test method. They concluded that the students encounter difficulties with reading comprehension strategies such as inferring and evaluating. They recommended the need of an intervention program to develop academic reading skill. This study indicates relevant issues across different contexts including Libya.

Puteh et al (2022) explored the correlation between reading strategies such as cognitive, metacognitive and self-regulation among EFL postgraduate learners by applying a quantitative method emphasizing the effect of metacognitive strategies in reading to enhance their overall academic progress. A survey was conducted with a large sample (80 males and 120 females) at a university in Malaysia. The quantitative nature of the study limited in-depth insights. It provided a groundwork for similar investigations such as the current study in Libya.

In Indonesia, Anwar and Sailuddin (2022) investigated the academic reading difficulties among EFL postgraduate students. The study concentrated on vocabulary challenges conducting a mixed method approach; specifically, they used questionnaires to gather data from 60 postgraduate students at Kharun University. Their findings showed that comprehending complex vocabulary hinders students' academic reading proficiency. They emphasized the need for extensive vocabulary training programs to handle these specific difficulties. Despite the small sample size and the restricted area where this study was conducted, it is relevant to the current study as it investigates similar difficulties among similar EFL students who might encounter complex vocabulary challenges.

Recently, a study by Ibrahim et al (2024) investigated the factors causing reading comprehension difficulties among the seventh graders". They employed a qualitative approach in a case study using interviews with students in class seven. The

study concluded that five significant factors contribute to reading difficulties, namely (a) comprehending long sentences, (b) insufficient reading strategies, (c) loss of concentration, (d) external factors related to environment, (e) lack of resource access and parental and instructional support. Although its emphasis is on young students, the study provided the current research with some potential factors that might be causing academic reading difficulties in the Libyan setting.

To sum up, examining these previous studies, especially those conducted in settings similar to the current study, allows the current study researcher to build on existing knowledge and identify gaps in literature which directly relate to academic reading difficulties within EFL postgraduate students and their implementation of academic reading strategies.

## **2.12. Literature Gaps and Future Research**

Mainly, Literature on reading difficulties focuses on EFL undergraduate learners in Western educational contexts, which led to significant gaps in comprehending the difficulties encountered by EFL postgraduate students in non-Western contexts. Some previous studies such as Rashed (2016), Ying and Or-Kan (2019) and Alashouri (2023) have emphasized the need for more context-specific studies where English is often a foreign language and the culture and education systems are different. The previous studies pointed out that the Libyan EFL context, specifically where the postgraduate level remains underexplored, still needs in-depth investigation into the vocabulary issues. The studies indicated that teachers' perspectives of instructional and institutional support as well as students' perspectives need to be investigated more applying mixed approach or qualitative approach to gather data about the use of reading strategies. New studies might explore variations in focusing on the pedagogical interventions to improve academic reading skills needed by Libyan EFL postgraduate students.

## **2.13 Conclusion of the Chapter**

This chapter reviews the literature on academic reading difficulties among EFL postgraduate students. It establishes a theoretical framework using four key theories (Cognitive Load, Metacognitive, Schema, and Sociocultural) to analyze the problem. The review identifies the primary causes of these difficulties, categorizing them



as internal (e.g., motivation, L1 interference), external (e.g., instructional methods, cultural context), and textual (e.g., complex vocabulary, grammar). By synthesizing previous studies, the chapter highlights a gap in the research on this topic within non-Western contexts like Libya, thereby establishing a clear rationale for the study.

The next chapter discusses the methodology of the thesis.

## **Chapter Three: Research Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter describes the research methodology adopted in this study including the research philosophy, research approach, research design, methods of the study population selection, data collection tools and procedures, and data analysis method. The chapter also points out the justification for the methods chosen and their relevance to the study aims and the research questions. Lastly, it addresses the reliability of the questionnaire and the quantitative tools used, and indicates the ethical considerations taken during the research procedures.

### **3.2 Research Philosophy**

The philosophical groundwork supporting this study is pragmatism. According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003), this specific philosophy is particularly appropriate for research that applies a mixed method approach. Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006, p.45) highlight pragmatism's embrace of pluralism, noting that "it is not logically contradictory to claim that quantitative and qualitative research are both useful, even if, at times, they appear to be contradictory". This insight enables the researcher to integrate both quantitative and qualitative methods, employing procedures that best answer the research questions, rather than relying on one single pedagogical paradigm. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) indicated that several authors have defined pragmatism as a perfect philosophy for applying mixed methods study.

### **3.3 Research Design**

In this study, a convergent mixed-methods design is employed. Historically, this design was also referred to as triangulation by Greene, Caracelli and Graham, (1989). It was later called parallel design by Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998). Creswell et al (2003) used the term 'concurrent triangulation', and Teddlie and Tashkkori (2009) used the term 'parallel mixed design'. Lastly, after the merging of convergent parallel design (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011) with concurrent design (Creswell, Plano and Clark, 2018), a more comprehensive version was formed. This design is identified as the most appropriate design for educational studies. The design employed in the current study can be more specified as a fixed mixed-methods design, as the procedures for both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were planned in the early stages of the research and executed accordingly (Creswell, Plano and Clark, 2018, p. 52).

The convergent design was primarily selected due to the practical constraints related to the Libyan context like samples co-operation'. A sequential design was precluded by the limitation of time and lack of resources including the process of conducting a study using two distinct phases. Most significantly, the characteristics of the convergent design allows simultaneous data collection. Also, the current circumstances make it even more suitable such as stopping the samples study due terms' trimming or other reasons.

### 3.4 Research Approach

Guided by a pragmatic philosophy and convergent design, the current study employs a mixed-method research approach. Othman, Steen and fleet (2020) stress that this approach is used to maximize both quantitative and qualitative strengths, and enables a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the study problem than could be gained by applying only a single approach. Moreover, Othman et al. (2020) explain that this combination approach allows for a greater understanding of complex phenomena such as the academic reading difficulties explored in the current study.

Regarding priority, the convergent design naturally involves simultaneous data collection procedures. The current study employs the notation **QUAN + qual** (Creswell, and Plano Clark, 2011). The notation (**QUAN**) in the upper case indicates that the quantitative phase is greatly prioritized in achieving the research objectives, while the plus sign (+) followed by **qual** in the lowercase form indicates that the qualitative phase held a secondary, supportive role. This means that the main purpose of the qualitative data was to triangulate, validate and offer more explanation of the results reached from the quantitative data.

### 3.5 Sampling

This study included all EFL postgraduate students registered in the English Department at the University of Zawia during the Autumn term in 2024.

The quantitative sampling of the study employed an exhaustive approach involving the whole population of the MA program in English Department at University of Zawia: (47) students, including 43 females and 4 males in the quantitative phase. According to Cohen et al (2018), exhaustive approach in sampling is a technique referring to the inclusion of the total population, specifically when the population is

accessible and small. This approach aims to maximize participation. Thus, all available students who consented to participate were included in this study (N=47).

A non-probability, convenience sampling strategy is applied in this study in order to gather the qualitative data as (5) postgraduate students were involved in semi-structured interviews. Creswell & Creswell (2018) and Saunders et al (2019) noted that convenience sampling is a strategy in which the selection of the participants is based on their availability and ease of their access rather than applying random methods. Immediately after the questionnaires collection, the students were asked to participate in semi-structured interviews. This alignment with the strategy emphasizes ease and availability to access students (Bryman, 2016). Following Saunders et al (2019), Creswell & Creswell (2018) and Patton (2015), this strategy is frequently used in exploratory studies as it provides practicality and sufficiency in collecting data and providing in-depth perspectives.

### 3.6.1 Data Collection Tools

The primary tool for gathering quantitative data was a closed-ended questionnaire. Bhandari (2021) describes a questionnaire as a key instrument for collecting information on individuals' perspectives and experiences. This particular questionnaire was structured into three sections to address the study's specific research questions regarding reading difficulties, their potential causes, and students' awareness of academic reading strategies. The questions were designed as close-ended items, offering predefined choices like multiple-choice, rating scales, and Yes/No options, a method noted by Dosseto (2023). A five-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree," was utilized to measure the participants' level of agreement. See table (3.1)

| Extent of effect | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|------------------|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| Degree           | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |

**Table 3. 1: Likert scale**

For qualitative data, the researcher employed semi-structured interviews. Naz, Gulab, and Aslam (2022) highlight interviews as valuable for in-depth understanding of respondents' insights. The questions for the interviews were open-ended and derived

from the questionnaire, allowing for flexibility to explore emergent themes related to the research problem. To ensure comprehensive and accurate data capture, the interviews were audio-recorded using a mobile phone, a method that Johnson, Scheitle, and Ecklund (2021) confirm is superior to note-taking alone for capturing rich data that can be accurately transcribed and analyzed.

### **3.6.2 Procedures of Data Collection**

The development of the questionnaire was a multi-step process. The items were formulated based on a review of relevant previous studies, as well as feedback from the researcher's supervisor and other experts in the field. The questionnaire was then administered in a face-to-face setting. According to Villegas (2023), this method of administration allows the researcher to directly engage with participants, observe their non-verbal reactions, and provide clarification on tasks when necessary.

The qualitative data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with five participants. The researcher used open-ended questions to probe for detailed responses and explore topics as they arose during the conversation. This approach, as pointed out by Ruslin (2021), facilitates an in-depth investigation while keeping the focus on the study's objectives. Prior to recording the interviews, permission was obtained from each participant. The use of audio recording was a deliberate choice to ensure that the rich, detailed data from the interviews was captured accurately for later transcription and analysis.

### **3.5 Pilot study**

Before the main data collection, a pilot study was applied to ensure the consistency of the research methods and their reliability (a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview). According to Machey and Gass (2012) piloting the questionnaire is providing the data collection method to a group of participants who are close to the sampling that originally the study targeting.

Ten postgraduate students were engaged in the pilot stage from the English department at university of Zawia. These participants were excluded from the data analysis. The main purpose was to identify any misunderstanding or ambiguities in the questionnaire item and evaluate their reliability.

The internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed by using Cronbach's Alpha, a common measurement tool. A coefficient of 0.70 or higher is generally accepted in social science research. The analysis of the data tested scored a good reliability of .833. which is considered as a high level of consistency.

### 3.7. Data Analysis

The study used the Statistical Package for Social Science Software known as (SPSS) to analyze the quantitative data collected via the questionnaires. Brzakovic and Brzakovic (2020) state that SPSS provides a user friendly interface without demanding advanced programming abilities to analyze complex statistics. With the help of statistician, the following statistical tests were used:

- Descriptive Statistics: To determine the average response for each section and item; thus, mean values were calculated.
- Reliability Analysis: To measure the questionnaire scales consistency and reliability, Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient was calculated. See section 3.8 for more clarification.
- Inferential Statistics: To compare the mean value of the questionnaire sections with the hypothetical mean, a one-sample t-test was conducted to assess the statistical importance against the Neutral value of 3 on the Likert scale.

The following table illustrates the significance of the arithmetic mean results and their interpretation;

|                     |           |          |        |     |             |
|---------------------|-----------|----------|--------|-----|-------------|
| Mean arithmetic     | 4.5-5     | 3.75-4.5 | 3-3.75 | 2-3 | Less than 2 |
| Relative importance | Very high | High     | Medium | Low | Very low    |

**Table 3. 2: Measurement of the Relative Importance of the Arithmetic Mean**

For the interviews, this study employs thematic analysis to interpret the qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews. According to Caulfield (2019), thematic the analysis strategy includes identifying, interpreting and reporting themes within the data. The analysis process followed several procedures including transcription for whic Intelligent Verbatim approach was used to transcribe the audio recordings which allows the researcher to enhance readability by removing speech fillers (e.g., 'um, 'ah) and maintaining the core ideas. The gained transcripts were read

and reread multiple times to increase familiarity with the content and gain in-depth understanding of data. Accordingly, initial codes were generated to address the interesting themes related to the study aims. Finally, the generated codes were collated, reviewed, defined, and refined into themes. With the assistance of MAXQDA software, the final qualitative data were managed and analysed. Following Marjaei, Yazdi and Chandrashekara (2019), MAXQDA software facilitates the exploration of text-based data and the theoretical interpretation of a phenomena.

