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**INVESTIGATING TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT READING COMPREHENSION**

**IN RELATION TO CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT PRACTICES:**

**Case of 1<sup>st</sup> Year EFL Students at Tlemcen University**

*Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the*

*Magister Degree in Assessment and Testing*

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## **DEDICATIONS**

To my much-loved family  
For their support, their patience, and their faith.

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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## **ABSTRACT**

Studies have demonstrated that teachers' thinking processes highly influence their behaviour and instructional practices in the classroom. In other words, the act of instructing and assessing students is narrowly upheld and bounded to these thinking processes. Understanding teachers' theoretical orientations and beliefs about reading is more than necessary in order to disambiguate their classroom instructional and evaluative practices. This present research work is a case study of 1<sup>st</sup> year EFL, at Tlemcen University. The study was conducted in order to explore teachers' beliefs and theoretical orientations in connection to the teaching and assessing of reading, then defining the impact reading assessment may have on students' comprehension ability. This work also discusses the possibility of implementing an alternative approach to reading assessment in order to enhance students' comprehension ability and motivation to read. Data collection procedures included two questionnaires and three structured, uncontrolled classroom observations. Quantitative and qualitative data analyses showed that teachers possess an interactive theoretical orientation towards the instruction and assessment of reading. Teachers believe that it is good to mix between both bottom-up processing and top-down processing to develop reading skills and achieve comprehension. Moreover, standardized classroom reading assessment was revealed to have an apparent negative impact on students' comprehension ability and reading motivation. This study underscores the importance of alternative reading assessment methods, which represent genuine and effective language learning strategies, as modern research in the field of assessment maintains. The implementation of portfolios would permit teachers to monitor students' learning, who will develop their reading skill and comprehension ability independently from classroom reading sessions.

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## **List of Acronyms**

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

ELT: English Language Teaching

RC: Reading Comprehension

LMD1: 1<sup>st</sup> Year License-Master-Doctorate

LMD2: 2<sup>nd</sup> Year License-Master-Doctorate

UT: University of Tlemcen

SPSS: Statistical Package for the Social Science

# **General Introduction**

## **General Introduction**

The necessity to explore the beliefs and thinking processes, which are at the root of teachers' classroom practices and teachers' decision making, has consequently resulted from all the investigations attempting to explain how teachers cope with the very complex, and demonstrably multidimensional, teaching process. To better understand teaching, researchers specified some kinds of tasks with which each and every teacher is confronted, such as: preparing students for new learning, monitoring students' learning, selecting learning activities and assessing that very same learning. Scarcely the beliefs which underlie the previously mentioned tasks have been explored, till recently.

Teachers' beliefs, in relation to the content and process of teaching, are deeply embedded in teachers, constituting a solid background for their decision planning and their decision making. The most productive contributions to our understanding of the relationship between teachers' beliefs and teachers' practices have taken place in the field of reading. Numerous studies in the field of reading support the notion that teachers do possess theoretical beliefs toward reading and that such beliefs tend to shape the nature of their instructional practices.

Teachers' orientations and approaches to the teaching of reading are mostly characterized in their theoretical beliefs about how we actually process reading and its corollary comprehension. Nonetheless, there are four dominant and distinct theories which disambiguate and explain the reading-comprehending process. In a nutshell, teachers' theoretical beliefs about reading manifestly correspond to one of these four dominant reading models, which are: the bottom-up model, the top-down model, the interactive model and finally, the compensatory model.

Existing research on teachers' belief systems and their relationship to teachers' instructional practices has, nevertheless, treated assessment somewhat superficially. In spite of the scarcity of research that addressed teachers' beliefs about reading in connection to reading assessment, it stands to reason that their evaluative practices are likewise influenced by their conceptions of what constitutes genuine and appropriate classroom assessment. These discrete views on such tasks as lesson planning and

assessment may lead to different and divergent instructional and evaluative classroom practices, not to say archaic or ineffective practices.

