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**English Language Lecturers' Beliefs about Teaching English Language Reading: The Case of Libyan Universities by 1. Ahmad Nazari and 2. Ahmed Zraga**

**English Language Lecturers' Beliefs about Teaching English Language Reading: The Case of Libyan Universities**

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**Abstract**

Although the influence of teachers' beliefs on their practices in the classroom has been well documented (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017), not much is known about teachers' beliefs about EFL reading instructional techniques (Borg, 2015). Furthermore, no comprehensive studies have been carried out in the context of Libyan universities, where lecturers in English are non-native speakers of the language. The present study aims to fill this gap in the literature through an analysis of the beliefs that Libyan EFL lecturers hold. The results of a quantitative questionnaire completed by 273 lecturers revealed that the lecturers, who conceded that their approaches to teaching reading had not changed over the years, believed a bottom-up approach was the optimal way to teach this skill. The lecturers also stated that they depended on their own experience of learning reading and engaged in certain social activities as well to prepare themselves for teaching reading. Additionally, underlining the importance of teaching this skill to students at all university levels, they believed that a significant part of TEFL training courses should focus on how to teach reading. The findings of the study could be of benefit to both current and future EFL lecturers of reading and should also provide directions for further research in this field.

**Key words:** university lecturers' beliefs; teaching English language reading comprehension; approaches to teaching the reading skills; the role of experience in teaching reading; social construction of knowledge in teaching reading.



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## **1. Introduction**

Reading is a key to success in all content areas; the more one reads, the more knowledgeable one may become in their subject area (Ahmadi & Pourhossein, 2012). Khaki (2014) points out that improving reading comprehension has a significant role in developing language learning. Researchers have also identified a need for improvements in reading comprehension instructions (Gambrell, Block, & Pressley, 2002). Moreover, research has suggested that teachers' beliefs can influence their classroom practices (Phipps & Borg, 2009).

Beliefs are an important aspect of any learning program as they affect the way teachers and students define their roles, and the way they approach their duties and responsibilities. Besides, they highly affect teachers' practices, methods, and lesson plans (Abasifar & Fotovatnia, 2015, p. 63).

Similarly, on the significance of teachers' beliefs, Gilakjani and Sabouri write:

Teachers' beliefs affect what they accomplish in their classroom, their attitudes, and their learner' beliefs. They guide teachers to adopt their teaching strategies for coping with their teaching challenges, shape language learners' learning environment, their motivation and their language ability. (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017, p. 78)

The impact of teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning is investigated as a relatively new field of study which, to date, has involved only a few researchers (Borg, 2003, 2006). Given that Libya is an EFL context, researching and improving EFL lecturers' teaching of reading are crucial for the universities in Libya, because in that context students' English language learning considerably depends on their English language reading activities and skills. Nonetheless, there is not much research in that context on this research topic. Therefore, lecturers' stated beliefs about the teaching of English language reading in Libyan universities will be investigated in this study, as their beliefs can influence the development of students' language abilities including reading (Rocane, 2015).



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## **2. Review of Literature**

### **2.1. Teacher Cognitions and Beliefs**

Borg (2003) defined teacher cognitions as “the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching: what teachers know, believe, and think” (p. 81). In other words, teacher cognitions represent “the store of beliefs, knowledge, assumptions, theories, and attitudes about all aspects of their work which teachers hold and which have a powerful impact on teachers’ classroom practices” (Borg, 1998, p. 19). Since the 1970s, this area has attracted certain researchers wishing to explore teacher cognitions and how they might influence their teaching (Freeman & Johnson, 1998). Studies of teacher cognitions (e.g. Borg, 2006; Brickhouse, 1990; Fang, 1996; King & Wiseman, 2001) have confirmed that there is an increased interest in how teacher cognitions affect and are affected by their performance in the classroom. There has also been increasing interest in teacher beliefs, as one of the aspects of teacher cognitions, among researchers since the 1980s (Freeman, 2002). Research into teacher cognitions in general, and teacher beliefs in particular, has identified different sources of teacher beliefs, including their learning experiences, teacher education, teachers’ personality and contextual factors (Breen, Hird, Milton, Thwaite, & Oliver, 2001; Richards & Lockhart 1996).

Teacher beliefs, as a one of the aspects of teacher cognitions, are crucial to be explored in order to understand what happens inside the classroom (Borg, 2001). Richards (1998, p. 66) defines teachers’ beliefs as “the information, attitudes, values, expectations, theories, and assumptions about teaching and learning that teachers build up over time and bring with them to the classroom.” Pajares conceptualises teacher beliefs as “their attitudes, values, judgments, opinions, perceptions, conceptions, conceptual systems, preconceptions, dispositions, implicit theories, personal theories, internal mental processes, action strategies, rules of practice, practical principles and perspectives” (1992, p.309).



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The above shows that there are variations in definitions of the term beliefs due to its complexity, meaning that there is no one agreed-upon definition. This might be because the term is associated with “definitional problems, poor conceptualisations, and differing understandings of beliefs and belief structures” (Pajares, 1992, p. 307). In the current study, we have adopted Basturkmen, Loewen, and Ellis’s (2004, p. 243) definition when they pointed out that beliefs are the “statements teachers make about their ideas, thoughts and knowledge that are expressed as evaluations of what should be done, should be the case and is preferable”, as this definition seems more focused, precise and straightforward. In addition, as “beliefs cannot be directly observed or measured but must be inferred from what people say, intend, and do” (Pajares, 1992, p. 314), we have focused on the ‘stated’ beliefs of English language lecturers.

## 2.2. Studies of Teachers’ Beliefs

When exploring how teachers’ actions lead or do not lead to student learning (Freeman, 2002, p. 2), researchers also become concerned about why teachers teach the way they do. In this regard, Freeman and Richards argue that:

In order to better understand language teaching, we need to know more about language teachers: what they do, how they think, what they know, and how they learn. Specifically, we need to understand more about how language teachers conceive of what they do: what they know about language teaching, and how they think about their classroom practice. (Freeman & Richards, 1996, p. 1)

Schreiber and Moss (2002, p. 1) state that “our beliefs guide our desires and shape our practice.” Likewise, Garcia and Rueda (1994) contend that teachers have a range of beliefs regarding their profession, and the way they fulfil their professional duties is based on such beliefs, thus having either a positive or a negative effect on their practice. Borg (as cited in Kajinga, 2006, p. 17) noted that “the earlier the belief is incorporated into the belief structure,



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the more difficult it is to alter, for these beliefs in the long run influence perceptions and the processing of new information encountered.” Thus, it is possible to argue that there is an agreement between certain researchers that teachers’ beliefs are among the elements that influence shaping their professional conduct and teaching practice (Berger, Girardet, Vaudroz, & Carhay, 2018).