Both quantitative and qualitative data findings were integrated in line with the convergent design across the final procedures of analysis. This involved comparing and contrasting between the final results from SPSS analysis (QUAN) and the identified themes from the thematic analysis (qual). In particular, the (qual) data analysis was used to gain deeper contextual understanding of the statistical finding from the revealed quantitative data.

### 3.8. Validity and Reliability of Data

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated in order to ensure the internal consistency of the questionnaire's scales. A pilot study was conducted on a portion of responses (N=10; See Table 3.4 for more details). According to Isaac and Michael (1995) and Perneger et al (2015), the use of the tests N=30 is sufficient for estimating reliability. George and Mallery (2003) simplified the rules that were used for analysis. (See Table 3.3).

| The Grade.   | Percent |
|--------------|---------|
| Excellent    | .9      |
| Good         | .8      |
| Acceptable   | .7      |
| Poor         | .6      |
| Unacceptable | .5      |

**Table 3.3: Rules of Cronbach Alpha Interpretation**



**Table 3.4 shows the Cronbach's alpha test results are as follows:**

| Scale                                       | Cronbach's Alpha | Number of Items |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Reading Difficulties                        | .756             | 10              |
| Factors Cause Reading Difficulties          | .821             | 10              |
| Reading Strategies and Techniques Awareness | .833             | 10              |
| Total                                       | .803             | 30              |

**Table 3.4: Results of Cronbach's Alpha Test**

The results of the Cronbach's alpha test show that all variables were above (0.7), which is the threshold for reliability. The Cronbach's alpha for the first axis (Reading Difficulties) is (0.756) which is Good, while the second axis (Factors Cause Reading Difficulties) is (0.821), and the third axis (Reading Strategies and Techniques Awareness) is (0.833), which are Good. Therefore, it is clear that the Cronbach coefficient for the total items of the questionnaire reached 0.803, which is a good value. This indicates that there is a significant internal consistency among the items of the questionnaire. Thus, it is possible to rely on the results of the questionnaire, its stability its credibility and its ability to reach and achieve the goals of the study.

To ensure that the questionnaire items were developed and enhanced based on the literature review for validity, relevance, clarity and comprehensiveness, it was reviewed by the researcher's supervisor and other experts in the field of study.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative data gained from the semi-structured interviews, specific procedures were followed including triangulation by contrasting the interviews' findings with the questionnaire data and the use of direct quotes from the participants' responses to support the thematic analysis credibility, which provides sufficient detailed description for the qualitative data.

### **3.9. Ethical Considerations**

In this study, ethical issues were taken into consideration throughout the research process. Before collecting data, all participants were informed about the study purpose, potential benefits, and their right to withdraw at any stage by providing them

with a written statement in the questionnaire. Consent was also obtained verbally during the qualitative data collection procedure before starting each interview. While the anonymity of the questionnaire was ensured for the respondents, the confidentiality of the interviews was guaranteed by using codes and pseudonyms during the transcription phase. In addition, the data was stored in a secured computer where it was accessed by the researcher only. Finally, participation in the study was completely voluntary for both the questionnaire and interviews.

### **3.10. Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter presented the research methodology adopted in this study, including the research philosophy that guided the employment of the convergent design (QUAN) + (qual), and the quantitative data collection via a closed-ended questionnaire (47). This is in addition to the qualitative data collection via the (5) semi-structured interviews with a detailed justification for the chosen tools. For the data analysis, the researcher used SPSS for the quantitative data and thematic analysis using MAXQDA software for the qualitative data. Relevant ethical issues were also taken into consideration.

## **Chapter Four:**

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

## 4.1 Introduction

The current chapter analyzes the study data and presents the research findings. The chapter analyzes the primary data collected via both quantitative and qualitative methods focusing on the academic reading difficulties, the potential factors behind them and the students' awareness of the reading strategies. 47 participants have answered the quantitative questionnaire, and 5 participants from the questionnaire pool were engaged in the semi-structured interviews. Statistical insights into academic reading difficulties and strategies provided in-depth understanding of and richer perspectives on the EFL student's challenges and experiences. In addition, the validity and reliability of the results were enhanced by the triangulation of the analysis of both types of data. Also, relevant theories such as the Cognitive Theory, Sociocultural Theory, Metacognitive Theory and Schema Theory were integrated into the analysis process to interpret the data and reach the findings.

### 4.1. Questionnaires Findings

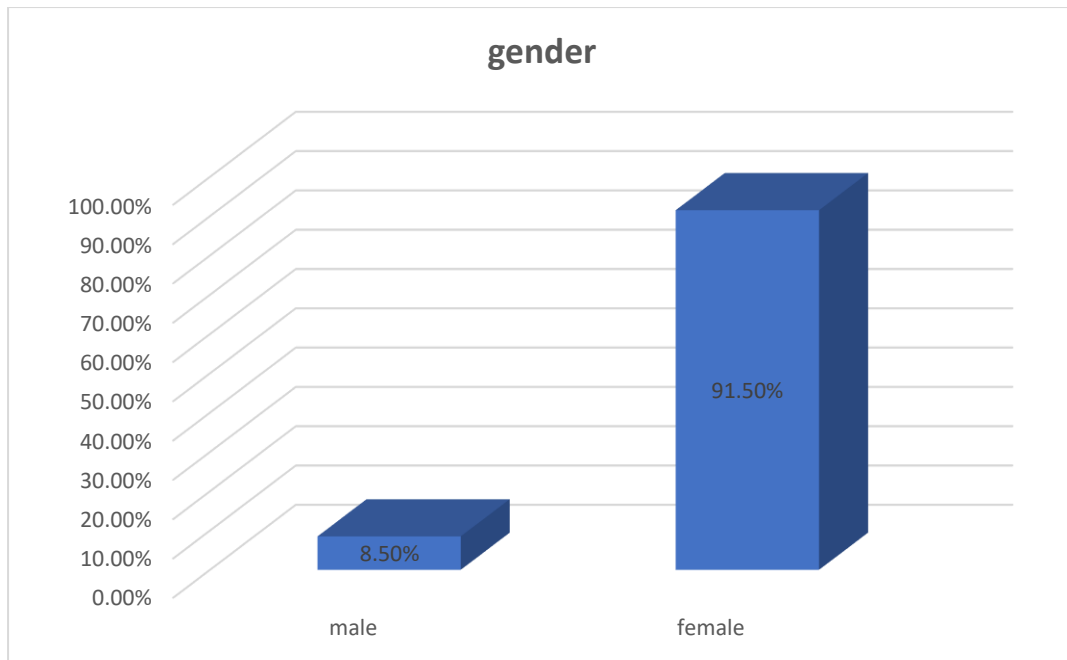
The data collected using the questionnaire was analyzed by the use of both descriptive statistics, including means, derivations and frequencies, and inferential statistics involving Normality tests, T-tests and reliability analysis. The analysis process was accomplished by the use of SPSS software.

#### 4.1.1 Demographics

47 EFL postgraduate students in the English Department were chosen to participate and the majority of the students (91.5%) were females, whereas 8.5% of them were males, as illustrated below:

| Variable | No | Percent |
|----------|----|---------|
| Males    | 4  | %8.5    |
| Females  | 43 | %91.5   |
| Total    | 47 | 100%    |

**Table 4.1: Gender**

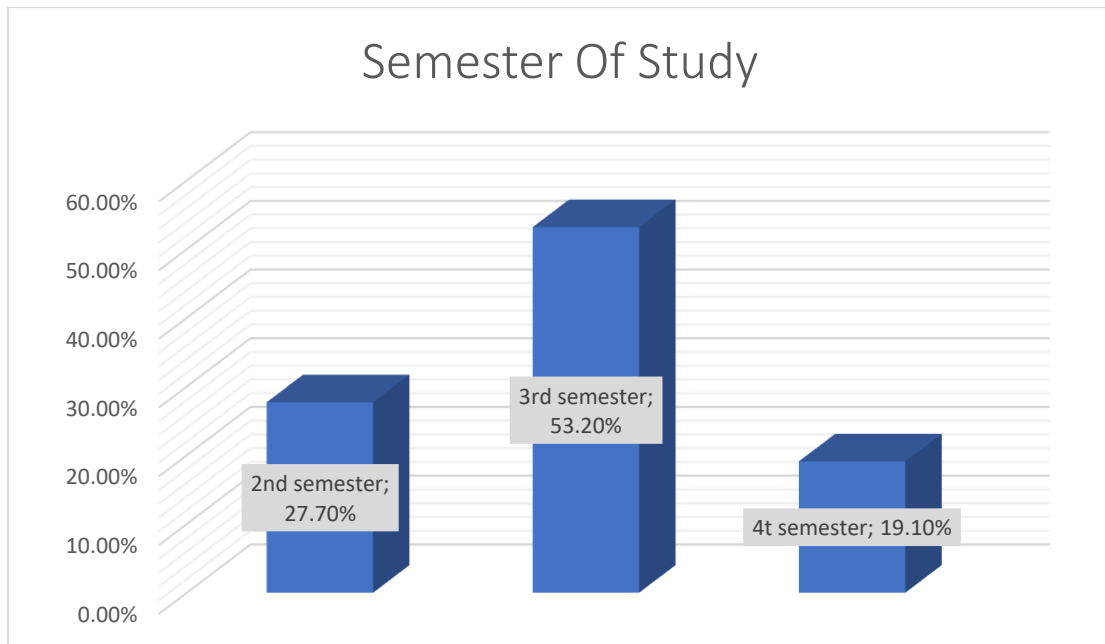


**Figure 4. 1: Gender**

The participants were from different study levels, but the majority were in the 3<sup>rd</sup> semester i.e., 53.2%. Students who were in the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester comprised 27.7%, while 19.1% were in the 4<sup>th</sup> semester, as indicated in Table 4.2 and Figure 4.2 below:

| Variable                 | No.       | Percent     |
|--------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester | 13        | 27.7%       |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> Semester | 25        | 53.2%       |
| 4 <sup>th</sup> Semester | 9         | 19.1%       |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>47</b> | <b>100%</b> |

**Table 4.2: Semester of Study**



**Figure 4. 2: Semester Of Study**

Furthermore, Cronbach's alpha test was calculated to measure the validity of the questionnaire scales. It revealed good reliability for the Academic Reading Difficulties section, which scored ( $\alpha=0.756$ ), Factors Causing Reading Difficulties section, which scored ( $\alpha=0.821$ ), and lastly, the Reading Strategies and Technique Awareness section, which scored ( $\alpha=0.833$ ). Table 4.4. shows these results:

| Cronbach's Alpha | No. of Items |
|------------------|--------------|
| 0.756            | 11           |

Reading difficulties

| Cronbach's Alpha | No. of Items |
|------------------|--------------|
| 0.821            | 11           |

Factors Causing Reading Difficulties

| Cronbach's Alpha | No. of Items |
|------------------|--------------|
| 0.833            | 12           |

Reading Strategies and Techniques Awareness

**Table 4.3; Reliability Statistics**

The data for the three aspects including Reading Difficulties, Factors Causing Difficulties and Reading Strategies Awareness followed a normal distribution as the Smirnov-Kolmogorov test (S-K) indicated. The results presented in Table 4.5 show that the probability value (Sig) is greater than the significance level of 0.05, and thus the data distribution for these dimensions follows the normal distribution, as parametric tests were used to load the data and test the study hypotheses. This justifies the use of parametric test such as T-test. See Table 4.3 below for details:

| <b>Axes</b>                                 | <b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b> |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Reading Difficulties                        | .200*                  |
| Factors Cause Reading Difficulties          | .200*                  |
| Reading Strategies and Techniques Awareness | .195*                  |