Even if there is a surge of interest in the field of teachers' belief systems, at present, there is not much information on teacher beliefs related to assessment in general and classroom reading assessment in particular. There is even less understanding about how various factors such as learning experience and professional background might influence these beliefs and practices. Thus, it is crucial to investigate these beliefs, mainly with the increasing need for some changes, or a reform, to guarantee a genuine assessment which expresses intelligibly student's level of proficiency.

This study emphasizes teachers' beliefs about reading. Most importantly, the consistency of these beliefs with the actual teachers' instructional and evaluative practices is to be investigated. In the light of shifting paradigms affecting education, some teachers have adopted new beliefs and assumptions about reading, in contrast with others who have not updated or changed theirs. These different beliefs about reading highly influence teachers' theoretical orientations and approaches to teaching and assessing reading. For instance, some teachers may consider reading as an interactive or compensatory process, while others may consider it as a psycholinguistic or serial process. Particularly at this level, the instructional similarities and dissimilarities, shaped by theoretical beliefs, are practically observable and identifiable during a reading class in contrast to the instructional diversity among teachers which stems from their singular learning and professional experiences.

These distinct theoretical orientations are diametrically opposed, centered on reading. It is, thus, crucial to try to identify them in teachers' instructional practices, then to determine whether or not they influence their approaches to reading assessment, concentrating attention on its nature, function, and impact on learner's reading comprehension ability. Significantly, it is primary to define the extent to which these beliefs about reading match teachers' instructional and evaluative practices. As a matter of fact, some teachers still draw on conventional traditional and conventional assessment,

in spite of all its demonstrable negative aspects, as opposed to others who have opted for modern alternative assessment.

Therefore, goals, values and beliefs underlying classroom reading assessment practices need to be investigated and clarified. These belief systems particularly influence teachers' theoretical orientations and understandings of reading, which, in turn, form and typify the nature and function of reading assessments designed afterwards.

Teachers' beliefs and orientations are distinguishably embodied in these assessment practices. Defining the impact of these influenced evaluative practices on learner's reading comprehension ability is crucial and central to conclude whether or not a shift from traditional assessment to alternative assessment is necessary and urgent.

The initial and principal purpose of this research is to investigate teachers' belief systems about literacy, with a distinct single focus on reading. Studies' in the field of reading support the notion that teachers do possess theoretical beliefs toward reading and that such beliefs tend to form the nature of their instructional practices. Nevertheless, links between teachers' beliefs and reading assessment have rarely been investigated, until recently. In this sense, the second aim of this research is to identify the impact of teachers' beliefs about reading on their evaluative practices i.e. on classroom reading assessment, focusing on its nature, function and impact on students' reading comprehension ability.

The Algerian educational system is based on traditional assessment and rote learning. These traditional evaluative practices may also be carried out at the level of the Algerian universities. It is very important to find out whether or not these conventionalized testing methods are still perpetuated at the level of higher education classrooms. Indeed, traditional testing and assessment are not authentic and do not demonstrate actual level of proficiency. Teachers' beliefs about reading may be at the origin of these sustained evaluative practices. Traditional assessment, as opposed to alternative assessment models, may also have a very unconstructive, negative, impact on student's skills development in general, and student's reading comprehension ability in

particular. Hence, both the possibility and need for a shift from traditional evaluative practices to alternative assessment practices will be debated.

According to the aforementioned expressed problematic, the following questions can be raised:

- 1- What beliefs about reading comprehension underlie teachers' instructional practices?
- 2- To what extent do those beliefs influence the classroom reading assessment process?
- 3- Do reading comprehension teachers need a shift to an alternative form of assessment?

Based on the theoretical framework of the study, the review of literature, as well as observation and reasoning, three hypotheses are formulated:

H1: Tlemcen EFL university teachers are top-down oriented in terms of beliefs about reading process and reading instruction.

H2: Teachers' evaluative practices are influenced by their beliefs about reading.

H3: Reading evaluative practices need to be updated, considering their impact on learners' reading comprehension ability.