In a study on the beliefs of pre-service teachers about English language teaching, Narvaez, Ramirez, and Vasco (2017) conducted qualitative research where nine pre-service teachers’ (from sixth semester of the BA English program at Universidad del Tolima in Colombia) language learning histories, reflection journals and teaching portfolios were looked at and interviews and classroom observations were carried out with them. Their study showed that “the core of beliefs these student-teachers have about their teaching practices has been the product of life experiences as learners” (Narvaez, Ramirez, & Vasco, 2017, p. 187).

Karimi and Dehghani (2016) studied the degree of correspondence between Iranian EFL teachers’ beliefs about reading instruction and their practices in teaching reading. Eighty Iranian EFL teachers teaching at a number of private English language institutes participated in the study. A Teachers’ Orientation to Reading Instruction (TORI) questionnaire was used to examine the teachers’ beliefs about reading instruction. The classes of 25% of the surveyed teachers were also observed to explore the degree of correspondence between their stated beliefs about reading instruction and their actual reading instructional practices. The results of their study showed a low correlation between the uncertified teachers’ self-reported beliefs about reading instruction and their actual reading instructional practices and a high correlation between the certified teachers’ self-reported beliefs about reading instruction and their reading instructional practices.

Bamanger and Gashan (2014) conducted a quantitative study of Saudi EFL teachers in different schools in Riyadh. The researchers’ aim was to discover teachers’ beliefs about teaching reading strategies and to investigate how the strategies influence teachers’ practices.



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The participants were twenty seven Saudi EFL teachers and a questionnaire was used to collect data. They found that EFL teachers, while expressing their beliefs, placed a great emphasis on the importance of teaching reading strategies. The researchers also found that this was related significantly to what teachers really did in their classrooms.

Mellati, Fatemi and Motallebzadeh (2013) looked into the likely congruence between Iranian EFL instructors' beliefs about English language teaching and their practices in classrooms. To this end, the researchers selected 369 Iranian EFL instructors and used the Teacher's Beliefs Questionnaire (TBQ) to elicit instructors' beliefs about English language teaching. In addition to applying questionnaires, the researchers interviewed nine instructors. The results of their study revealed a positive significant relationship between instructors' beliefs about English language teaching and their real teaching practices.

Kuzborska (2011) explored the correlation between the beliefs of eight English native-speaking teachers and their practices with advanced learners of reading in the United Kingdom. Video recall was utilised to obtain data on teachers' beliefs. The researcher found congruence between beliefs and practices of the majority of teachers regarding the teaching of reading.

### 2.3. Exploring a Gap in Knowledge

Research contributing to the understanding of teachers' beliefs has been carried out in various areas of the teaching of reading. However, the current study differs from earlier investigations in the following respects. Borg (2003, 2006) reviewed different studies of teachers' cognitions and classroom practices, but studies investigating teachers' beliefs about teaching reading skills in a Libyan context are rare. Only a few studies have shed light on English teacher beliefs in Libya, focussing on teachers' perceptions of new approaches to English language learning and teaching. Although important contributions have been made to understanding the association between teachers' beliefs and practices in the area of L1 reading, there has been little investigation into teacher beliefs in the teaching of reading in



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EFL contexts. Therefore, as Borg (2006, p. 166) contended, “L2 reading instruction is thus clearly an area where a gap exists between our understanding of methodological and theoretical principles on the one hand, and what we know about teachers’ actual practices and cognitions in teaching reading on the other.” Research on L2 teachers’ beliefs has been limited in several ways (Borg, 2011). For example, a good number of research studies have been conducted in developed countries with English native-speaking teachers; however, the existing research is not fully representative of language teaching settings around the world (Lin, 1999; Borg, 2015). This indicates that there is a need to fill contextual gaps in the literature by conducting further studies in various non-native English speaking contexts. In addition, there is very little research regarding teachers’ beliefs in FL university settings (Borg, 2009). Similarly, there has been little focus on lecturers’ beliefs in relation to the teaching and learning of English language reading in a Libyan university level context. Thus, as the literature clearly demonstrates, the issue of exploring university non-native EFL lecturers’ beliefs is still a lacuna to be addressed in research studies, as such studies can add to our understanding of EFL lecturers’ beliefs “in the area of academic reading instruction and can act as a catalyst to enable other teachers to reflect on and examine their own beliefs about their teaching of reading in academic contexts” (Kuzborska, 2011, p. 122). We hope that the insights obtained from our research may help to develop a more comprehensive picture and understanding of EFL lecturers’ beliefs about teaching English language reading.

#### 2.4. Research Question

To address the above aim and lacuna, the following research question has been formulated:

What beliefs are held by university English language lecturers in Libya concerning teaching English language reading?

As a secondary objective, this research aims to understand the relationship between such beliefs and the beliefs about certain techniques used in teaching reading.



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### 3. Method of the Study

To address the research question, a quantitative research approach was adopted. A quantitative questionnaire with 41 items was made (see the section below on the process of making the questionnaire) and manually distributed among all 320 English language lecturers teaching at 3 largest public universities in Libya. All the university EFL lecturers were Libyan, Arabic speakers and non-native speakers of English. The participants were teaching English language reading at English language departments and all had prior experience in teaching English reading. The students of these lecturers were undergraduates who were going to be English language teachers after their graduation. 273 of the lecturers responded to the questionnaire, i.e. the return rate was 85.31%. The data were analysed by using the SPSS software. The following is the participants' demographic information.