**Table 4.3: Results of the normal distribution test for the quantitative data**

#### **4.4: Reading Difficulties**

Below is Table 4.4 which presents the analysis of the academic reading difficulties among the Libyan EFL postgraduate students in the English Department at the University of Zawia:

| <b>The Items</b>                                                                   | <b>Mean</b> | <b>Standard<br/>Deviation</b> | <b>Relative<br/>importance</b> | <b>Arrangement</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| I struggle to get the key ideas in academic materials.                             | 2.93        | 1.308                         | Low                            | 10                 |
| I find it difficult to comprehend complex vocabulary.                              | 3.44        | 1.265                         | Medium                         | 3                  |
| I face difficulties to understand academic terminology which are unfamiliar.       | 3.65        | .938                          | Medium                         | 2                  |
| I find it quite challenging to understand when reading long and complex materials. | 3.21        | 1.301                         | Medium                         | 7                  |
| I struggle to understand text contexts which are culturally different for me.      | 3.38        | 1.376                         | Medium                         | 4                  |

| The Items                                                                                                      | Mean | Standard Deviation | Relative importance | Arrangement |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| It is complicated for me when trying to understand the critical meaning and analyse academic materials.        | 3.29 | 1.365              | Medium              | 5           |
| English texts' style and formation are not common to me.                                                       | 2.63 | 1.325              | Low                 | 11          |
| It is difficult to infer theoretical and practical ideas provided in the academic materials.                   | 3.27 | 1.036              | Medium              | 6           |
| I frequently reread academic materials to understand the overall meaning.                                      | 3.82 | 1.028              | High                | 1           |
| It is hard to manage time while reading.                                                                       | 3.12 | 1.328              | Medium              | 9           |
| I cannot understand the correlation between the writer's argument and the supporting ideas within the content. | 3.14 | 1.382              | Medium              | 8           |
| Total                                                                                                          | 3.27 | 1.241              | Medium              |             |

**Table 4.4: Analysis of Reading Difficulties**

The above-mentioned results show that it is clear that the degree of agreement with the statements as a whole is at an agreement rate, as the general arithmetic mean for the axis reached (3.27). The items were arranged in a descending order according to the agreement of the study sample members as follows:

- 1- The statement **(I frequently reread academic materials to understand the overall meaning)** was ranked first in terms of the study sample members' agreement with a High importance and an average of (3.82). It indicates that the students struggle with initial comprehension challenges leading them to read multiple times.
- 2- The statement **(I face difficulties to understand academic terminology which are unfamiliar)** was ranked second in terms of the study sample members' agreement with a Medium importance, and an average of (3.65), showing that unfamiliar terminology is a major reading difficulty among the students.



- 3- The statement (**I find it difficult to comprehend complex vocabulary**) was ranked third in terms of the study sample members' agreement with a Medium importance and an average of (3.44). Therefore, complex vocabulary poses a significant obstacle for the participants.
- 4- The statement (**I struggle to understand text' contexts which are culturally different for me**) was ranked fourth in terms of the study sample members' agreement with a Medium importance and an average of (3.38), revealing that cultural differences affect students' reading comprehension.
- 5- The statement (**It is complicated to me when trying to understand the critical meaning and to analyse academic materials**) was ranked fifth in terms of the study sample members' agreement with a Medium importance and an average of (3.29), indicating that critical analysis remains as a barrier for students.
- 6- The statement (**It is difficult to infer theoretical and practical ideas provided in the academic materials**) was ranked sixth in terms of the study sample members' agreement with a Medium importance and an average of (3.27). This shows that linking the theoretical and practical ideas in a text is difficult for the participants.
- 7- The statement (**I find it quite challenging to understand when reading long and complex materials**) was ranked seventh in terms of the study sample members' agreement with a Medium importance and an average of (3.21), revealing that students' academic reading is affected by the length and the complexity of the materials.
- 8- The statement (**I cannot understand the correlation between the writer's argument and the supporting ideas within the content**) was ranked eighth in terms of the study sample members' agreement with a Medium importance and an average of (3.14). This shows that understanding the structure of argumentation texts is also a barrier for the students.
- 9- The statement (**It is hard to manage time while reading**) was ranked ninth in terms of the study sample members' agreement with a Medium importance, and an average of (3.12), revealing that during their reading, the EFL postgraduate students struggle to manage their time.
- 10- The statement (**I struggle to get the key ideas in academic materials**) was ranked tenth in terms of the study sample members' agreement with a Low importance and

an average of (2.93), indicating that despite the fact that this item scored a low rank, inferring main ideas still poses some difficulty.

11- The statement **(English texts' style and formation are not common to me)** was ranked eleventh in terms of the study sample members' agreement with a Low importance and an average of (2.63). This shows that unfamiliar texts' structure still poses a difficulty even though it was the lowest agreed item.

## 4.5 Factors Causing Difficulties

The potential factors that cause academic reading difficulties for Libyan EFL postgraduate students in the English Department at the University of Zawia are detailed as follows:

| The Items                                                                                                                              | Mean | Standard Deviation | Relative importance | Arrangement |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| My capability to enhance my academic reading skills are affected by the shortage of institutional resources like workshops, and texts. | 3.95 | .977               | High                | 1           |
| My early education concentrated only on traditional approaches (e. g. repetition, memorization) more than reading comprehension.       | 3.36 | 1.451              | Medium              | 5           |
| I rely on my first language to translate English texts which affects my ability to interact with them.                                 | 3.36 | 1.292              | Medium              | 5           |
| My ability to Comprehend academic materials is affected by the shortage of vocabulary instruction.                                     | 3.59 | 1.191              | Medium              | 3           |
| The complexity of academic texts leads me to be less motivated to read them.                                                           | 3.59 | 1.345              | Medium              | 3           |
| I find it difficult to read unfamiliar Western custom materials e. g. debates, dialogues, and citation practices.                      | 3.34 | 1.355              | Medium              | 6           |
| I find it difficult to access academic free materials on the internet in order to read them.                                           | 2.89 | 1.492              | Low                 | 8           |

| The Items                                                                                                                 | Mean | Standard Deviation | Relative importance | Arrangement |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| The lack of institutional training and workshops in my university impacts my reading abilities.                           | 3.65 | 1.339              | Medium              | 2           |
| Unwell structured texts on the internet exacerbates my ability to read and understand academic materials.                 | 3.42 | 1.057              | Medium              | 4           |
| I lack self-confidence in my reading abilities which leads me to avoid reading complex materials.                         | 2.61 | 1.171              | Low                 | 9           |
| The lack of institutional instructions and the academic expectations to read independently affect my reading proficiency. | 3.12 | 1.312              | Medium              | 7           |
| Total                                                                                                                     | 3.35 | 1.271              | Medium              |             |

**Table 4.5: Analysis of Factors Cause Reading Difficulties**

It is clear from the results shown above that the degree of agreement with the statements as a whole is at an agreement rate, as the general arithmetic mean for the axis reached **(3.35)**. The items were arranged in a descending order according to the agreement of the study sample members as follows:

- 1- The statement **(My capability to enhance my academic reading skills are affected by the shortage of institutional resources like workshops and texts)** was ranked first in terms of the study sample members' agreement with a High importance and an average of (3.95), indicating that the main factor that causes academic reading difficulties is the lack of resources.
- 2- The statement **(The lack of institutional training and workshops in my university impacts my reading abilities)** was ranked second in terms of the study sample members' agreement with a Medium importance and an average of (3.65), showing that the limitation of academic reading training programs is a significant factor.
- 3- The statement **(My ability to Comprehend academic materials is affected by the shortage of vocabulary instruction)** and **(The complexity of academic texts**

**leads me to be less motivated to read them)** were both ranked third in terms of the study sample members' agreement with a Medium importance and an average of (3.59). Thus, revealing that ineffective vocabulary instruction and academic texts' structures are significant factors that demotivate the students' academic reading.

- 4- The statement **(Unwell structured texts on the internet exacerbate my ability to read and understand academic materials)** was ranked fourth in terms of the study sample members' agreement with a Medium importance and an average of (3.42). This indicates that poorly structured online texts remain as a factor affecting reading comprehension.
- 5- The statements **(My early education concentrated only on traditional approaches (e. g. repetition, memorization) more than reading comprehension)** and **(I rely on my first language to translate English texts which affects my ability to interact with them)** were ranked fifth in terms of the study sample members' agreement with a Medium importance and an average of (3.36). This means that prior education and reliance on L1 in translation impact students' academic reading abilities.
- 6- The statement **(I find it difficult to read unfamiliar Western custom materials e. g. debates, dialogues, and citation practices))** was ranked sixth in terms of the study sample members' agreement with a Medium importance and an average of (3.34). This reveals that the limitation of exposure into English customs is also a significant factor affecting academic reading proficiency.
- 7- The statement **(The lack of institutional instruction and the academic expectations to read independently affect my reading proficiency)** was ranked seventh in terms of the study sample members' agreement with a Medium importance and an average of (3.12). This indicates other factor which are lack of guidance and academic expectations.
- 8- The statement **(I find it difficult to access academic free materials on the internet in order to read them)** was ranked eighth in terms of the study sample members' agreement with a Low importance and an average of (2.89). Despite the low rank, the difficulty to access free online materials is still a factor which impacts academic reading proficiency.

- 9- The statement **(I lack of self-confidence in my reading abilities which leads me to avoid reading complex materials)** was ranked ninth in terms of the study sample members' agreement with a Low importance and an average of (2.61). This indicates that the lack of confidence was the least agreed factor that might cause reading difficulties for these students.

#### 4.6 Awareness of Reading Strategies and Techniques

The students' awareness of academic reading strategies is examined in table 10 below:

| The Items                                                                                            | Mean | Standard Deviation | Relative importance | Arrangement |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| I frequently apply reading strategies like skimming and scanning.                                    | 3.89 | 1.107              | High                | 5           |
| I use reading strategies actively such as summarizing and highlighting while I read academically.    | 4.06 | .791               | High                | 4           |
| I can guess the text's main ideas by reading headings and sub-titles.                                | 3.80 | 1.013              | High                | 6           |
| I often use online tools and dictionaries to comprehend new vocabulary.                              | 4.19 | .900               | High                | 1           |
| I already have got formal education on reading strategies during my early levels of learning.        | 3.29 | 1.283              | Medium              | 9           |
| Using reading strategies and techniques enhances my reading skills to understand academic materials. | 4.08 | .951               | High                | 3           |
| After reading I summarize what I read to increase my understanding of the main ideas.                | 4.10 | 1.088              | High                | 2           |
| I try to classify long sentences into small parts to make them better to understand.                 | 3.78 | 1.102              | High                | 7           |
| I frequently use translator applications on the internet to simplify difficult sections.             | 3.89 | .914               | High                | 5           |

| The Items                                                                                           | Mean | Standard Deviation | Relative importance | Arrangement |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| I write notes while reading academic materials to help me in understanding and retention.           | 3.78 | 1.082              | High                | 7           |
| I ask for help from my teacher, partners or a native speaker to understand complex texts.           | 2.91 | 1.426              | Low                 | 10          |
| I skip unfamiliar vocabulary if they are not necessary to understand the whole meaning of the text. | 3.31 | 1.384              | Medium              | 8           |
| Total                                                                                               | 3.76 | 1.087              | High                |             |

**Table 4.6 Analysis of Reading Strategies and Techniques Awareness**

According to the results shown above, it is clear that the degree of agreement with the statements as a whole is at an agreement rate, as the general arithmetic mean for the axis reached (3.76). The items were arranged in a descending order according to the agreement of the study sample members to reveal the most frequently used reading strategies as follows:

- 1- The phrase **(I often use online tools and dictionaries to comprehend new vocabulary)** was ranked first in terms of the study sample members' agreement with a High Importance and an average of (4.19), thus indicating that the most common strategy used by students is the use of digital tools to comprehend new vocabulary.
- 2- The phrase **(After reading I summarize what I read to increase my understanding of the main ideas)** was ranked second in terms of the study sample members' agreement with a High Importance and an average of (4.10). revealing that post-reading summarizing is often used as a strategy.
- 3- The phrase **(Using reading strategies and techniques enhances my reading skills to understand academic materials)** was ranked third in terms of the study sample members' agreement with a High Importance and an average of (4.08). A strong belief among the students is that reading strategies are helpful.