An exploratory case study is designed in order to test the previous hypotheses and answer the research questions. This case study included First (1<sup>st</sup>) Year EFL, University of Tlemcen, 2013 – 2014. Three research instruments will be used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data from different sources and participants. The set of research instruments comprises: classroom observation and two questionnaires.

The first questionnaire will be addressed to all the teachers, whereas the second will be solely given to LMD1 English students. On the basis of a mixed approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data, the findings of the research will be analyzed and triangulated.

This research work is partitioned into three chapters. The first chapter encompasses the literature related to teachers' belief systems and puts up a theoretical background about both reading and assessment so as to draw a clear understanding about the research major features. The second chapter is, in a part, devoted to the research problematic. Additionally, this same chapter details the research design or methodology in order to describe the tools that will grant this investigation to be conducted.

The third chapter, the final one, is dedicated to the analysis and interpretation of the collected data. Research hypotheses will be tested and research questions answered in the same chapter. To end with a discussion about whether or not reading assessment need to be reformed in nature and function so as to have a supposedly better impact on students' reading comprehension as central point and students' reading experience as a whole.

**Chapter I**  
**Literature Review**

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## 1.1 Introduction

Teachers' theoretical beliefs are thought of as a significant part of the prior knowledge through which teachers perceive and process reading instruction and assessment in the classroom. This work aims at extending the current research on teachers' theoretical beliefs within reading instruction contexts to the field of reading assessment. It particularly examines the relationship between teachers' theoretical beliefs about teaching reading and their instructional and evaluative practices.

This chapter is devoted to the theoretical background of the current research. The existing literature related to teachers' belief systems as well as reading and assessment will be presented all along this chapter. It is organized in order to move gradually from broad overviews to more specific focus points.

## 1.2 Teachers' Belief systems:

In spite of the productivity of research in the field of teacher education, no standard definition for what the term belief means (Pedersen & Liu, 2003). According, to Pajares (1992) Beliefs are often mistakably considered as judgments, attitudes, values, opinions, and ideologies. Accordingly, Pajares (1992) sees that the term "belief" encompasses all these commonly used designations.

As stated in Richards and Lockhart's *Reflective Teaching in Second Language Classrooms* (1994), exploring teachers' thinking implies an investigation aiming at determining what the teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning are. Investigating their sources and their influence on the teaching is also essential and fundamental to the understanding of beliefs (Richards and Lockhart, 1994).

Up till now, the difficulty in studying teachers' beliefs has not been overcome because of the different understandings and conceptualizations of the beliefs and the beliefs systems (structures). Richards and Lockhart (1994: 30) states that teachers' belief systems are "founded on the goals, values, and beliefs teachers hold in relation to the

content and process of teaching, and their understanding of the systems in which they work and their roles within it.”

Borg (2003: 81) reports that “teachers are active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs.” Farrell and Patricia (2005) also pointed out the complexity of teachers’ beliefs. Conversely, their research findings reported that teachers’ beliefs do not always reflect teachers’ classroom practices. Although the term “belief” is variously defined, its importance and impact on teaching and learning EFL cannot be ignored. Beliefs held by teachers usually reflect strengths and weaknesses of a given teaching context, mainly because the teaching strategies, teaching material, and evaluative practices are determined by these beliefs (Pajares, 1992).

Richards and Lockhart (1994) specified a number of tasks with which teachers of any kind are confronted. These tasks are mostly shaped by teacher’s own goals, values and beliefs. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the belief systems and thinking processes which underlie teachers’ classroom instructional (and evaluative) practices for an understanding of how teachers undertake the teaching. According to Richards and Lockhart (1994), teachers’ actions are framed by what they know and believe. Usual tasks such as: selecting learning activities and checking students’ understanding can reveal the theoretical beliefs held by teachers.

Harste and Burke (1977) assumed that teachers make decisions about classroom instruction in light of their theoretical beliefs about teaching and learning. These beliefs may influence their procedures, goals, materials, classroom interactions, as well as their roles. Teachers possess assumptions about language and language learning, and these provide the basis for a particular approach to language instruction (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). Hence, teachers’ theoretical orientations represent a major determinant of how they act during (and after) language instruction.