#### 3.1. General and Demographic Information of Participants

The general and demographic information of the participants is summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: General and Demographic Information of Participants

| Demographics           | Categories                       | Frequency (Count) | Percent (%) |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| Gender                 | Male                             | 158               | 57.9        |
|                        | Female                           | 115               | 42.1        |
| University involved    | Uni 1                            | 74                | 27.1        |
|                        | Uni 2                            | 106               | 38.8        |
|                        | Uni 3                            | 93                | 34.1        |
| Teaching level         | Teaching first year students     | 79                | 28.9        |
|                        | Teaching second year students    | 65                | 23.8        |
|                        | Teaching third year students     | 75                | 27.5        |
|                        | Teaching fourth year students    | 54                | 19.8        |
| Academic qualification | Master's in TESOL                | 214               | 78.4        |
|                        | Doctorate in Applied Linguistics | 59                | 21.6        |
| Total                  |                                  | 273               | 100         |





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Descriptive statistics of the age of the lecturers and their teaching experience are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Age and Teaching Experience of Participants

| Variable                                       | N   | Mean  | Median | Mode | Std. Deviation | Minimum | Maximum |
|--|-----|-------|--------|------|----------------|---------|---------|
| Age  | 273 | 38.20 | 37.00  | 40   | 6.41           | 28      | 55      |
| Years of teaching experience in Libya          | 273 | 7.33  | 6.00   | 1    | 5.31           | 1       | 25      |
| Years of teaching experience elsewhere as well | 7   | 2.29  | 2.00   | 2    | 0.95           | 1       | 4       |

### 3.2. Questionnaire Design Process

The questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first part was the introduction which explained the aims of the questionnaire and advised teachers to participate in answering the statements as honestly and accurately as they could. Furthermore, the participants were informed that putting their names on the questionnaires was optional, and that the data collected would only be accessed by the researchers in order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The second part of the questionnaire consisted of forty-one statements (see the statements in Table 3), each to be rated by ticking the most appropriate answer on a given Likert scale. In the final part, the questionnaire ended with a statement in which we thanked the participants and provided our email addresses in case they were interested in knowing the results of the study.



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Drawing up an 'item pool' after deciding the title, length, format and three main parts of the questionnaire was the first step (Dornyei, 2003, p. 16-17). These statements or items included items produced by the researchers based on their experiences and familiarity with the subject matter and the research context and items adopted from previous questionnaire studies on research topics similar to ours (e.g. Maghsudi & Talebi, 2009; Dreyer & Nel, 2003; Ozek & Civelek, 2006; Bang & Zhao, 2007). The statements collected were then filtered and refined by following the guidelines on questionnaire design suggested by Bourke, Kirby and Doran (2016), Dornyei (2003), Bell (2005) and Gilbert and Stoneman (2008). Finally, as a pilot study, the questionnaire was given to six lecturers at the prospective universities. Some of them had long experience in teaching English language reading in the study context. From the feedback gained, some statements in the questionnaire were modified.

### 4. Data Analysis

The data collected in the study were analysed by using IBM SPSS Statistics version 22 (IBM Corp., 2012). Two statistical methods were employed, namely descriptive (summary) statistics and correlation.

#### 4.1. Questionnaire Items

The questionnaire included 41 items, as shown in Table 3 below; for each item, lecturers' beliefs were solicited using the response scale: never, rarely true, sometimes, usually true and always true.

Table 3: Questionnaire Items

| Item | Statement   |
|------|---|
| 1    | I believe a foreign language can be acquired without the student being taught to read.                                    |
| 2    | I believe reading should be presented in context.   |
| 3    | I believe learners should have the chance to develop their own reading techniques from examples provided by the lecturer. |
| 4    | I believe it is crucial that learners learn different reading techniques.   |
| 5    | I believe learners should be told the correct answer after tackling a reading comprehension question.                     |
| 6    | I believe a substantial part of a language course should concern teaching and practising reading.                         |
| 7    | I believe learning reading is more effective when learners work out the techniques for themselves.                        |



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|    |   |
|----|---|
| 8  | I believe the focus on reading during lessons should come after certain communicative tasks, not before.  |
| 9  | I make a lesson plan for teaching reading.  |
| 10 | I familiarise myself with the requirements of the reading activity.   |
| 11 | I believe learners need the knowledge of reading techniques in order to be able to read effectively.  |
| 12 | I analyse the topic of the reading activity for my students using my own techniques.  |
| 13 | I explain the topic of the reading to my students.  |
| 14 | I ask students to brainstorm to generate ideas and thoughts about the reading text.   |
| 15 | I teach reading topics without a written lesson plan.   |
| 16 | I plan the organisation of reading activities in advance to identify which approaches are suitable for teaching it.   |
| 17 | I make a lesson plan based on my experience in teaching reading.  |
| 18 | I make a lesson plan of teaching reading based on my beliefs.   |
| 19 | To teach reading, I depend on what I already know about teaching reading.   |
| 20 | I believe reflecting on the suitability of the methods of teaching reading that I use in my classes helps me improve my teaching reading.                           |
| 21 | I consult references for more information about the reading text that I am going to teach.  |
| 22 | I believe teaching reading is the most important role of the language lecturer.   |
| 23 | I believe it is important to teach learners the reading skills terminology.   |
| 24 | I apply my previous experience of learning reading and use it during my teaching.   |
| 25 | I share my ideas with my colleagues about the reading topic.  |
| 26 | I ask my colleagues about the methods and techniques they use in teaching reading that may help me.   |
| 27 | I believe it is important to provide many opportunities to improve students' reading skills.  |
| 28 | I believe it is important to include a variety of reading activities in teaching reading.   |
| 29 | I believe a significant proportion of a language course should concern teaching and practising reading.   |
| 30 | I believe reading can be effectively learned without too much focus on reading techniques.  |
| 31 | I believe reading plays a significant role in language learning and teaching.   |
| 32 | Over the years, my approaches to teaching reading have not changed.   |
| 33 | I believe a top-down approach (i.e. readers begin with the largest unit and then move to the smallest one to understand the text) is the best way to teach reading. |
| 34 | I believe reading should be taught intensively (during only part of the course) as opposed to extensively (during the entire course).                               |
| 35 | I believe training in teaching reading should be the most important part of learning to teach English.  |
| 36 | I believe a bottom-up approach (i.e. readers read a text and investigate every word and sentence in order to understand the text) is the best way to teach reading. |
| 37 | I believe the primary role of the teacher in a reading lesson is to explain the major reading points.   |
| 38 | I believe an interactive approach (i.e. combining both bottom-up and top-down approaches) is the best way to teach reading.   |
| 39 | I believe teaching reading should take place within all levels of the university.   |
| 40 | I believe reading instruction may not offer immediate results.  |
| 41 | I believe reading is best acquired unconsciously through extensive reading out of the class.  |



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### 4.2. Reliability of the Questionnaire

A reliability analysis of the questionnaire yielded a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.969. This value is considered very high indeed. Therefore, it can be concluded that the questionnaire is reliable. Cronbach's alpha is a measure that is commonly used for measuring the reliability of questionnaires (Cronbach, 1951). The following sections elaborate on the results and analyses.