- 4- The phrase **(I use reading strategies actively such as summarizing and highlighting while I read academically)** was ranked fourth in terms of the study sample members' agreement with a High Importance and an average of (4.06), indicating that active reading strategies like summarizing and highlighting are commonly used.
- 5- The phrase **(I frequently apply reading strategies like skimming and scanning)** and **(I frequently use translator applications on the internet to simplify difficult sections)** were ranked fifth in terms of the study sample members' agreement with High Importance and an average of (3.89). Thus, revealing that cognitive strategies such as skimming and scanning, and the use of translator applications for difficult section are also commonly used.
- 6- The phrase **(I can guess the text's main ideas by reading headings and sub-titles)** was ranked sixth in terms of the study sample members' agreement with High Importance and an average of (3.80). Thus, using the text headlines in predicting main ideas is also a commonly used strategy.
- 7- The phrases **(I try to classify long sentences into small parts to make them easier to understand)** and **(I write notes while reading academic materials to help me in understanding and retention)** were ranked seventh in terms of the study sample members' agreement with High Importance and an average of (3.78). This reveals that chunking sentences and note-taking during reading were also frequently used strategies.
- 8- The phrase **(I skip unfamiliar vocabulary if they are not necessary to understand the whole meaning of the text)** was ranked eighth in terms of the study sample members' agreement with a Medium Importance and an average of (3.31). Thus, new/non-essential vocabulary is commonly skipped.
- 9- The phrase **(I already have got formal education on reading strategies during my early levels of learning)** was ranked ninth in terms of the study sample members' agreement with Medium Importance and an average of (3.29). indicating that some but not all students were engaged in formal strategy training during their early education.
- 10- The phrase **(I ask for help from my teacher, partners or a native speaker to understand complex texts)** was ranked tenth in terms of the study sample

members' agreement with Low Importance and an average of (2.91). This reveals that asking for help from others is the least employed strategy.

#### 4.7 One-Sample T-Test (inferential statistics)

To test the validity of the study hypothesis, a t-test was conducted to compare the average of the variables with the hypothetical average, which equals (3).

| Test Value = 3                                    |      |        |    |                    |                    |                                                 |       |
|---------------------------------------------------|------|--------|----|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------|
| Axes                                              | Mean | T      | df | Sig.<br>(2-tailed) | Mean<br>Difference | 95% Confidence<br>Interval of the<br>Difference |       |
|                                                   |      |        |    |                    |                    | Lower                                           | Upper |
| Reading difficulties                              | 3.27 | 3.209  | 46 | .002               | .26886             | .1002                                           | .4375 |
| Factors cause<br>reading difficulties             | 3.36 | 3.642  | 46 | .001               | .35783             | .1601                                           | .5556 |
| Reading strategies<br>and techniques<br>awareness | 3.76 | 10.466 | 46 | .000               | .76241             | .6158                                           | .9090 |

**Table 4.7: T-test for study axes**

Table 4.9 shows that the actual/real arithmetic mean of the first axis: Reading difficulties was (3.27) and the significance level was (.002). The arithmetic mean of the second axis: Factors cause reading difficulties was (3.36), and the significance level was (.001). Also, the arithmetic mean of the third axis: Reading strategies and techniques awareness was (3.76), and the significance level was (.000). It is greater than the hypothetical arithmetic mean, which is (3), and this indicates that the majority of the respondents' answers tend towards approval, and this confirms the existence of a statistical significance for these variables. This enhances the direction of approval, and thus the study hypotheses were accepted.

#### 4.8 Results of Interviews

As mentioned before, five participants were involved in semi-structured interviews to gather in-depth perspectives about their academic reading experiences.



Several themes related to difficulties and strategies were disclosed by the thematic analysis. The analysis integrates theories, such as; Cognitive Theory (Sweller,1988), Metacognitive Theory (Flavell,1979), Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and Schema Theory (Bartlett, 1932). These theories indicate insights to the difficulties encountered by EFL students when they read academically, as well as their prior knowledge and the strategies and techniques they apply to make their reading more effective.

The qualitative results are based on data collected via interview from five students. The participants were organized and presented in an alphabetical classification: A-B-C-D, and D. The analysis shows that those students encounter some difficulties when they read academic texts indicating some factors behind those difficulties. Some of the students showed awareness of reading techniques and strategies while others did not. The majority of students mentioned some comprehension issues such as understanding sentences with complex structure, abstract concepts, time management issues and identifying main ideas when they are not placed in the expected place.

### **Theme 1: Complex Sentence Structures and Abstract Concepts**

Difficulties such as complex sentence structures and abstract concepts were frequently reported by the participants. Student A pinpointed "*comprehending complex sentence structure and abstract words, and identifying the main ideas which made it hard for me to get abstract concepts*". This indicates that the level of sentence complexity obstructs the understanding of abstract academic concepts. The same with student B when he cited "*trouble in understanding complex academic texts and long complicated sentences*". For both students A and student B writings with complex syntactic sentences are much more complicated than simple texts. This linguistic characteristic directly hinders their ability to identify the main arguments. Student A also elaborated "*main idea is hard to get when you read long texts*", causing a difficulty to extract key ideas from complex academic materials. Complex structures, coupled with long sentences increase the demand of cognitive load and exacerbates identifying the main ideas.

## **Theme 2: Lexical Barriers (Vocabulary and Terminology)**

Vocabulary and technical terminology are other challenges encountered by EFL postgraduate students in the English Department. They were mentioned consistently during the interviews. Student D described facing *"very complex vocabulary that I have never seen"* and cited *"specialized terminology that could be unknown"* as a major barrier. The lexical difficulties mentioned by her are not only about unfamiliar vocabulary; they are directly related to the overall understanding which impedes her engagement with academic texts. She also added that *"confusion, losing my concentration and lose time"* highlights a chain effect where terminology and unfamiliar vocabulary reduce concentration and waste valuable reading time. Even for experienced English teachers such as student E as she claimed, advanced vocabulary occurs to be a significant barrier. Student E admitted: *"academic reading can be very confusing for me. To be precise, understanding main ideas, terminology and complex vocabulary"*, highlighting that proficiency in English, academic terminology (specific-jargon) stood to be a comprehension difficulty at postgraduate level. For student B, new vocabulary and terminology make it *"hard to find the main point and I often have to stop and look up for the meanings of these, which breaks my focus"*. This reveals the immediate effect of lexical difficulties on reading flow and concentration.

Regarding reading strategies, the students gave different responses. While students A and C claimed that they use some reading strategies and techniques to understand the new words meaning, such as "guessing", students B, D and E pointed out that they struggle to understand unfamiliar vocabulary which leads them to rely on translation.

## **Theme 3: Identifying Main Ideas and Sentence-Level Comprehension**

The difficulties encountered by the EFL postgraduate students in academic reading extended into more than individual vocabulary items and sentences to higher level tasks including identification of main ideas. As described by Student A, cognitive load occurred due to the position of topic sentences within academic texts. The student explained that *"the topic sentence is not the first sentence... it might be the second or third, which makes me confused because this is not what I get used to when I read a novel"*, which is different from what she expects. This leads the student to actively search for the main ideas whether they are located in the initial sentences as in simple

structured texts or in any other position as it might be in more complex academic texts. In the same line, Student D also highlights this issue by reporting that she might perceive *"more than one main idea because the information I read seems to be important"*. This makes her overwhelmed by too much details leading to struggle to decide which is the topic sentence and which is the supporting one. The student claims that this over focus on details makes her *"concentrate on unnecessary details which makes me confused"*.

#### **Theme 4: Cognitive and Metacognitive Difficulties**

Cognitive strain tends to be a fundamental academic reading difficulty, it is coupled with emotions and experiences. For instance, confusion, which is an emotional barrier has been mentioned multiple times during the interviews. Student A reported *"sometimes it is confusing, and complexing. It is hard for me also"*. This goes in line with Student E who considers academic reading as *"very confusing"*. This indicates that this emotion (i.e., confusion) is directly caused by complex academic texts, thus, confusion contributes to cognitive fatigue. Student B acknowledges that *"difficult texts wore me out"*. The student also reported: *"I have to work hard to understand complicated sentences and abstract ideas, and that made me tired and lowered my overall comprehension"*. Thus, over cognitive load due to the complexity of linguistic patterns and unfamiliar words makes EFL postgraduate students exhausted and decrease their reading effectiveness. Student D admitted that she felt *"confused...losing my concentration and losing time"*. Thus, revealing an exhausting pattern of confusion which causes more cognitive struggling. For Student D also, cognitive reading strategies such as skimming might form negative feelings. She said: *"very confusing...strategy is the best for me as it saves time and cannot make me confused...some words and sentences that will make me confused and feel unconfident"*. Thus, she describes a feeling of anxiety about the effectiveness of the reading strategy she applies: whether it helps or exacerbates her comprehension.

#### **Theme 5: Time Management**

The interviews showed that time management is a critical barrier for the EFL postgraduate students. Student B expressed his struggling with time saying: *"very tricky question"*, confessing *"trouble in managing my time"*, and the useless tendency to *"waste my time on re-reading"*. Student E reported that *"managing my time when I read*

*for a purpose can be very struggling*", thus, relating time pressure to the need for reading carefully and re-reading. Thus, describing the matter as a *"time consuming process"*. As a result, time stress stands to be a deciding factor, expanding reading struggling into stress and anxiety and other reading challenges.

#### **Theme 6: Cultural Differences**

Based on the interview data, the cultural differences impede reading proficiency for these students. This goes in line with the Sociocultural Theory which stresses that the learning process is facilitated by culture and society. For example, Student A stated: *"when I read texts from a different culture its hard a lot, like different communication style between my culture and the culture of the writer which is not the same"*. This reveals that while these students are learning English as a foreign language, materials with different norms exacerbate their reading comprehension. The student added: *"it's hard to find how to communicate with my mind and the writer's mind"*. This is consistent with Student B who claimed that *"Cultural differences also make it worse"*. With Student B *"trying to understand the content itself, evaluating its arguments and looking for biases at the same time"*. This highlights the need for multiple techniques and high mental effort to understand academic texts structured according to the norms of a culture. This also relates to Student C when she pinpointed out that *"cultural differences between the author and I can really affect my reading comprehension negatively"*. Student D also shares the same idea stating that *"Cultural differences may influence reading because I am reading from someone who has a different perspective and culture"*. Finally, Student E claimed that *"the cultural differences between me and the author who wrote the text extremely affect my reading flow, as this difference cannot be overcome by understanding the written words only"*.

#### **Theme 7: Prior Education**

When the participants were asked if their prior knowledge had affected their reading abilities, different answers were given. Some of the students (A, B and C) claimed that it did not. At the same time, Students D and E claimed extremely the opposite. Student A said: *"Not at all, in fact my knowledge and everything I know in reading comprehension I got it from reading novels"*. Also, Student B when wondered: *"When I was in college, if I didn't learn some effective reading strategies how well I read now!"*, which shows a recognition of the value for prior knowledge. Student D

agreed with them when she said: *"Well, not that much"*. As a contradiction, student C said *"yes my prior knowledge... affect my reading ability negatively"*. Also, Student E agreed when she stated *" I will also say big yes"*. Students with little exposure to academic English texts encounter difficulties to process new materials, while those with better exposure can interact with new academic texts more efficiently.

### **Theme 8: Critical Thinking Requirements**

All the participants agreed that the level of the language and the critical thinking abilities they needed to understand the materials hinder their reading abilities. For instance, Student B said: *"Having to analyze the text critically at the same time also makes things tougher, because I'm trying to understand the content, evaluating arguments and looking for biases at the same time"*. Student D stated: *"with complexity of texts I always face a big problem..."*. Student E stated: *"comprehending the author's personal opinion which demands an advanced critical analysis can impede my reading process"*. The Cognitive load theory helps to explain this by suggesting that cognitive requirements can impede comprehension. The need to detect biases, process abstract concepts and analyze debates and arguments demands more cognitive strain which makes the reading process more complex. Student C stated: *"Well, not that much. I always try to guess the meanings from the text"*. The other participants responded negatively to this factor. For example, Student D reported: *"lack of vocabulary and reliance on translation are factors that affect my reading ability negatively"*. This goes in line with Student E when she responded: *"lack of vocabulary and the heavy reliance on translation cause big troubles to me"*.