Richards and Lockhart (1994) listed six (06) different sources of teachers' beliefs. These are:

- Teachers own experience as language learners.
- Teachers experience of what works best.
- Teachers' established practice.
- Teachers' personality factors.
- Teachers' educationally based or research-based principles.
- Teachers' principles derived from an approach or a method.

Therefore, teachers hold preconceived ideas about teaching and learning, as well as their roles as teachers, which, in turn, greatly impact instructional as well as evaluative practices. Campbell and O'Loughlin (1988) distinguished two views of teaching that may be held by the majority of teachers, "the mimetic or banking approach, whereby the teachers' job is to fill the empty vault with something of worth (knowledge)" and "the transformative or mid-wife approach. Teachers who hold this view tend to see the learner as bringing something to the learning situation and it is the role of the teacher to 'give birth to this knowledge'" (Jon Shapiro & Dona Kilbey, 1990: 61).

Newman (1985) and Froese (1990) observed that the range of beliefs embodied in the teaching of literacy is solidly supported by the different existing language approaches. In this sense, "teachers must learn to question why they are using specific instructional practices and how these practices relate to current theories of literacy development" (John Shapiro & Dona Kilbey, 1990: 63). Classroom instructional and evaluative practices can be improved by teacher educators whose central objective is to help teachers develop a theoretical orientation that is reflective of current and pertinent research in the field (Cummins et al., 2004).

### 1.3 Introducing reading:

Reading is a complex and multifaceted skill which could be defined as the ability to process a text through decoding, interpreting, and understanding it (Brown, 2004). According to Widdowson (1990), reading could basically be regarded as the process of negotiating meaning from a written text. Widdowson's perspectives on reading underscore the significance of the comprehension phase.

As a matter of fact, reading comprehension is universally considered as the level of understanding of written texts. Anderson (1985) defined reading as the process of constructing meaning from texts. In this sense, he considers that a skilled reading activity should be:

- Fluent: The automaticity of basic processes. Cognitive capacities.
- Strategic: Considering the purpose, using of the appropriate strategies.
- Constructive: Using prior knowledge and schemata to build new knowledge.
- Motivated: Maintaining attention and interest.

Comprehension as a process consists of two essentially imperative items: the reader and the text. In order for a reader to build meaning from a given text, he must be equipped with a certain range of capacities. Attention, memory and inferring are all instances of the cognitive capacities a reader should possess. Moreover, a reader should have an objective underlying his reading activity, a concern or an interest in the text being read. In other words, a reader must be motivated. Last but not least, a reader needs linguistic capacities and various types of knowledge to achieve understanding after his reading activity.

On the other hand, texts also have an outsized impact on comprehension. Comprehension does not depend on the reader only, the surface code of a written text and its content also play a significant role in achieving meaning. Both reader and text are interrelated in a dynamic way that influences the reading experience and comprehension. Hence, fluency in reading could be considered as a prerequisite and at the same time a

consequence to reading and understanding. Two primary barriers must be cleared in order to become skilled readers:

- Being able to master bottom up strategies for processing separate sounds, letters, words, phrases and symbols.
- As part of the top-down approach, second/ foreign language readers must develop appropriate format schemata —background information and socio-cultural experience— to carry out the inferences and interpretations effectively.

According to Phillips (2001), teaching reading comprehension implies creating and developing reading strategies as well as enhancing students' motivation to read. Hence, testing these particular reading strategies will resolve in assessing learners' reading comprehension abilities. The list below represents the principle reading comprehension strategies, teachers may draw on to instruct or evaluate learners:

- Identifying the purpose of reading.
- Applying bottom-up decoding approaches.
- Reading aloud
- Guessing at meaning.
- Reading silently
- Scanning.
- Skimming.
- Using discourse markers.
- Distinguishing the implied meaning from the literal meaning.
- Using extra information the text may provide through pictures or graphs as instances.