### 4.3. Lecturers' Beliefs about Teaching Reading

To analyse the data, the questionnaire items were clustered into two major themes, as shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Questionnaire Themes

| Theme  | Number of Items | Items  |
|--|-----------------|--|
| Lecturers' beliefs about teaching reading                            | 26              | 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 20, 22, 23, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41 |
| Lecturers' beliefs about certain techniques used in teaching reading | 15              | 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 24, 25, 26, 32                                      |

The percentages given in Table 5 below represent the answers offered by lecturers to each of the twenty-six items representing lecturers' beliefs about teaching English language reading to Libyan university students. The table shows the frequencies and percentages for each of the statements.

Table 5: Percentages and Frequencies of Lecturers' Beliefs about Teaching Reading

| Item | Statement  | Count/<br>Row % | Never | Rarely true | Some-times | Usually true | Always true | Never/<br>Rarely true | Usually/<br>Always true |
|------|--|-----------------|-------|-------------|------------|--------------|-------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| 1    | I believe a foreign language can be acquired without the student being taught to read. | Count           | 180   | 5           | 33         | 48           | 7           | 185                   | 55                      |
|      |  | Row %           | 65.9  | 1.8         | 12.0       | 17.5         | 2.5         | 67.7                  | 20.1                    |
| 2    | I believe reading should be presented in   | Count           | 10    | 10          | 47         | 124          | 82          | 20                    | 206                     |
|      |  | Row %           | 3.7   | 3.7         | 17.2       | 45.4         | 30.0        | 7.3                   | 75.5                    |



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|----|---|-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
|    | context.  |       |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| 3  | I believe learners should have the chance to develop their own reading techniques from examples provided by the lecturer. | Count | 11   | 9    | 40   | 88   | 125  | 20   | 213  |
|    |   | Row % | 4.0  | 3.3  | 14.7 | 32.2 | 45.8 | 7.3  | 78.0 |
| 4  | I believe it is crucial that learners learn different reading techniques.   | Count | 6    | 13   | 40   | 95   | 119  | 19   | 214  |
|    |   | Row % | 2.2  | 4.8  | 14.7 | 34.8 | 43.6 | 7.0  | 78.4 |
| 5  | I believe learners should be told the correct answer after tackling a reading comprehension question.                     | Count | 7    | 11   | 58   | 91   | 106  | 18   | 197  |
|    |   | Row % | 2.6  | 4.0  | 21.2 | 33.3 | 38.8 | 6.6  | 72.2 |
| 6  | I believe a substantial part of a language course should concern teaching and practising reading.                         | Count | 7    | 12   | 59   | 96   | 99   | 19   | 195  |
|    |   | Row % | 2.6  | 4.4  | 21.6 | 35.2 | 36.3 | 7.0  | 71.4 |
| 7  | I believe learning reading is more effective when learners work out the techniques for themselves.                        | Count | 160  | 30   | 23   | 38   | 22   | 190  | 60   |
|    |   | Row % | 58.6 | 10.9 | 8.4  | 13.9 | 8.0  | 69.5 | 21.9 |
| 8  | I believe the focus on reading during lessons should come after certain communicative tasks, not before.                  | Count | 8    | 13   | 52   | 99   | 101  | 21   | 200  |
|    |   | Row % | 2.9  | 4.8  | 19.0 | 36.3 | 37.0 | 7.7  | 73.3 |
| 11 | I believe learners need the knowledge of reading techniques in order to be able to read effectively.                      | Count | 9    | 21   | 50   | 84   | 109  | 30   | 193  |
|    |   | Row % | 3.3  | 7.7  | 18.3 | 30.8 | 39.9 | 11.0 | 70.7 |



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|    |   |       |      |      |      |      |       |      |       |
|----|---|-------|------|------|------|------|-------|------|-------|
| 20 | I believe reflecting on the suitability of the methods of teaching reading that I use in my classes helps me improve my teaching reading. | Count | 12.0 | 12.0 | 34.0 | 95.0 | 120.0 | 24.0 | 215.0 |
|    |   | Row % | 4.4  | 4.4  | 12.4 | 34.7 | 43.9  | 8.7  | 78.7  |
| 22 | I believe teaching reading is the most important role of the language lecturer.   | Count | 6    | 16   | 41   | 92   | 118   | 22   | 210   |
|    |   | Row % | 2.2  | 5.9  | 15.0 | 33.7 | 43.2  | 8.1  | 76.9  |
| 23 | I believe it is important to teach learners the reading skills terminology.   | Count | 9    | 9    | 42   | 93   | 120   | 18   | 213   |
|    |   | Row % | 3.3  | 3.3  | 15.4 | 34.1 | 44.0  | 6.6  | 78.0  |
| 27 | I believe it is important to provide many opportunities to improve students' reading skills.  | Count | 10   | 10   | 49   | 98   | 106   | 20   | 204   |
|    |   | Row % | 3.7  | 3.7  | 17.9 | 35.9 | 38.8  | 7.3  | 74.7  |
| 28 | I believe it is important to include a variety of reading activities in teaching reading.   | Count | 9    | 17   | 42   | 82   | 123   | 26   | 205   |
|    |   | Row % | 3.3  | 6.2  | 15.4 | 30.0 | 45.1  | 9.5  | 75.1  |
| 29 | I believe a significant proportion of a language course should concern teaching and practising reading.                                   | Count | 7    | 13   | 44   | 86   | 123   | 20   | 209   |
|    |   | Row % | 2.6  | 4.8  | 16.1 | 31.5 | 45.1  | 7.3  | 76.6  |
| 30 | I believe reading can be effectively learned without too much focus on reading techniques.  | Count | 130  | 15   | 69   | 38   | 21    | 145  | 59    |
|    |   | Row % | 47.6 | 5.4  | 25.2 | 13.9 | 7.6   | 53.1 | 21.6  |
| 31 | I believe reading plays a significant role  | Count | 9    | 18   | 32   | 85   | 129   | 27   | 214   |
|    |   | Row % | 3.3  | 6.6  | 11.7 | 31.1 | 47.3  | 9.9  | 78.4  |