### **Theme 9: Formal Training and Institutional Support**

All Students' responses reported that they were not involved in formal training and did not receive any institutional support, except student A. However, some of them said they had attended external reading workshops. They all believe that institutional support is required to develop their reading abilities. These findings are aligning with the Sociocultural Theory which suggests that sufficient learning processes can be achieved through guided training and instruction, group and peer interaction within a formal academic context. Student D said: *"No actually, I haven't attended any formal training before"*. She added: *"I believe they can be very useful because sometimes you don't know some specific steps that can help you to read, as they say "Practice makes*

*perfect". Student B said: "I did not have formal academic training but I have learned effective reading strategies by engaging in writing, research and workshops". He added: "workshops and access to resources are keys to be a better reader; workshops teach practical skills to understand difficult texts".*

Students face difficulties in understanding vocabulary that is relevant to the domains of the learner, the instructor, the textbook, and the classroom environment in connection with cultural context".

### **Theme 10: Students Awareness of Reading Strategies**

Based on the data collected from the interviews, the students showed a low level of awareness of the primarily cognitive reading strategies and techniques such as skimming, scanning and note-taking. In contrast, none of them mentioned any metacognitive strategies such as planning, monitoring and evaluation which are crucial for self-regulation. According to the Metacognitive Theory, these strategies are significant factors for academic reading success. Both Students A and B reported using dictionaries to understand unfamiliar vocabulary meanings. Student A said: *"I always check out my dictionary"*. Also, Student B overcomes the understanding of complex vocabulary *"by checking them in online dictionaries, and through context clues and glossaries"*. He also indicated applying more advanced techniques when he stated: *"I figure out what do these words mean based on how they are used in a sentence and I sometimes check out the roots and origins of these words"*. This highlights an active engagement with texts to improve his comprehension.

Note- taking is one of the mentioned strategies across the interviews. Student B mentioned using *"a mix of skimming, scanning and note-taking to read effectively"*, thus, revealing an integrated strategy method to interact actively with texts. Skimming and scanning are also reported by Student C as time saving strategies. She explained: *"If I am reading to obtain some information about specific topic only, I just use skimming. But if I am reading to answer some questions, I use scanning to save time"*. Student E explained her understanding of skimming when she said: *"I apply skimming to overview the materials which helps me to comprehend the main ideas. I also use scanning when I look for specific information"*. For Student D, scanning is viewed as a timesaver strategy ensuring *"scanning...saves time"*.

Contextual guessing helps to bridge lexical gaps. Student C stated: *"I overcome the difficulties by guessing the meanings from the text itself, words before and after"*. Student D also claimed to engage in *"reading the surrounding sentences and guess their meanings from the context"*. Although the heavy reliance on context indicates avoiding immediate use of dictionaries, it might reflect misunderstanding if the context is somehow unclear.

Peer-collaboration and help seeking for some participant seemed to be a valuable strategy. Student A explained that engaging actively with other peers can overcome reading difficulties. She said: *"I try to ask for help from someone who is more experienced than me "*. She added: *"I ask a friend about how to read more professionally"*. This strategy highlights the value of expert guidance and social learning. Which was not explicitly mentioned by other participants.

Based on the data collected from the interviews, the majority of the responses mentioned cognitive reading strategies only such as skimming, scanning and note-taking. The analysis of the interview data reveals that EFL postgraduate students in the English Department of The University of Zawia encounter significant difficulties when they read academically, especially in understanding complex sentence structures, abstract concepts, terminology, time management and identifying the main ideas. These issues are related to the cultural differences, complexity of texts, critical thinking requirements, prior education, lack of vocabulary, and the need for formal training and institutional support. While one student had previously engaged in a formal training program, the other students rely only on self-development of reading strategies and techniques. All the students believe that workshops and open academic resources can play a significant role in improving their reading proficiency. Addressing these difficulties and the factors causing them through structured training programs and open resources could help the EFL postgraduate students to develop more effective academic reading skills.

### **4.3. Summary of the Chapter**

The analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data and findings reveal that Libyan EFL postgraduate students in the English Department at the University of Zawia encounter multi-faceted difficulties when they read academic texts. The quantitative data analysis provided statistical levels of agreement related to difficulties like

comprehending terminology and complex vocabulary, rereading and critical thinking requirements. The chapter also addressed factors leading to academic reading difficulties such as text complexity, lack of institutional support, the need for training programs and reliance on L1 translation. For the reading strategies and techniques phase, although seeking help was less used, the students reported sufficient awareness and implementation of cognitive strategies like dictionary use, skimming, scanning note-taking.

The qualitative data and findings were based on semi-structured interviews, which highlighted the intensive impact of complex sentences structure, unfamiliar terminology, abstract concepts, cognitive load and cultural differences. Furthermore, students reported some academic reading difficulties such as identifying main ideas, meeting critical thinking requirements and managing reading time effectively. While the interviews revealed that students are aware of cognitive reading strategies, they lack awareness of metacognitive strategies.



## **Chapter Five:**

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

## **5.1 Introduction**

The current chapter interprets and discusses the study findings and contrasts them with relevant previous studies (See section 2.10) in alignment with existing relevant theories including Cognitive Theory, Metacognitive Theory, Sociocultural Theory and Schema Theory. Discussion in this chapter is guided by the answers to the study questions. Therefore, this chapter is structured accordingly to three main sections: academic reading difficulties encountered by EFL postgraduate students, the factors causing these difficulties and the students' awareness of reading strategies.

The study employed a mixed-method approach to triangulate the quantitative data gained from the questionnaires (N47) with the qualitative data collected from the semi-structured interviews (N=5). This study was aimed to gain a deep understanding of the EFL postgraduate students' difficulties, assumed factors and students' awareness of reading strategies. Each section is supported with the integration of the empirical findings, theoretical insights and literature review.

## **5.2 Academic Reading Difficulties**

The first objective of this study was to find out whether EFL postgraduate students encounter any academic reading difficulties, and to determine what are those factors. The findings of the study ensure that these difficulties are a common aspect of EFL students' academic context. The gathered quantitative data statistics showed significant agreement level contributing to academic reading (Mean=3.27; N (47) = 3.209,  $p = .002$ ), revealing that difficulties are significantly acknowledged.

- **Major Comprehension Difficulties**

The most clearly reported difficulty was the regular need to reread academic texts to comprehend their meanings (mean=3.82). This indicates challenges in the early processing and constructing of meanings effectively, leading to mental overload, which is also acknowledged in the qualitative phase through expressing cognitive fatigue during reading (See section 4.3.4).

- **Lexical Difficulties**

Difficulties including unfamiliar terminology (mean=3.65) and advanced vocabulary (mean=3.44) occurred as significant obstacles. This is aligned with the qualitative data findings that linked the lexical gap to inefficient time management, hindering reading fluency and leading to confusion (see section 4.3.2.). This goes in line with both Rashed (2016) (within the Libyan context) and Anwar & Sailuddin (2022) and Alghail & Mahfoodh (2016) (in the Asian context), who found out that vocabulary is a crucial difficulty for EFL students in academic reading.

- **Contextual and Cultural Issues**

The students noted that text contexts indicating different cultural insights which are differ from their own are challenging (Mean= 3.38). The interviews revealed that different communication styles and cultures impede reading comprehension (see section 4.3.6.). This is consistent with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which indicates that different cultures impede reading proficiency. The same is true also for Bartlett's (1932) Schema theory which assumes that discourse schemas and lack of relevant culture hinder comprehension.

- **Critical Thinking Requirements**

According to the quantitative data findings (Mean=3.29), analyzing academic texts critically appear to be one of the most significant difficulties that EFL postgraduate students encounter when reading, along with understanding how the authors' arguments are supported by evidence (Mean=3.13). Similar findings were gained from the qualitative data across the interviews (see section 4.3.8), aligning with Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory (1988) which asserts that academic reading tasks demand high mental processing (intrinsic cognitive load). Hadoud, (2020) and Ocnos (2021) also reveal concerns about the application of critical thinking in EFL contexts.

- **Text-Based and Time Management Difficulties**

The interviews findings indicate that quantitative data reveals that the the text length and complexity are challenging when reading academically (Mean=3.21) (see section 4.3.1). Moreover, reading time management exacerbates students' struggling as scored in the quantitative data (Mean=3.12). Similar findings gained from the

interviews revealed significant concerns with time management exacerbated by frequent rereading (see section 4.3.5.).

In conclusion, the answer to the first question of the study is affirmative. The Libyan EFL postgraduate students in the English Department at the University of Zawia encounter a set of academic reading difficulties including comprehension issues, cultural interpretation, lexical access, managing complex texts under time limitation and critical analysis.

### **5.3 Factors causing Academic Reading Difficulties**

The second objective of the current study was to address the potential factors contributing to academic reading difficulties. The overall findings revealed a significant agreement on various causative factors (Overall Mean=3.35), ( $t(47) = 3.642, p = .001$ ), leading towards a set of instructional, institutional, experiential and textual aspects.

- **Lack of Institutional Support**

Lack of resources such as workshops and access to sources was ranked as the highest factor contributing to institutional support. The quantitative data scored an agreement of (Mean=3.95) and (Mean=3.65) for the limitation of formal training in academic reading strategies. This is shown by the qualitative data finding which are revealed by students' descriptions of the need for guidance (See section 4.3.9.). This aligns with Hadoud's (2020) findings about the institutional obstacles in higher education in Libya and Sociocultural theory (1978) which highlights the mediated learning and scaffolding's crucial role.

- **Vocabulary Instruction**

Consistent with the lexical difficulties addressed by answering the first question of the current study, EFL students in the English Department perceived insufficient vocabulary guidance as a cause. The quantitative data score (Mean=3.59) aligns with Mare et al (2021) who found out that EFL postgraduate students' background did not supply them with the necessary vocabulary for this level of study. This highlights the need for pedagogical intervention focusing on vocabulary.

- **Text-Complexity**

The nature of academic texts and their complex structure arise as one of the factors that affect students' motivation negatively. The quantitative statistical findings score was (Mean=3.59), which aligns with *the high-intrinsic cognitive load* (Sweller 1988).

- **Prior Education**

The impact of the students' prior education that focused on traditional approaches such as repetition and memorizing was acknowledged by the students as a real factor scoring (Mean=3.36). Even though the qualitative insights were varied (see section 4.3.7.), the quantitative data findings align with Schema Theory (Bartlett, 1932) that early education might have not provided the necessary schematic knowledge for handling academic texts.

- **L1 Interference**

It was recognized that reliance on the readers' first language hinders students' interaction with English academic texts as illustrated by the quantitative data findings (Mean=3.36), i.e., is was a frequent sign of the second language gaps or poor schema.

- **Other Related Factors**

The quantitative data findings revealed that the limitation of exposure to Western academic contexts among EFL postgraduate students constitutes another factor that causes academic reading difficulties for them, with a score (Mean=3.34). Also, the unclear academic expectations related to independent reading proficiency are recognized as another causative factor (Mean=3.12). Thus, the answer to the second question of the study reveals initial factors that cause academic reading difficulties encompassing pedagogical issues (including access to resources and institutional support), instructional challenges (involving vocabulary and reading strategy training) as well as the impact of early education and first language interference.

## **5.4 Awareness and Use of Reading Strategies**

The third objective of this study was to address the awareness of reading strategies and techniques among the EFL postgraduate students and the extent of their implementation. The study findings indicate a strong self-awareness and

implementation of different academic reading strategies (Overall Mean=3.76); (47)=10.466,  $p = .000$ ). The awareness and use of the reading strategies is manifested as follows:

- **Dominance of Cognitive Strategies**

Based on the quantitative data findings, students noted regularly the utilization of cognitive strategies including the use of online instruments and dictionaries (Mean=4.19), post-reading summarizing (Mean=4.10), during reading summarizing (Mean=4.06), scanning and skimming (Mean=3.89), translator applications (Mean=3.89), context-guessing (Mean=3.80), breaking down sentences (Mean=3.78) and note taking (Mean=3.78). These findings were confirmed by the qualitative data results (see section 4.3.10) which align with Phakiti and Li (2011) who support the use of such strategies and techniques.