Reading activity falls into two main categories: oral reading (perceptive) and silent reading. Oral or perceptive reading is principally based the surface structure of a text. It puts emphasis recognition of alphabetic symbols such as letters or words. It also focuses on the recognition of morpheme-phoneme (spelling-sound) correspondences and



punctuation as well. Discourse markers and grammatical structures represent the basis for the perceptive reader to build literal meaning from a given text.

Perceptive reading relies on the bottom-up model of reading and it is mostly used to introduce reading as an activity to novice readers and beginner second/ foreign language learners. It generally involves short and simple sentences and at maximum a paragraph with the same simplicity characteristics. If a reader is presented with a long text to read orally, he will more likely concentrate his efforts on bottom-up strategies in order to perform his reading effectively. Especially if the written material is longer than it should be, as a consequence to oral reading, little if any memorization or comprehension will be achieved due to the overreliance on bottom-up strategies.

Silent reading activities on the other hand enhance learners' comprehension, since they rely on a top-down representation of the reading process. The surface structure is almost automatically decoded and the reader's attention is freed to concentrate on extracting and interpreting information in order to infer and construct meaning. There are three types of silent reading:

### **1.3.1 Selective reading:**

Selective reading is very similar to perceptive reading in the processing of information contained in the text since it is also based on the bottom-up mechanisms. However, this reading type also incorporates top-down representations of reading in view of the fact that the reader is not required to read aloud.

It is called selective reading basically because the reader is supposed to select his reading material. It also implies that the reading material is somehow longer than in perceptive reading. Nevertheless, the distinctive fact that selective readings involve a top-down approach to reading is to be underlined too.

### **1.3.2 Intensive reading:**

Intensive (interactive) reading is a type of reading which is used on short texts, essays and articles so as to extract specific information. This specific information could be included in the details of the text. The reader is supposed to focus and exploit each part of the text and the information it contains.

Intensive focused reading gives emphasis to the processing and understanding of any kind of information that the text may provide. The reader can also scan the text searching for the particular information he intends to find through his reading.

Scanning is very common to readers when performing an interactive reading. Scanning is briefly defined as the purposive fast reading of texts. It is used to locate specific information in a somewhat long text. In order for a reader to use this strategy, he will simply have run his eyes over and through the text looking for the needed details and information. A reader may scan a text before moving to any more intensive and focused reading.

### **1.3.3 Extensive reading:**

Extensive reading involves longer texts whether being read for pleasure or for a certain purpose such as developing knowledge or reading skills. One of the principal objectives behind this approach to reading is enjoyment; development and enrichment are consequential benefits.

Extensive readings are carried out in order to achieve a broad understanding of the text. Its objectives are generally centered on pleasure and general comprehension. This method is largely based on a top-down conceptualization of the reading process. Nevertheless, reader could have to process information in a bottom-up order in case it is needed. This is called targeted bottom-up processing.

Skimming strategies are often used in extensive reading activities. This strategy is used to quickly collect the most significant gist. It consists of a somewhat fast

reading through the paragraphs of a long written text to see what they are about and how they are organized. Skimming allows the reader to predict purposes and main ideas contained in a text before moving to any intensive focused reading. It is not important to understand each word when skimming. On the other hand, it is essential to make predictions and construct a extensive meaning.

#### **1.4 Teachers' belief systems in connection to reading:**

Clark and Peterson (1986) psycholinguistics research revealed much about teachers' cognitive processes. Their study has demonstrated that teachers' thinking processes highly influenced their behavior and instructional practices in the classroom. The act of instructing and assessing their students is narrowly upheld and bounded to these thinking processes. Understanding teachers' beliefs and theories about reading is more than necessary in order to disambiguate their classroom instructional and evaluative practices.

In his article *Teacher Thinking and Foreign Language Teaching*, Richards (1994) affirms that “good teaching involves the application of the findings of research and the teacher's role is to put research-based principles into practice” (Richards, 1994: 1). On the other hand, this view of teaching represents one of the most common beliefs shared by teachers. Hence, their orientations and classroom practices embody research-based principles and beliefs.