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|    |   |       |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
|----|---|-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
|    | in language learning and teaching.  |       |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| 33 | I believe a top-down approach (i.e. readers begin with the largest unit and then move to the smallest one to understand the text) is the best way to teach reading. | Count | 107  | 43   | 90   | 19   | 14   | 150  | 33   |
|    |   | Row % | 39.1 | 15.7 | 32.9 | 6.9  | 5.1  | 54.9 | 12.0 |
| 34 | I believe reading should be taught intensively (during only part of the course) as opposed to extensively (during the entire course).                               | Count | 51   | 69   | 96   | 40   | 17   | 120  | 57   |
|    |   | Row % | 18.6 | 25.2 | 35.1 | 14.6 | 6.2  | 43.9 | 20.8 |
| 35 | I believe training in teaching reading should be the most important part of learning to teach English.  | Count | 9    | 12   | 35   | 55   | 162  | 21   | 217  |
|    |   | Row % | 3.3  | 4.4  | 12.8 | 20.1 | 59.3 | 7.6  | 79.4 |
| 36 | I believe a bottom-up approach (i.e. readers read a text and investigate every word and sentence in order to understand the text) is the best way to teach reading. | Count | 10   | 7    | 36   | 90   | 130  | 17   | 220  |
|    |   | Row % | 3.7  | 2.6  | 13.2 | 33.0 | 47.6 | 6.2  | 80.6 |
| 37 | I believe the primary role of the teacher in a reading lesson is to explain the major reading points.   | Count | 12   | 15   | 43   | 68   | 135  | 27   | 203  |
|    |   | Row % | 4.4  | 5.5  | 15.8 | 24.9 | 49.5 | 9.9  | 74.4 |
| 38 | I believe an interactive approach (i.e. combining both  | Count | 26   | 80   | 147  | 12   | 8    | 106  | 20   |
|    |   | Row % | 9.5  | 29.3 | 53.8 | 4.3  | 2.9  | 38.8 | 7.3  |



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|    |  |       |     |     |      |      |      |     |      |
|----|--|-------|-----|-----|------|------|------|-----|------|
|    | bottom-up and top-down approaches) is the best way to teach reading.                         |       |     |     |      |      |      |     |      |
| 39 | I believe teaching reading should take place within all levels of the university.            | Count | 9   | 13  | 33   | 58   | 160  | 22  | 218  |
|    |  | Row % | 3.2 | 4.7 | 12.0 | 21.2 | 58.6 | 8.0 | 79.8 |
| 40 | I believe reading instruction may not offer immediate results.                               | Count | 11  | 10  | 35   | 83   | 134  | 21  | 217  |
|    |  | Row % | 4.0 | 3.7 | 12.8 | 30.4 | 49.1 | 7.6 | 79.4 |
| 41 | I believe reading is best acquired unconsciously through extensive reading out of the class. | Count | 16  | 9   | 32   | 70   | 146  | 25  | 216  |
|    |  | Row % | 5.9 | 3.3 | 11.7 | 25.6 | 53.5 | 9.2 | 79.1 |

Table 5 shows that the highest level of consensus among respondents was in response to item 36, 'I believe a bottom-up approach (i.e. readers read a text and investigate every word and sentence in order to understand the text) is the best way to teach reading', where 80.6% of the lecturers selected 'usually true' or 'always true' and only 6.2% selected 'never' or 'rarely true'. The next most consistent response was for item 39, 'I believe teaching reading should take place within all levels of the university', where 79.8% of lecturers selected 'usually true' or 'always true' and only 8% selected 'never' or 'rarely true'. This was followed by the belief expressed in item 40, 'I believe reading instruction may not offer immediate results', where 79.4% of the lecturers selected 'usually true' or 'always true' and 7.6% selected 'never' or 'rarely true'. Most of the lecturers also held the belief expressed in item 35, 'I believe training in teaching reading should be the most important part of learning to teach English', where 79.4% of the lecturers selected 'usually true' or 'always true', and 7.6% selected 'never' or 'rarely true'.





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The lecturers' beliefs about certain techniques used in teaching reading were explored in 15 items, as shown in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Percentages and Frequency of Lecturers' beliefs about Certain Techniques used in Teaching Reading

| Item | Statement   | Count/<br>Row % | Never | Rarely true | Some-times | Usually true | Always true | Never/<br>Rarely true | Usually/<br>Always true |
|------|---|-----------------|-------|-------------|------------|--------------|-------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| 9    | I make a lesson plan for teaching reading.  | Count           | 8     | 16          | 54         | 96           | 99          | 24                    | 195                     |
|      |   | Row %           | 2.9   | 5.9         | 19.8       | 35.2         | 36.3        | 8.8                   | 71.4                    |
| 10   | I familiarise myself with the requirements of the reading activity.   | Count           | 7     | 18          | 48         | 89           | 111         | 25                    | 200                     |
|      |   | Row %           | 2.6   | 6.6         | 17.6       | 32.6         | 40.7        | 9.2                   | 73.3                    |
| 12   | I analyse the topic of the reading activity for my students using my own techniques.                                | Count           | 12    | 22          | 43         | 85           | 111         | 34                    | 196                     |
|      |   | Row %           | 4.4   | 8.1         | 15.8       | 31.1         | 40.7        | 12.5                  | 71.8                    |
| 13   | I explain the topic of the reading to my students.  | Count           | 11    | 21          | 40         | 79           | 121         | 32                    | 200                     |
|      |   | Row %           | 4.0   | 7.7         | 14.7       | 29.0         | 44.5        | 11.8                  | 73.5                    |
| 14   | I ask students to brainstorm to generate ideas and thoughts about the reading text.                                 | Count           | 11    | 22          | 40         | 74           | 126         | 33                    | 200                     |
|      |   | Row %           | 4.0   | 8.1         | 14.7       | 27.1         | 46.2        | 12.1                  | 73.3                    |
| 15   | I teach reading topics without a written lesson plan.   | Count           | 100   | 50          | 45         | 43           | 35          | 150                   | 78                      |
|      |   | Row %           | 36.6  | 18.3        | 16.4       | 15.7         | 12.8        | 54.9                  | 28.5                    |
| 16   | I plan the organisation of reading activities in advance to identify which approaches are suitable for teaching it. | Count           | 10    | 19          | 45         | 77           | 122         | 29                    | 199                     |
|      |   | Row %           | 3.7   | 7.0         | 16.5       | 28.2         | 44.7        | 10.6                  | 72.9                    |
| 17   | I make a lesson plan based on my experience in teaching reading.  | Count           | 6     | 17          | 56         | 96           | 98          | 23                    | 194                     |
|      |   | Row %           | 2.1   | 6.2         | 20.5       | 35.1         | 35.8        | 8.4                   | 71.0                    |
| 18   | I make a lesson plan of teaching reading based on my beliefs.   | Count           | 10    | 14          | 68         | 63           | 118         | 24                    | 181                     |
|      |   | Row %           | 3.7   | 5.1         | 24.9       | 23.1         | 43.2        | 8.8                   | 66.3                    |