- **Reliance on Lexical Compensations**

The intensive use of dictionaries and translator applications demonstrates the lexical obstacles addressed by the first objective of the study and emphasizes the primary students' problem-solving strategies.

- **Metacognitive Regulation Gaps**

A crucial gap occurred despite the high reported awareness. The qualitative data findings revealed a limitation of clear discussion towards the metacognitive strategies which involve planning, self-monitoring and evaluation of the reader's own strategy (see section 4.3.10.). Confusion and anxiety were reported frequently although the use of common strategies (see section 4.3.4) suggests that the awareness only might not be enough for sufficient self-regulation. This aligns with Flavell (1979) who made a distinction between metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive regulation revealing that EFL students may need to plan, monitor and evaluate even though they know these strategies. This highlights a significant contrast with a related study in a similar context (Elmadwi & Shepherd 2014) that emphasizes the use of metacognitive strategy, pointing out potential differences in context or a gap between reported frequency and self-regulation skills.

- **Lack of Social-Strategy Use**

The lowest ranking strategy was seeking guidance from peers or instructors (Mean=2.91), revealing that the underuse of significant social learning sources aligns with the Sociocultural Theory. To sum up, despite the high awareness and utilization of cognitive reading strategies by the EFL postgraduate students their capacity for sufficient self-regulation (metacognitive) appeared less efficient. This gap may limit the overall sufficiency of their strategy implementation efforts in handling their academic reading challenges.

## **5.5. The Study Implications**

The previous triangulated findings reveal the following significant implications:

### **5.5.1. Pedagogical Implications**

Instructions should go further than basic understanding to handle the identified academic reading difficulties revealed by RQ1. This requires a sufficient intervention in terminology, advanced vocabulary, analysis of complex texts' structure, filling the gaps in critical thinking skills and techniques for overcoming cultural barriers. Finally, and most crucially is the promotion of self-regulation and metacognitive awareness (identifying the gap in RQ3) must be a priority, i.e., instructing the EFL postgraduate students in the English Department on how to plan, monitor and evaluate their own academic reading.

### **5.5.2. Institutional Implications**

The reported causative factor (lack of institutional support) identified in RQ2 points to a clear need for institutional intervention. Sufficient academic reading training programs should be employed by the University of Zawia such as workshops and courses. Furthermore, focusing on providing accessible relevant resources, reviewing the curriculum to include a systematic academic reading component in line with SCT that focuses on the importance of scaffolding. In this regard, Al-trabulsi (2024) pointed out that institutional development in academic reading training and assessment could be very useful.

### **5.5.3. Theoretical Implications**

The current study findings validate the effectiveness of using a combination of theoretical frameworks. The four combined theories illustrate how cognitive load constraints by Cognitive Load Theory (CLT), metacognitive processes by Metacognitive Theory, systematic gaps by Schema Theory and sociocultural context involving institutional support and cultural factors by Sociocultural Theory (SCT) interact to provide a comprehensive picture of the academic reading experiences of these EFL postgraduate students. Finally, the significant distinction between strategic awareness and metacognitive self-regulation highlights the need for further theoretical and empirical investigation.

### **5.6. Limitations of the Study**

The current study findings should be considered in view of some limitations including the restricted generalization due to the small study population and the emphasis on the institution only. Moreover, the majority of the participants were females and the actuality of the participants' behaviors might not be fully captured due to the emphasis on self-reported data. In addition, there might be slight errors in the optical character recognition data (OCR). Finally, the cross-sectional approach provides a fixed view only.

### **5.7. Suggestions for Further Research**

Elaborating on this study, further research could extend the range of samples involving several institutions using long-term approaches to monitor the developmental changes over time. Also, to adopt approaches that emphasize the process to examine the strategy implementation and self-regulated activities more closely. For instance, these might include think-aloud and eye-tracking. Also, to assess how effective specific interventions address the EFL postgraduate students' needs, explore teachers' insights and practices, address the correlation between strategy awareness and sufficient self-regulation, and lastly, link the academic reading difficulties and strategy awareness with the students' academic achievements.



## 5.8. Conclusion

The current study has identified the major factors contributing to the academic reading practices among the EFL postgraduate students in the English Department at the University of Zawia. It validated the existence of several difficulties including comprehension issues, critical thinking, vocabulary and cultural obstacles (RQ1) resulting from related factors (RQ2) involving lack of institutional support, insufficient instructional support and textual factors. Finally, the EFL postgraduate students reported a high level of awareness of cognitive reading strategies and their execution (RQ3), particularly for difficulties related to sufficient metacognitive regulation which occurred as a crucial gap.

Analyzing the study findings using theoretical perspectives indicates a correlation between internal students' factors, text-based requirements, and instructional and institutional context. The findings demonstrate the need for specific-pedagogical interventions related to lexical skills and self-regulation improvements along with effective institutional support to equip EFL postgraduate students with adequate accessible resources and pedagogical support. To conclude, identifying these significant multifaceted requirements is fundamental to empower Libyan EFL postgraduate students to handle the academic reading landscape demands for their overall academic progress.

## 5.9 Main Results:

- 1) There are difficulties in understanding academic materials, especially when dealing with complex vocabulary, unfamiliar terminology, and culturally different contexts. Long and detailed texts are particularly challenging, making it harder to grasp key ideas and overall meaning.
- 2) Analyzing critical meanings and connecting theoretical and practical ideas. Also, the structure and style of English academic texts are unfamiliar to some students, which adds to the difficulty of understanding the content effectively.
- 3) The students often need to reread materials multiple times, which affects their ability to manage reading time efficiently. Also, they struggle to identify the correlation between a writer's arguments and their supporting ideas, making comprehension and analysis even more challenging.

- 4) The ability to enhance academic reading skills is affected by a lack of institutional resources, such as workshops and instructional texts. The early education relied heavily on traditional methods like repetition and memorization rather than reading comprehension, which has limited the ability to engage deeply with academic materials.
- 5) The lack of vocabulary instruction and the complexity of academic texts lower the motivation to read. Also, the students struggle to understand unfamiliar Western cultural elements in academic writing, such as debates, dialogues, and citation practices.
- 6) Institutional factors also play a role in reading difficulties, as well as the absence of sufficient training and workshops at the university.
- 7) Various reading strategies are applied to enhance academic reading skills. Speed reading and scanning are often used such as summarizing key points, highlighting important details and breaking long sentences into smaller, more manageable chunks.
- 8) To better understand new vocabulary, online tools, dictionaries, and translation apps are often used. Formal instruction in reading strategies with helpful techniques helps to engage with academic material more effectively.
- 9) Support is sought when needed by asking teachers, peers, or native speakers for clarification on complex texts. After reading, summarizing the material is done to enhance comprehension. Together, these strategies improve the ability to engage with academic texts and enhance overall reading proficiency.

### **5.10 Recommendations:**

Based on the study results, the research recommends the following:

- 1) To enhance comprehension of academic materials, it is important to address challenges like complex vocabulary, unfamiliar terminology, and culturally different contexts.
- 2) Developing students' ability to analyze critical meanings and connect theoretical and practical ideas is essential for academic success. To achieve this, universities should focus on teaching the structure and style of academic texts.

- 3) To further improve comprehension, teaching students how to identify the correlation between a writer's arguments and supporting ideas will allow them to better understand the flow of content and its main points. These techniques can help reduce the need for repeated readings, enabling students to better manage their time and engage more deeply with texts.
- 4) To improve academic reading skills, universities need to provide more resources, such as reading workshops, instructional texts, and detailed reading guides.
- 5) Early education should emphasize reading comprehension techniques alongside traditional methods like repetition. Offering specialized reading programs at the university level will ensure that students are well equipped to engage with more complex academic materials and develop their reading proficiency.
- 6) Institutions should focus on expanding vocabulary instruction and offering materials that address the complexity of academic texts.
- 7) Providing support for understanding Western academic culture, including debates, dialogues, and citation practices, will help students better navigate unfamiliar content. Incorporating these elements into the curriculum will boost students' motivation to read and engage more fully with academic materials.

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## **Appendixes**

## **Appendix 1**

### **Questionnaire**

#### **An Investigation into Academic Reading Difficulties Encountered by EFL Postgraduate Students of the English Department at the University of Zawia**

Dear Participant, my name is Mohanad Mustafa Alswaee and I am a postgraduate student at the University of Zawia. I am currently conducting a study to understand the academic reading difficulties of postgraduate students in the English Department and their awareness of the academic reading strategies and techniques to overcome these difficulties. The purpose of this questionnaire is to understand the challenges post-graduate students in English Department at University of Zawia encounter in academic reading. By identifying and addressing these challenges, this study attempts to help administrators to improve the overall learning experience and provide better support for English Department students.

The questionnaire includes questions that require you to check the box corresponding to the option you choose. Please read each item carefully and select the appropriate option by checking the relevant box. Your honest and thoughtful feedback will help to paint a comprehensive picture of the challenges faced by postgraduate students, allowing administrators to develop effective strategies and support the system to resolve these difficulties. Your participation in this study is voluntary and your personal information will be highly protected.

Date \_\_/\_\_/2025

**Table1: Respondent's Personal Information:**

|                          |                                                                                                   |                                     |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Gender</b>            | <b>Male</b> <input type="radio"/>                                                                 | <b>Female</b> <input type="radio"/> |
| <b>Semester of study</b> | [ a,1 <sup>st</sup> b, 2 <sup>nd</sup> c, 3 <sup>rd</sup> d, 4 <sup>th</sup> e, 5 <sup>th</sup> ] |                                     |
| <b>Age</b>               | [23, 24 ,25 ,26 ,27 ,28 ,29 ,30 or older than 30...]                                              |                                     |

**Table2: Reading Difficulties**

| Item No. | Item                                                                                                      | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neuter | Strongly Disagree | Disagree |
|----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------|--------|-------------------|----------|
| 1        | I struggle to get the key ideas in academic materials.                                                    |                |       |        |                   |          |
| 2        | I find it difficult to comprehend complex vocabulary.                                                     |                |       |        |                   |          |
| 3        | I face difficulties to understand academic terminology which are unfamiliar.                              |                |       |        |                   |          |
| 4        | I find it quite challenging to understand when reading long and complex materials.                        |                |       |        |                   |          |
| 5        | I struggle to understand text' contexts which are culturally different for me.                            |                |       |        |                   |          |
| 6        | It is complicated to me when trying to understand the critical meaning and to analyze academic materials. |                |       |        |                   |          |
| 7        | English texts' style and formation are not common to me.                                                  |                |       |        |                   |          |
| 8        | It is difficult to interference theoretical and practical ideas which provided in the academic materials. |                |       |        |                   |          |
| 9        | I frequently reread academic materials to understand the overall meaning.                                 |                |       |        |                   |          |

|    |                                                                                                                |  |  |  |  |  |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| 10 | It is hard to manage time while reading.                                                                       |  |  |  |  |  |
| 11 | I cannot understand the correlation between the writer's argument and the supporting ideas within the content. |  |  |  |  |  |

**Table 3: Factors Causing Reading Difficulties**

| <b>Item No.</b> | <b>Item</b>                                                                                                                        | <b>Strongly Agree</b> | <b>Agree</b> | <b>Neuter</b> | <b>Strongly Disagree</b> | <b>Disagree</b> |
|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>1</b>        | My capability to enhance my academic reading skills are affected by the shortage of institutional resources like workshops, texts. |                       |              |               |                          |                 |
| <b>2</b>        | My early education concentrated on traditional approaches (e. g. repetition, memorization) more than reading comprehension.        |                       |              |               |                          |                 |
| <b>3</b>        | I rely on my first language to translate English texts which affects my ability to interact with them.                             |                       |              |               |                          |                 |
| <b>4</b>        | My ability to Comprehend academic materials is affected by the shortage of vocabulary instruction.                                 |                       |              |               |                          |                 |
| <b>5</b>        | The complexity of academic texts leads me to be less motivated to read them.                                                       |                       |              |               |                          |                 |
| <b>6</b>        | I find it difficult to read unfamiliar western custom materials, e. g. debates, dialogues. Citation practices.                     |                       |              |               |                          |                 |
| <b>7</b>        | I find it difficult to access academic free materials on the internet in order to read them.                                       |                       |              |               |                          |                 |
| <b>8</b>        | The lack of institutional training and workshops in my university impacts my reading abilities.                                    |                       |              |               |                          |                 |
| <b>9</b>        | Unwell structured texts on the internet exacerbates my ability to read and understand academic materials.                          |                       |              |               |                          |                 |

|           |                                                                                                                           |  |  |  |  |  |
|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| <b>10</b> | I lack self-confidence in my reading abilities which leads me to avoid reading complex materials.                         |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>11</b> | The lack of institutional instructions and the academic expectations to read independently affect my reading proficiency. |  |  |  |  |  |