An overview of the study of the nature of reading is imperative in order to understand some of the beliefs framing teachers' reading instruction and assessment. Alderson (2000) asserts that the total volume of research on reading exceeds anyone's capacity to review and to synthesize. He maintains that “the number of different theories of reading is simply overwhelming” (Alderson, 2000: 1).

Reading models represent a systematic and operative way of explaining certain aspects of reading: what it is, how it is taught, how reading relates to other cognitive and perceptual abilities, how it interfaces with memory... Reading models (theories) have impacted significantly on the teaching approaches, textbooks as well as reading

assessment. Therefore, these models are of a capital importance in the exploration of teachers' theoretical beliefs about reading.

### 1.5 Reading models:

All at once, reading is the most extensively researched and the most enigmatic of the four basic language skills. The availability of a theoretical pattern to understand, and master, the mental processes activated when reading would be of a great contribution to linguistics, psychology, education, as well as research. "A reading model is theory of what is going on in the reader's eyes and mind during reading and comprehending (or miscomprehending) a text" (Davis, 1995: 159).

However, such an ideal reading model is still to be theorized and formulated. Models of the reading process try to explain and predict reading behavior. They are the bases on which reading instructions are built. The ones devised up to now are partial and incomplete, as the authors themselves declare. This is why psychologists and linguists do not stop researching to put forward formulae which account for the mental processes taking part in reading as well as how they perform to achieve meaning from the written discourse.

Nowadays, based on a chronology of the most significant contributions in the field of reading, reading models can be classified depending on the functional relationship of the different processing levels taking place in the reading process. The most important contributions are listed in Table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1 Chronology of formal reading models

<b>Year</b>	<b>Description of the model</b>
<b>1964</b>	Carroll devises a definition of reading based on a unidirectional diagram. His research gave rise to significant findings. However, The model was purely illustrative.
<b>1969</b>	Ruddell provided a thoroughly detailed model about the stages and the

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constituent processes of reading.

**1970** Goodman's endeavor gave rise to a formula which he typified reading components and stages. His model had a great impact on the teaching of reading; it was known as the psycholinguistic approach to reading. Majority of Goodman's works disclosed the readers' preference to rely on meaning as opposed to the graphic and morpho-phonemic clues available in the written text.

**1971** Smith described his model as being psycholinguistic. Like Goodman, he inquires whether the identification of meaning is immediate or thought through and whether it lies in the procedural character or in the basic graphic automatism of the language.

**1972** Gough's reading model is based on the impact that the processing of information has on the various mental processes. According to him, input is first entered into the iconic system where it is transformed into phonemic character, then, subsequently, to lexical level before the structural level. So the text serially moves from low-level sensory information into higher-level encoding (Gough, 1972).

**1974-1977** LaBerge & Samuels emphasized automatic information (automaticity) of the processing with their bottom-up (serial) model. Visual input (letters and words) is sequentially entered into the mind of the reader.

**1977** Rumelhart, with his interactive model, drew attention on contextual circumstances which condition flexible processing and multiple sources of information. He improved upon the previous works of Goodman.

**1977-1978** The model introduced by Carver emphasized letters - sounds - meanings, as much as Gough's, Holmes's (1953) and Singer's (1983) models did.

**1978** Kintsch and Van Dijk provided a model which, given the multiplicity of the processes that sometimes occur in parallel and at other times in

sequence, interpreted understanding as also excluding identification of the word, in contrast to the majority of the preceding models.

**1980-1984** Stanovich developed his theory upon Rumelhart's works. He combined the interactive model conceptualization of reading with an assumption of compensatory processing in order to formulate his interactive-compensatory model.

**1980-1987** Just and Carpenter elaborated a model that explained reading processes based on studies of the eye movement.

**1983** Taylor and Taylor introduce the bilateral cooperation model which incorporate features of Rumelhart's and Stanovich's models as well as a neurolinguistic perspective. They devise strategies that work in parallel for various levels of textual information. According to the needs of the reader and the task or text difficulties, mechanisms of fast and slow processing are activated in parallel.