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|    |   |       |     |     |      |      |      |     |      |
|----|---|-------|-----|-----|------|------|------|-----|------|
| 19 | To teach reading, I depend on what I already know about teaching reading.                           | Count | 8   | 17  | 35   | 103  | 110  | 25  | 213  |
|    |   | Row % | 2.9 | 6.2 | 12.8 | 37.7 | 40.3 | 9.2 | 78.0 |
| 21 | I consult references for more information about the reading text that I am going to teach.          | Count | 8   | 15  | 40   | 95   | 115  | 23  | 210  |
|    |   | Row % | 2.9 | 5.5 | 14.7 | 34.8 | 42.1 | 8.4 | 76.9 |
| 24 | I apply my previous experience of learning reading and use it during my teaching.                   | Count | 10  | 9   | 41   | 104  | 109  | 19  | 213  |
|    |   | Row % | 3.7 | 3.3 | 15.0 | 38.1 | 39.9 | 7.0 | 78.0 |
| 25 | I share my ideas with my colleagues about the reading topic.  | Count | 2   | 10  | 50   | 81   | 130  | 12  | 211  |
|    |   | Row % | 0.7 | 3.6 | 18.3 | 29.6 | 47.6 | 4.3 | 77.2 |
| 26 | I ask my colleagues about the methods and techniques they use in teaching reading that may help me. | Count | 7   | 18  | 44   | 87   | 116  | 25  | 203  |
|    |   | Row % | 2.6 | 6.6 | 16.2 | 32.0 | 42.6 | 9.2 | 74.6 |
| 32 | Over the years, my approaches to teaching reading have not changed.                                 | Count | 12  | 14  | 28   | 74   | 145  | 26  | 219  |
|    |   | Row % | 4.4 | 5.1 | 10.3 | 27.1 | 53.1 | 9.5 | 80.2 |

As Table 6 shows, for the 15 items, the highest consensus was for item 32, '*Over the years, my approaches to teaching reading have not changed*', where 80.2% of the lecturers selected 'usually true' or 'always true' and only 9.5% selected 'never' or 'rarely true'. The next most common point of agreement among the lecturers was expressed in item 24, 'I apply my previous experience of learning reading and use it during my teaching', where 78.0% of lecturers selected 'usually true' or 'always true' while 7% selected 'never' or 'rarely true'. The third most common technique from the lecturers' viewpoint was expressed in item 19, 'To teach reading, I depend on what I already know about teaching reading', where 78.0% of lecturers selected 'usually true' or 'always true' while 9.2% selected 'never' or 'rarely true'. The fourth most common stated practice was seen in item 25, 'I share my ideas with my



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colleagues about the reading topic', where 77.2% of lecturers selected 'usually true' or 'always true' while 4.3% selected 'never' or 'rarely true'.

The relationship between lecturers' beliefs about teaching reading and their beliefs about certain techniques used in teaching reading is shown in Figure 1 below. As the straight line on the graph shows, there is a clear linear relationship between these two. This positive relationship indicates that lecturers' teaching beliefs are associated with lecturers' beliefs about using certain techniques, even though this is not a cause and effect relationship. From the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) of 0.820 as shown in Figure 1, it is clear that 82% of lecturers' beliefs about using certain techniques are accounted for by their beliefs about teaching reading. In other words, this strong correlation indicates that these two are related and their beliefs about certain techniques used for teaching reading go hand-in-hand with their beliefs about teaching reading. This indicates that lecturers who selected 'usually true' and 'always true' on items relating to their beliefs concerning teaching reading also selected 'usually true' and 'always true' on items relating to their beliefs about certain techniques used for teaching reading. This is evident in the concentration of data points in the upper right corner of Figure 1.