**Table 4: Awareness of Reading Strategies and Techniques**

| Item No. | Item                                                                                                 | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neuter | Strongly Disagree | Disagree |
|----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------|--------|-------------------|----------|
| 1        | I frequently apply reading strategies like skimming and scanning.                                    |                |       |        |                   |          |
| 2        | I use reading strategies actively such as summarizing and highlighting while I read academically.    |                |       |        |                   |          |
| 3        | I can guess the text's main ideas by reading headings and sub-titles.                                |                |       |        |                   |          |
| 4        | I often use online tools and dictionaries to comprehend new vocabulary.                              |                |       |        |                   |          |
| 5        | I have already got formal education on reading strategies during my early levels of learning.        |                |       |        |                   |          |
| 6        | Using reading strategies and techniques enhances my reading skills to understand academic materials. |                |       |        |                   |          |
| 7        | After reading I summarize what I read to increase my understanding of the main ideas.                |                |       |        |                   |          |

|    |                                                                                                           |  |  |  |  |  |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| 8  | I try to restructure long sentences into small parts to make them better to understand.                   |  |  |  |  |  |
| 9  | I frequently use translator applications on the internet to simplify difficult sections.                  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 10 | I write notes while reading academic materials to help me understand and retain ideas.                    |  |  |  |  |  |
| 11 | I ask for help from my teacher, partners or a native speaker to understand complex texts.                 |  |  |  |  |  |
| 12 | I skip unfamiliar vocabulary items if they are not necessary to understand the whole meaning of the text. |  |  |  |  |  |

## Appendix 2

### Semi-Structured Interview

#### Interviews Schedule:

| Interview | Participant | Date                            | Time     | Location            |
|-----------|-------------|---------------------------------|----------|---------------------|
| 1         | Student A   | February 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2025 | 10.00 AM | University of Zawia |
| 2         | Student E   | February 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2025 | 11.30 AM | University of Zawia |
| 3         | Student C   | February 3 <sup>rd</sup> 2025   | 11.00 AM | University of Zawia |
| 4         | Student B   | February 3 <sup>rd</sup> 2025   | 11.45 AM | University of Zawia |
| 5         | Student D   | February 4th 2025               | 9.30 AM  | University of Zawia |

#### The Interview Questions

1. What are the difficulties you encounter when you reading academic texts, specifically in comprehending main ideas, terminology and vocabulary?
2. How do these items affect your reading comprehension: complexity of texts, cultural differences, or critical thinking requirements?
3. Do you encounter any difficulty in managing your reading time? If yes, how?
4. Do your prior education, vocabulary limitation and reliance on translation influence your reading ability? If so, how?
5. Does institutional support like workshops and access to resources play a crucial role in your reading development? If yes, how?
6. What reading strategies do you frequently use, e.g., skimming, scanning and note-taking, and how do they affect your reading process?
7. Have you ever been involved in a formal training on academic reading strategies? If so, how they helped you?
8. How do you overcome complex vocabulary and complex sentences in academic texts?

#### Interviews Transcription

##### Simi-structured interview: (1)



**Study title: "An Investigation into academic reading Difficulties encountered by EFL postgraduate students in English Department at University of Zawia"**

**Interviewer: Mohanad Mustafa Alswaee Abdul-Mageed**

**Interviewee: Student A**

**Date of interview: February 1<sup>st</sup> 2025**

**Location: University of Zawia**

**Introduction:**

Hello miss Student A and thank you very much for accepting to engage in this interview. As you know this research is about investigating academic reading difficulties that you may encounter as a postgraduate student in English department at University of Zawia, I would like to ensure that your responses will be kept confidential and used for the purposes of this study only. Also, I assure you that you can withdraw at any time and avoid answering any question if you don't feel relaxed. Do you have any question before starting?

**Student A:** I'm so happy to participate and learn how to interview people and collect data, and I wish you the best.

**Interviewer:** Thank you. So, the first question: can you please introduce your academic background and field of study?

**Student A:** I'm a postgraduate student in my second semester in English Department at the University of Zawia.

**Interviewer:** In the first section, we will talk about academic reading difficulties

Miss Student A,

**What are the difficulties you encounter when you read academic texts, specifically in comprehending main ideas, terminology and vocabulary?**

**Student A:** For me when I'm reading academic texts I have some difficulties, one of them is complex sentence structure which is hard for me to get abstract concepts, main ideas. Main idea is hard to get when you read long texts but sometimes topic sentence is not the first sentence. It might be the second or the third which makes me confused

because this is not what I get used to when I read a novel or just simple texts. Now academic texts are at a higher level with difficult words, difficult structure and for me, the most hard thing I have faced is finding out this statement "topic sentence". This statement is something that like a step in my life when I'm reading academic texts because sometimes it's confused, complex, its hard for me also . try to overcome this issue by reading different sources of language with using a dictionary, also try to develop my background knowledge and try to ask for help from someone who's more experienced than me, and break down complex texts.

**Interviewer: How do these items affect your reading comprehension: complexity of texts, cultural differences, and critical thinking requirements?**

**Student A:** It affects a lot when I'm trying to understand the text. They make it more challenging (the items) to find out the main idea, the main statement. How I can find out the information that I'm looking for. It helps me a lot and I can overcome this by increasing my reading time and more effort, and always ask friends about how to read more professionaliy, sometimes for my culture, when I read texts from different culture its hard a lot for example, like different communication style between my culture and the culture of the writer which is not the same, so it's hard to find how to communicate with my mind and the writer's mind.

**Interviewer: Do you encounter any difficulty with managing your reading time? If yes, how?**

**Student A:** I have three steps I frequently do when I face such a difficulty, first of all I break down long texts by focusing on the most critical information only. Second, I break down the texts into smaller units which allows me to process and analyze each part more efficiently. Lastly, I use contextual understanding to identify the main ideas, supporting details and relationships between concepts.

**Interviewer:** Now we will talk about the main factors that may lead to difficulties of academic reading.

**Do your prior education, vocabulary limitation and reliance on translation influence your reading ability? If so, how?**

**Student A:** Not at all, in fact my knowledge and everything I know in reading comprehension I get it from reading novels and listening to the radio and podcasts and reading online articles in topics I actually like, so my answer is no.

**Interviewer:** Does institutional support like workshops and access to resources play a crucial role in your reading development? How?

Yes, places like workshops helped me a lot. When you discuss with other people about a specific word that I don't know before you will understand it from people who might be older than you or more expertized. So, it is a big hand for me.

**Interviewer:** We are almost done. Academic reading strategies and techniques is the last section of this interview. So,

**What reading strategies do you frequently use, e.g. skimming, scanning and note-taking, and how they affect your reading process?**

**Student A:** I use skimming when I look for something (specific information) in a long text. But it's very confusing because I lose important details.

Skimming and scanning are effective for gathering information quickly but they may lead to missing important details. For note-taking, it's also effective for retaining information and improving understanding, but it's time and effort consuming.

**Interviewer:** Have you ever been involved in a formal training on academic reading strategies? If so, how they helped you?

**Student A:** Yes, I have been in two situations which involved me in formal reading strategies training: one when I was a student in college as undergraduate student, I used to study reading comprehension for two years with different kinds of content and texts. And I practiced skimming and scanning. And the other situation when I was a teacher, I gave my students a text, and asked them to write the answers besides the given strategies.

**Interviewer:** How do you overcome complex vocabulary and complex sentences in academic texts?

**Student A:** For hard words, I always check out my dictionary. I write down on my notebook the unknown words and sometimes I ask my teacher or anyone who can help.

For complex sentences, I analyze the grammatical structure of the complex sentence to identify the relationship between words and phrases.

**Interviewer:** Miss Student A, thank you very much for your time and perspectives, they will be helpful to accomplish this study. Feel free to ask for a summary of the findings or ask any question, you can contact me any time.

**Student A:** Good luck Mr. Mohanad and I'd be so happy to see your findings.

### **Simi-structured interview: (2)**

**Study title:** "An Investigation into academic reading Difficulties encountered by EFL postgraduate students in English Department at University of Zawia"

**Interviewer:** Mohanad Mustafa Alswaee Abdul-Mageed

**Interviewee:** Student B

**Date of interview:** February 3rd, 2025

**Location:** University of Zawia

### **Introduction:**

Hello mister Student B and thank you very much for accepting to engage in this interview. As you know this research is about investigating academic reading difficulties that you may encounter as a postgraduate student in English department at University of Zawia, I would like to ensure that your responses will be kept confidential and used for the purposes of this study only. Also, I assure you that you can withdraw at any time and avoid answering any question if you don't feel relaxed. Do you have any question before starting?

**Student B:** I wish you good luck and I hope to hear your success soon.

**Interviewer:** Thanks. First if it is okay, introduce your background knowledge and your specialization.

**Student:** My name is Student B, a postgraduate student at the University of Zawia. I am here to participate in the interview in order to help my colleague in his study.

**Interviewer:** In the first section, we will talk about academic reading difficulties. So, mister Student B,

**What are the difficulties you encounter when you read academic texts, specifically in comprehending main ideas, terminology and vocabulary?**

**Student B:** Well, I have a trouble in understanding complex academic texts, long, complicated sentences, and unfamiliar words make it hard for me to find the main point, and I often have to stop and look up for some words' meaning, which breaks my focus. Integrated language and culture differences can also be confusing.

**Interviewer: How do these items affect your reading comprehension: complexity of texts, cultural differences, and critical thinking requirements?**

**Student B:** Well, in that case difficult texts wore me out, I mean I have to work harder to understand complicated sentences and abstract ideas, and that could make me tired and lower my overall comprehension. Cultural differences also make it worse. If I don't understand the cultural background or historical references, I could miss the author's point. Having to analyze the text critically at the same time also makes things tougher, because I'm trying to understand the content, evaluating arguments and looking for biases at the same time, if you know what I mean.

**Interviewer: Do you encounter any difficulty with managing your reading time? If yes, how?**

**Student B:** This is a very tricky question. The answer is yes. I often have some troubles in managing my reading time. Academic texts take serious focus and time to understand. I sometimes underestimate how long it takes to read a difficult article or chapter, distraction make it even harder, reread the texts over again and again which waste my time. It is also tough to find time to understand words which are unfamiliar and academic.

**Interviewer: Do your prior education, vocabulary limitation and reliance on translation influence your reading ability? If so, how?**

When I was in college, if I didn't learn some effective reading strategies how well I read now! If I haven't done much academic reading before I might struggle with academic texts, even the smallest words can make it hard to understand things, especially the

terminology which are not included in my field of study. They make me look them up in a dictionary, and losing my concentration to understand the overall meaning of the text. Using translation can be helpful sometimes, but it also slows me down and might miss some significant details plus translation is not always perfect because it might mislead me in understanding some critical points.

**Interviewer:** Does institutional support like workshops and access to resources play a crucial role in your reading development? How?

**Student B:** Yes, workshops and access resources are keys to be a better reader, workshops teach practical skills to understand difficult texts, figuring out main ideas and thinking critically. They offer a structured way to practice with experts help and easy access to dictionaries, databases and writing centers, also poses comprehension. Being able to look up quickly at words, research topics and get feedback make reading process more productive. These resources can even help with time managing by offering tools to organize reading assignments.

**Interviewer:** We are almost done. Academic reading strategies and techniques is the last section of this interview. So,

**What reading strategies do you frequently use, e.g. skimming, scanning and note-taking and how they affect your reading process?**

**Student B:** I use a mix of skimming, scanning and note-taking to read effectively. Skimming gives me a quick overview, scanning helps me find specific details, and note-taking, summarizing, paraphrasing and questioning helps me understand and remember what I read but with complex texts I also need to do some more strategies.