In view of the previously mentioned contributions, reading models can be classified as being psycholinguistic, serial, interactive or compensatory. Table 1.2 represents the classification of reading models.

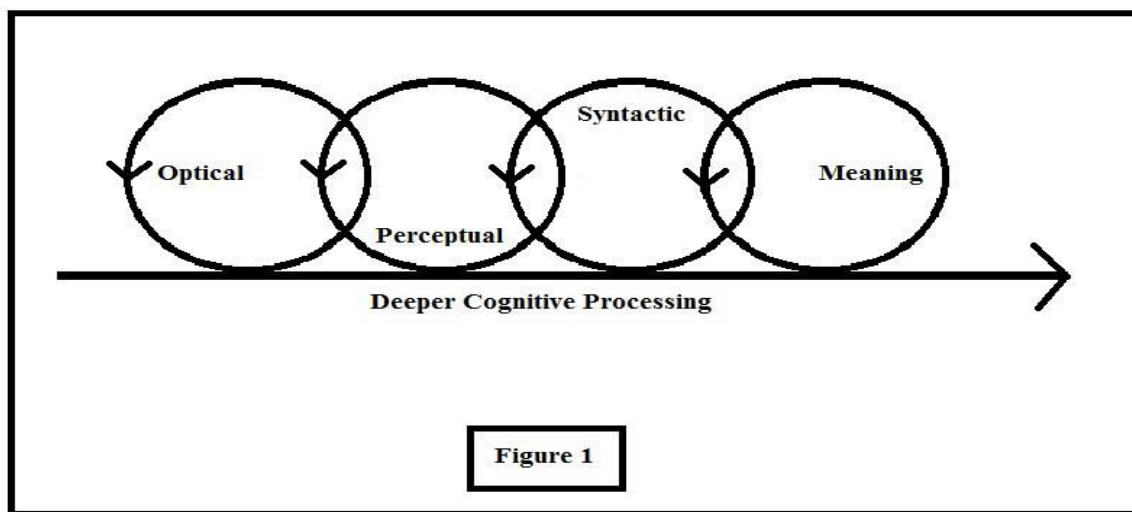
Table 1.2 The Classification of Reading Models

<b>Researcher</b>	<b>Model</b>
Kenneth Goodman	Top-down / Psycholinguistic
David LaBerge and S.J Samuels	Bottom-up / Serial
David E. Rumelhart / James McClelland	Interactive / Bidirectional
Keith E. Stanovich	Interactive-Compensatory

### 1.5.1 Goodman's Model or the Top-down Model:

In 1967, Goodman's article, "Reading: a psycholinguistic guessing game", changed the view of reading as a rapid accurate sequential word recognition to an understanding of reading as a process of constructing meaning from texts. Goodman regarded reading as "a receptive psycholinguistic process wherein the actor uses strategies to create meaning from text" (Goodman, 1988).

In Goodman's model, readers move from text to understanding through cycles of cognitive processes, starting from the optical cycle, moving to perceptual, then to syntactic, and finally to meaning which represents the continuous reader's goal i.e. each cycle fuses with the following one to, finally, get to the meaning (figure 1).



This model includes five (05) cognitive stages (processes) in the building of meaning. These stages are:

- Initiation / Recognition: The brain initiates the reading and subsequently starts the recognition of the graphic symbols in the visual area.
- Prediction: The brain anticipates and predicts as it seeks order and significance in the sensorial stimuli.

- Confirmation: The brain verifies its predictions with each new stimulus and confirms (or disconfirms) them.
- Correction: If the brain finds any inconsistencies or disconfirmations, it reprocesses the stimulus.
- Termination: The brain ends the reading because the reader has achieved meaning (or because he has not).