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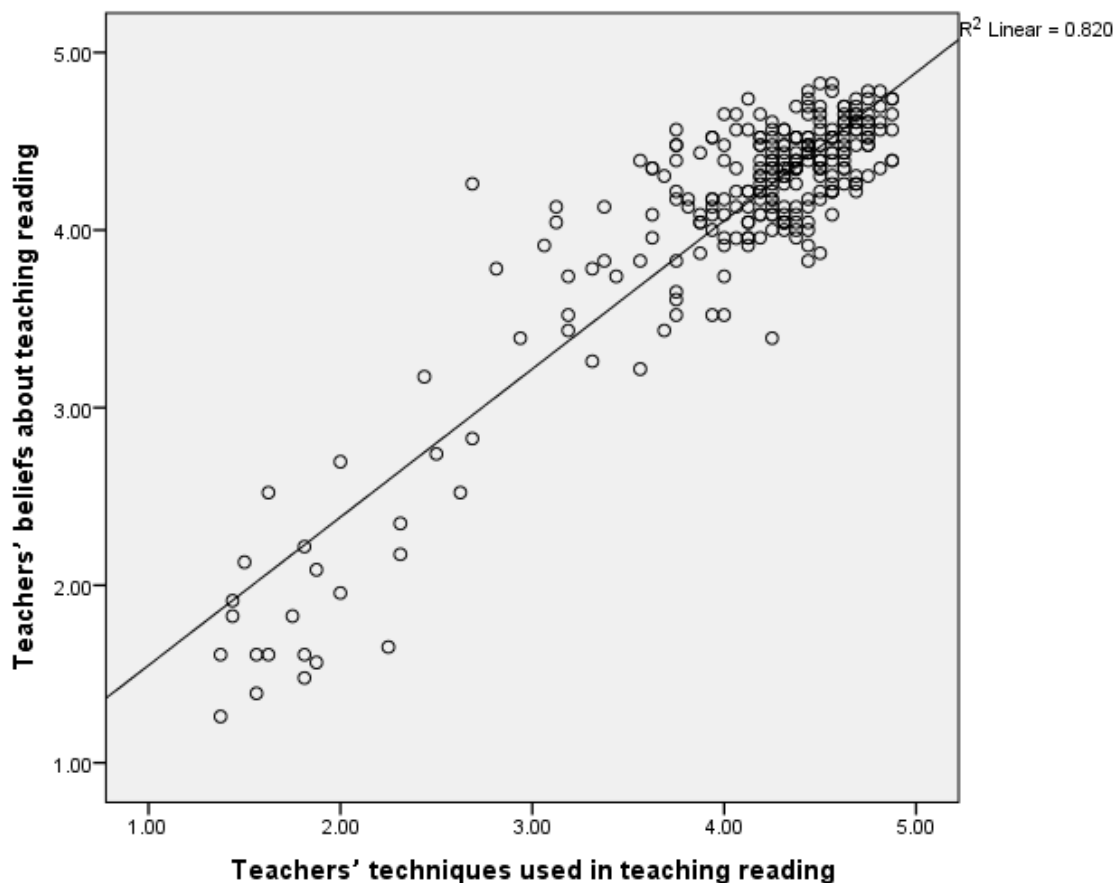


Figure 1: Relationship between lecturers' teaching beliefs and their beliefs about certain techniques used for teaching reading

To sum up the analyses of the data, the most commonly-held beliefs were the following:

- I believe a bottom-up approach (i.e. readers read a text and investigate every word and sentence in order to understand the text) is the best way to teach reading.
- I believe teaching reading should take place within all levels of the university.
- I believe reading instruction may not offer immediate results.
- I believe training in teaching reading should be the most important part of learning to teach English.



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Similarly, for the 15 items concerning lecturers' beliefs about certain techniques used in teaching reading, the most commonly-used techniques were the following:

- Over the years, my approaches to teaching reading have not changed.
- I apply my previous experience of learning reading and use it during my teaching.
- To teach reading, I depend on what I already know about teaching reading.
- I share my ideas with my colleagues about the reading topic.

Furthermore, there was a strong relationship between lecturers' beliefs about teaching reading and their beliefs about certain techniques used in teaching reading.

## **5. Discussion**

As mentioned earlier, the study set out to find out what lecturers believed about teaching English language reading. As a secondary objective, it aimed to understand the relationship between such beliefs and the beliefs about certain techniques used in teaching reading.

The reasons for the above-mentioned beliefs might be related to contextual and curricular factors, institutional requirements and constraints, the way the lecturers themselves were taught, being comfortable with certain approaches and techniques, and their knowledge, skills, research, experiences, training, motivations, personality and social networks, all of which might influence shaping lecturers' beliefs. For example, as most of the lecturers stated in their questionnaire responses, they applied methods during their teaching which were used in their previous experience of learning reading. Experience here resembles a type of credit which they use when they need. This reinforces Borg's (2003, p. 81) finding that there has been much evidence to support the view that the experiences teachers have when they are learners continue to affect their beliefs about teaching and learning throughout their careers. Borg argues that this type of knowledge can be influential in shaping lecturers' beliefs about teaching. Raturi and Boulton-Lewis endorse this by saying that "there is usually a relationship between what teachers and lecturers believe about their own learning and how they teach" (2014, p. 69). As another example, the lecturers stated that the bottom-up approach was the best way to teach reading. In a study carried out in the EFL setting of



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Taiwan, “the majority of the instructors (64%, 27 out of 42) said that they believed the interactive approach was the most effective approach in teaching EFL reading” (Chou, 2008, p. 199). Once again, the contextual, curricular, institutional, experiential, cultural and personal factors affecting Libyan lecturers might be different from those affecting Taiwanese instructors and this in turn might have caused the difference in their beliefs about a suitable approach to teaching reading.

Furthermore, as shown by the findings, most of the lecturers stated that their approaches to teaching reading had not changed over the years. This seems to amplify Ur’s point that “teachers who have been teaching for 20 years may be divided into two categories: those with twenty years’ experience and those with one year’s experience repeated twenty times” (Ur, 1996, p. 317). Although it can be argued that teaching approaches should change according to the students’ levels, their needs and the classroom environment (see, for example, Jenkins, Williams, Moyer, George, & Foster, 2018 on the necessity of shifting the paradigms of teaching) as well as along with the progress of the lecturer’s experience and training, one could also say that lecturers are so overloaded with teaching, assessing, marking and administrative work (Abbas & Roger, 2013) that they do not find enough time to draw up new lesson plans each time or regularly update their activities and practices.

One of the issues explored in the questionnaire was the social aspects of teaching reading. The results show that English language Libyan lecturers engage in social activities to prepare themselves for teaching reading comprehension skills. For instance, consulting colleagues and sharing ideas with them about teaching reading and reading topics are among the social activities they do. While drawing on the merits of the social construction of knowledge, Gergen (2015) writes that both social constructionism and Vygotskian sociocultural theory prioritise the role of the social over the individual in educational practices, place community prior to individual, look at individual rationality as a by-product of the social sphere and hold negotiation and cooperative, collaborative and dialogic processes as pivotal to the process of education. Likewise, Mercer (1995) argues that “we rely on others for developing our



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understanding and for acquiring practical and intellectual skills” (Mercer’s book blurb) and therefore there are a great deal of knowledge and skills that teachers can share and learn from each other (Duckworth, 1997). In this regard, Johnson (2018, p. 262) points out that “teachers have been increasingly understood as sociocultural beings, with powerful beliefs, attitudes, identities, knowledge, and reasoning, and such insights have allowed us to peer into the hidden side of teachers’ mental lives.”