**Have you ever been involved in a formal training in academic reading strategies? If so, how they helped you?**

**Student B:** I may not have formal academic training but I have learned effective reading strategies by engaging in writing, research and workshops. Theses workshops covered active reading and understanding academic texts structures and critical thinking. they also have taught me note-taking and comprehension strategies, also learning from others has greatly taught me how read effectively.

**How do you overcome complex vocabulary and complex sentences in academic texts?**

**Student B:** I tackle complex words by checking them in online dictionaries, context clues and glossaries. And I also try to figure out what these words mean by how they are used in a sentence, deeper dive, I sometimes check out these words roots and origins. I break them down to smaller units and looking for their grammatical role in a sentence if they are subjects or objects and so on.

**Interviewer:** Thank you so much for your valuable time and for sharing your personal experience and patience to answer all the questions.

**Student B:** Thank you so much for your invitation and I hope I fully answered the questions and I wish the best of luck Mr. Mohanad. It was a pleasure.

### **Semi-structured interview (3)**

**Study title: "An Investigation into academic reading Difficulties encountered by EFL postgraduate students in English Department at University of Zawia"**

**Interviewer: Mohanad Mustafa Alswaee Abdul-Mageed**

**Interviewee: Student 3**

**Date of interview: February 4th, 2025**

**Location: University of Zawia**

#### **Introduction:**

**Interviewer:** Hello Mrs. Student 3 and thank you very much for accepting to engage in this interview. As you know this research is about investigating academic reading difficulties that you may encounter as a postgraduate student in English department at University of Zawia, I would like to ensure that your responses will be kept confidential and used for the purposes of this study only. Also, I assure you that you can withdraw at any time and avoid answering any question if you don't feel relaxed. Do you have any question before starting?

**Student 3:** Is it ok if I made any grammatical mistake?

**Interviewer:** Completely, it is ok because I use intelligent verbatim transcription to analyze this interview, I am allowed to enhance any grammatical mistakes so, feel confident to express your reading experience. But before we start could you please introduce your background knowledge and your specialization?

**Student 3:** My name is Student 3. I am a postgraduate student in English Department at University of Zawia. And I am also an English teacher with more than 5years experience.

**Interviewer:** Let's start with the academic reading difficulties' section:

**What are the difficulties you encounter when you read academic texts, specifically in comprehending main ideas, terminology and vocabulary?**

**Student 3:** The most important difficulty I encounter is the new terminology or vocabulary. Sometimes, I really struggle to understand the main ideas of texts because of that, especially if the text is not about something I am interested in.

**Interviewer: How do these items affect your reading comprehension: complexity of texts, cultural differences, and critical thinking requirements?**

**Student 3:** Complexity of sentences, cultural differences between the author and I, and critical thinking requirement are things that can really affect my reading comprehension negatively.

**Interviewer: Do you encounter any difficulty with managing your reading time? If yes, how?**

No, I can manage my time honestly because I practiced this reading skill when I was trying to pass ILETS exam in an ILETS preparation course. So, I believe that I can overcome this issue easily.

**Interviewer: Do your prior education, vocabulary limitation and reliance on translation influence your reading ability? If so, how?**

**Student 3:** Well, not that much. I always try to guess the meanings from the text.

**Interviewer: Does institutional support like workshops and access to resources play a crucial role in your reading development? How?**



**Student 3:** Yes, it does because the more we practice the better we attain. I have attended many workshops before as I already have mentioned. By practicing and engaging in organized training programs.

**Interviewer:** So, how it did help you?

**Student 3:** Simply, with skills like reading, writing and so on, training is crucial.

**Interviewer:** We are almost done Mrs. Student 3. Academic reading strategies and techniques is the last section of this interview. So,

**What reading strategies do you frequently use, e.g. skimming, scanning and note-taking, and how they affect your reading process?**

It depends actually on the purpose of reading I am reading for. If I am reading only to obtain some information about specific topic, I just use skimming. But if I am reading to answer questions, I use scanning to save time.

No use of any other techniques.

**Interviewer: Have you ever been involved in a formal training in academic reading strategies? if so, how they helped you?**

**Student 3:** No, I have not been involved in any formal training.

**Interviewer: How do you overcome complex vocabulary and complex sentences in academic texts?**

**Student 3:** I overcome these difficulties by guessing the meaning from the context itself, words before and after.

**Semi-structured interview (4)**

**Study title: "An Investigation into academic reading Difficulties encountered by EFL postgraduate students in English Department at University of Zawia"**

**Interviewer: Mohanad Mustafa Alswaee Abdul-Mageed**

**Interviewee: Student 4**

**Date of interview: February 4th, 2025**

**Location: University of Zawia**

**Introduction:**

**Interviewer:** Hello Mrs. Students 4 and thank you very much for accepting to engage in this interview. As you know this research is about investigating academic reading difficulties that you may encounter as a postgraduate student in English department at University of Zawia, I would like to ensure that your responses will be kept confidential and used for the purposes of this study only. Also, I assure you that you can withdraw at any time and avoid answering any question if you don't feel relaxed. Do you have any question before starting?

**Student 4:** I wish you the best.

**Interviewer:** Thanks. First, if it is okay, introduce your background knowledge and your specialization?

**Student 4:** Yes, sure. I am Student 4, a 30-year-old wife and a mother. I am a student in the third semester of English Department at the University of Zawia.

**Interviewer:** Let's start with the academic reading difficulties' section:

**What are the difficulties you encounter when you read academic texts, specifically in comprehending main ideas, terminology and vocabulary?**

**Student 4:** First, when I read a text, I think that there is more than one main idea because the information I read seem to be important, so I concentrate on unnecessary details which makes me confused. We know that academic texts contain very complex vocabulary that I have never seen. It is also a difficulty I always encounter. Also, they consist of specialized terminology that could be unknown to me. It is also a difficulty for me when I read academically. For vocabulary as a foreign English speaker, I may have many words in my mind, but when it comes to academic texts I may encounter unfamiliar vocabulary which really makes me confused, losing my concentration and losing time to look up for them in dictionaries or guessing their meaning from the context.

**Interviewer: How do these items affect your reading comprehension: complexity of texts, cultural differences, and critical thinking requirements?**

Complexity of texts is always a big problem, which is the level of language that the overall text is written in, which may lead to misunderstanding the whole main idea of the text. Cultural differences may influence reading because I am reading from someone who has a different perspective and culture

**Interviewer: Do you encounter any difficulty with managing your reading time? If yes, how?**

**Student 4:** Yes, I do. I have this problem. As I have mentioned before the level of the language that the text is written by may lead me to lose my time by overthinking and rereading in order to understand the text, and to be honest my IQ (Intelligence Quotient) is not that fast to comprehend texts quickly.

**Interviewer: Do your prior education, vocabulary limitation and reliance on translation influence your reading ability? if so, how?**

**Student 4:** Well, let me divide my prior knowledge into parts, curriculums I have studied, and the teachers who taught. Actually, the curriculums were good for me as specialized in English since secondary school, on the other hand teachers have taught us only for one reason, which is passing the subject. It is very temporarily education but to be honest not all the teachers. I mean any language skill including reading, writing, vocabulary anything which actually doesn't help me to learn a new language. So, yes, my prior knowledge, lack of vocabulary and reliance on translation are factors that affect my reading ability negatively.

**Interviewer: Does institutional support like workshops and access to resources play a crucial role in your reading development? How?**

**Student 4:** I actually have not been in any workshop before, but I believe they can be very useful because sometimes, you don't know some specific steps that can help you to read as they say: Practice makes perfect. So, the best place to practice is those workshops.

**Interviewer: what reading strategies do you frequently use e.g., skimming, scanning and note-taking and how they affect your reading process?**

**Student 4:** For me, I like scanning as I find skimming very confusing, as I scan I take some notes which help me not forgetting some important information. And I always

underline the main ideas so I can get back to them again after I read the questions. This strategy is the best for me as it saves time and does not confuse me.

**Interviewer:** Have you ever been involved in a formal training in academic reading strategies? If so, how they helped you?

**Student 4:** No, actually I haven't attendant any formal training before.

**Interviewer:** How do you overcome complex vocabulary and complex sentences in academic texts?

We all know definitely that as English students we may face complex vocabulary and sentences in academic texts, so I have mentioned before I avoid reading the whole text by using skimming because I know that I will encounter some words and sentences that will make me confused and feel unconfident, but if it happens I try to get the whole point and avoid focusing in these words or sentences. I frequently read the surrounding sentences and guess their meanings from the context. I set some potential meaning for them and when I find some near and relative meaning for them, I just continue reading in the same way. Maybe sometimes my guessing is wrong but it helps a lot to get closer to the general meaning of the text.

**Interviewer:** Thank you very much for your time and participate, your information is highly protected.

**Student 4:** I know, thank you for giving me this opportunity to participate, and I wish you good luck,

**Simi-structured interview: (5)**

**Study title:** "An Investigation into academic reading Difficulties encountered by EFL postgraduate students in English Department at University of Zawia"

**Interviewer:** Mohanad Mustafa Alswaee Abdul-Mageed

**Interviewee:** Student 5

**Date of interview:** February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025

**Location:** University of Zawia

**Introduction:**

Hello Mrs. Student 5. I would like to thank you very much for accepting to engage in this interview. This study is about to investigate the academic reading difficulties that you may encounter as a postgraduate student in English Department at University of Zawia. I would like to ensure that your responses will be kept confidential and used for the purposes of this study only. Also, I assure you that you can withdraw at any time and avoid answering any question if you don't feel relaxed. Do you have any question before starting?

**Student 5:** No, let's get started.

**Interviewer:** If you don't mind, could you please introduce your educational background?

**Student 5:** I have been teaching English for fifteen years, and currently I am a postgraduate student in English Department at University of Zawia,

**Interviewer:** Let's start with the academic reading difficulties' section:

**What are the difficulties you encounter when you read academic texts, specifically in comprehending main ideas, terminology and vocabulary?**

**Student 5:** Actually, academic reading can be very confusing for me. To be precise, understanding main ideas and complex vocabulary. As a postgraduate student I struggle to identify the central ideas especially in complex texts. Also understanding advanced vocabulary.

**Interviewer: How do these items affect your reading comprehension: complexity of texts, cultural differences, and critical thinking requirements?**

**Student 5:** Complexity of texts that involve complicated sentence structure and advanced vocabulary along with the cultural differences between me and the author who wrote the text extremely affect my reading flow, as this difference cannot be overcome by understanding the written words only. Also comprehending the author's personal opinion which demands advanced critical analysis can impede my reading process.

**Interviewer: Do you encounter any difficulty with managing your reading time? If yes, how?**

**Student 5:** Absolutely yes. Managing my time when I read for a purpose can be very challenging. Large materials to read with the factors mentioned before lead me to read carefully and reread the material over again and again which can be a time consuming process.

**Interviewer:** Do your prior education, vocabulary limitation and reliance on translation influence your reading ability? if so, how?

I will also say big Yes. Good prior education can be helpful for any student. But when I was an undergraduate learner at college and in the secondary school English learning was more difficult than nowadays according to technology. So, lack of vocabulary and the heavy reliance on translation cause big troubles to me.

**Interviewee:** Does institutional support like workshops and access to resources play a crucial role in your reading development? How?

**Student 5:** Sure, as workshops and free open resources can help me to overcome many reading difficulties. They can provide me academic support, enhance my language in general and gain more reading abilities and skills.

**Interviewer:** What reading strategies do you frequently use, e.g. skimming, scanning and note-taking and how they affect your reading process?

I frequently use skimming, scanning and note-taking. I apply skimming to overview the materials which help me to comprehend main ideas. I also use scanning when I look for specific information. Finally, I take notes of important information which help me to remember them when I finish reading.

**Interviewer:** Have you ever been involved in a formal training in academic reading strategies? If so, how they helped you?

**Student 5:** I attended some workshops on reading strategies. They helped me to know how to skim and scan more effectively.

**Interviewee:** Thank you very much for your valuable time Mrs. Student 5 and good luck in your study.