The results of the study showed that EFL lecturers underscored the importance of receiving training in teaching reading comprehension. One reason for this belief might be the fact that students in a good number of EFL contexts do not usually have much access to native English speakers and therefore their main exposure to authentic language is through reading texts and listening activities. In such contexts, reading probably underpins most of the language learning of students. Obviously, lecturers cannot be expected to teach what they have not been trained for. EFL lecturers need to learn about how students learn and how students can be helped to read effectively. EFL lecturer-training institutions should ensure that their trainees are well-trained in teaching reading comprehension and in using the resources available to them to help students self-regulate in this skill (Durrance, 2017). Klapwijk (2012), pointing out the importance of training teachers how to teach reading comprehension, discusses the situation of in-service and pre-service teacher training in terms of training teachers to teach this skill and confirms that “while teachers are trained to teach reading, very little, if any, focus is placed on training them how to teach comprehension” (p. 200). Klapwijk (2012) also “recommends the inclusion of explicit comprehension instruction (which would include RSI [Reading Strategy Instruction]) as part of teaching in general and teaching reading in particular at teacher training institutions” (p. 200).

It can also be argued from the findings that there is a clear linear relationship between lecturers’ beliefs and their stated practice in relation to the use of certain techniques. This positive relationship indicates that lecturers’ beliefs are associated with using certain techniques, even though this is not a cause and effect relationship. A Teaching and Learning



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International Survey (TALIS, 2009) examined teachers' beliefs, attitudes and practices in 23 countries and compared them. TALIS covered core aspects of teachers' beliefs (general pedagogical knowledge), teachers' activities (teaching practices and teachers' co-operation) as well as quality indicators at the classroom and school level. "In all of the participating countries except Bulgaria, Malaysia and Turkey, significant relations between beliefs and practices were observed when controlling for teacher background characteristics" (p. 118). Beliefs measured in TALIS were not domain-specific and were general in nature, yet largely significant correlations with teaching practices were found across countries (p. 118). Therefore, based on the correlation obtained in the present study, one can say that Libyan lecturers' beliefs are associated with using certain teaching techniques, although to what extent their beliefs are translated into real practice is open to observation and further research.

### 5.1. Implications of the Study

According to previous studies (e.g. Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Pressley, 2006; Grabe, 2009; Small & Arnone, 2011; Ahmadi & Hairul, 2012), reading is an important component of the language learning process for both native and non-native learners of English. Reading is one of the most complicated activities in language learning, as it is both an interactive and discursive practice. English language lecturers are required to use their knowledge and awareness of the language and language teaching and learning to help their students to self-regulate in this complicated activity. The results of this study, then, may provide lecturers with insights into the techniques advocated by other lecturers. As Farrell (2013, p. 14) puts it, systematic reflection upon the beliefs can help lecturers develop their understanding not only of what they would like to achieve in their classrooms but also of the changes they may feel they need to implement so as to improve their approaches to teaching and learning.

This research was conducted in a context, Libya, which to the best of the present researchers' knowledge has not yet been explored as far as beliefs about teaching English language reading at the university level is concerned. Indeed, Libya is considered to be a breeding ground for studies into the beliefs of language lecturers and teachers. However, Libya is





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similar to other contexts in that a number of beliefs and practices of Libyan lecturers are likely to overlap with those of the lecturers in other contexts. In other words, what we have found about Libyan lecturers' beliefs might have relevance to the beliefs of the lecturers in other milieus. Those findings are essentially meant to be taken by researchers in other contexts and re-explored. As Nunan (1992) puts it, such findings are worth being compared with the findings and processes observed by other researchers (in both Arab and non-Arab contexts) to see what it is in the two situations that could account for the differences. This study is the first to address the lecturers' beliefs about teaching reading and reading techniques at the university level in the Libyan context. The study, therefore, could be a cornerstone for further research in this and other contexts. It could provide useful guidelines to be used by other researchers to conduct new studies in other contexts. It also provides empirical data to allow the comparison of the Libyan EFL university lecturers' beliefs with those of other lecturers in other contexts. It could also serve as a resource for developing research tools that will explore the beliefs of EFL lecturers. In addition, it paves the way to understanding the beliefs of lecturers, and particularly their beliefs about teaching reading, in order to further understand what influences them in the classroom and the way they teach (Brickhouse, 1990; Fang, 1996; King & Wiseman, 2001; Freeman, 2002; Gebel & Schrier, 2002; Farrell & Lim, 2005; Borg, 2006; Feryok, 2008). As Johnson puts it,

As the research on teacher cognition continues to enhance our understanding of the complexities of teachers' professional worlds, much work is left to be done if language teachers are to fully embrace and enact theoretically consistent instructional practices in the L2 classrooms where they teach. (Johnson, 2018, p. 262)

It is then hoped that the insights gained from this study may contribute to providing a more complete picture of L2 lecturers' beliefs concerning the teaching of reading. Furthermore, the findings of the study could be utilised for designing training programmes to develop lecturers' beliefs and to help them translate their beliefs into practice. In fact, the findings of



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the study could be of benefit to both current and prospective lecturers, as Richardson underlines that

Teacher attitudes and beliefs, therefore, are important considerations in understanding classroom practices and conducting teacher education designed to help prospective and in-service teachers develop their thinking and practices. (Richardson, 1996, p. 102)

#### 5.2. Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Further Research

There are several limitations encountered in this investigation. First, the data were collected at the largest three of the twelve major Libyan universities. The three universities were chosen because of their suitability in terms of distance, time and accessibility. The research findings could be more comprehensive if the data were collected from the other two provinces in the east and south of the country. In fact, this investigation only focused on EFL lecturers at universities in one region of Libya. Further explorations involving EFL lecturers in other parts of the country are recommended. Second, this investigation focused on the lecturers' beliefs concerning the teaching of English language reading. The investigation would be more comprehensive if we looked into how these beliefs are/are not materialised in practice. Third, we used only one data collection tool, i.e. a quantitative questionnaire, to collect data. Applying other approaches, e.g. qualitative interviews, classroom observations and think-aloud protocols, can produce a more in-depth picture. Fourth, as Libya is considered a relatively new geographical area for social and academic research, more investigations of lecturers' beliefs about the techniques for teaching the reading skills in this context could be beneficial to teaching EFL reading and research in this country and similar contexts. Finally, whilst our research was quantitative and we had a large sample of participants, i.e. 273 lecturers, generalising from the findings of this research should be done cautiously, as teachers' beliefs are context sensitive and dynamic (Amerian & Pouromid, 2018, p. 584).



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