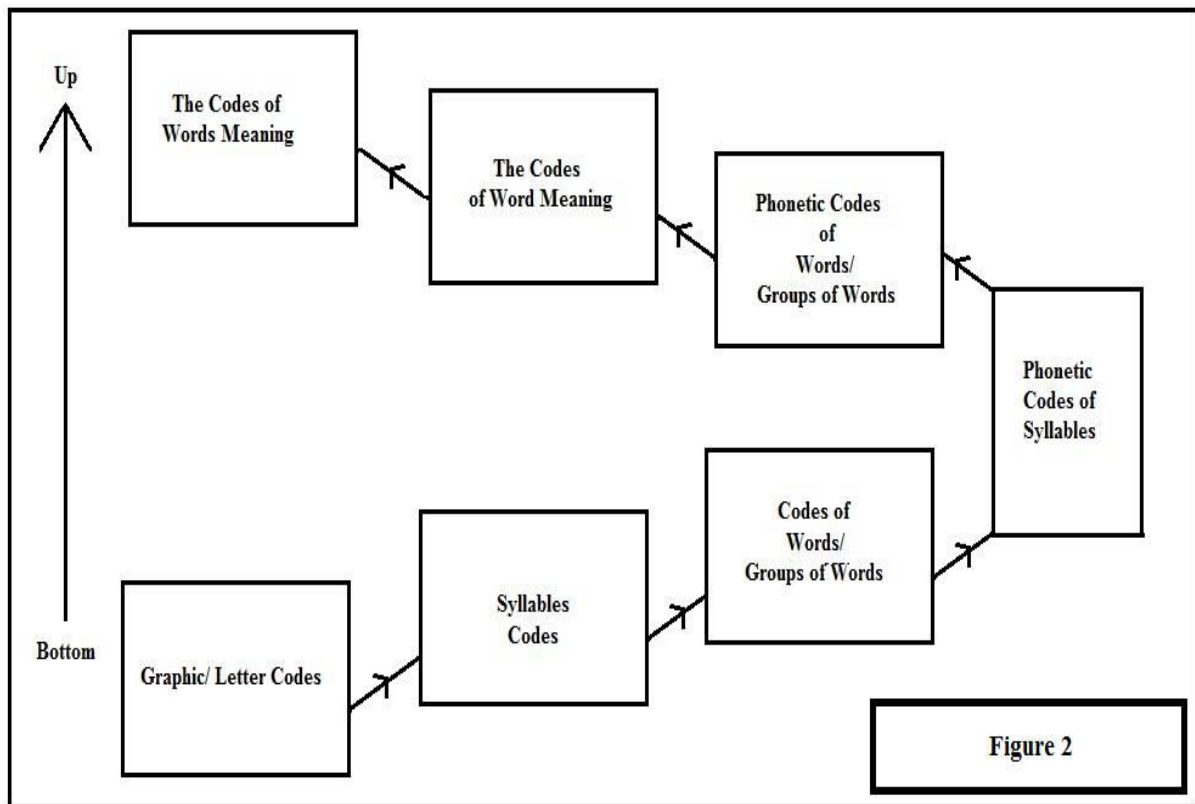
### **1.5.2 LaBerge and Samuels' Model or the Bottom-up Model:**

LaBerge and Samuels assume that learning the reading skills is a process of automating the visual, phonologic and semantic processes. In fact, the process of reading in the bottom-up model involves visual memory (visual symbols, letters, syllables, words, group of words), phonological memory (sound of the letters, phonemes), syllables, words, group of words), and the semantic memory (meaning of words and groups of words).

Visual perception is at once the first level of processing and the base for the next one, the recognition of letters. It is after that followed by the syllabic integration stage and so on, until the whole text is semantically processed (figure 2).

Along with figure 2, series of sequential processes take part in visual, phonological and semantic perception. In the visual perception, graphic and letter codes are joined together, sequentially syllables and words and groups of words. The phonetic codes of syllables, words and groups of words are then linked. Finally, in the semantic perception, the codes of word meaning and groups of words meaning are matched. According LaBerge and Samuels, beginner readers focus on the lower levels, but with practice the majority of these become automatic. Hence, the reader can be more focused on semantics and interpretation.





### 1.5.3 Rumelhart and McClelland Model or the Interactive Model:

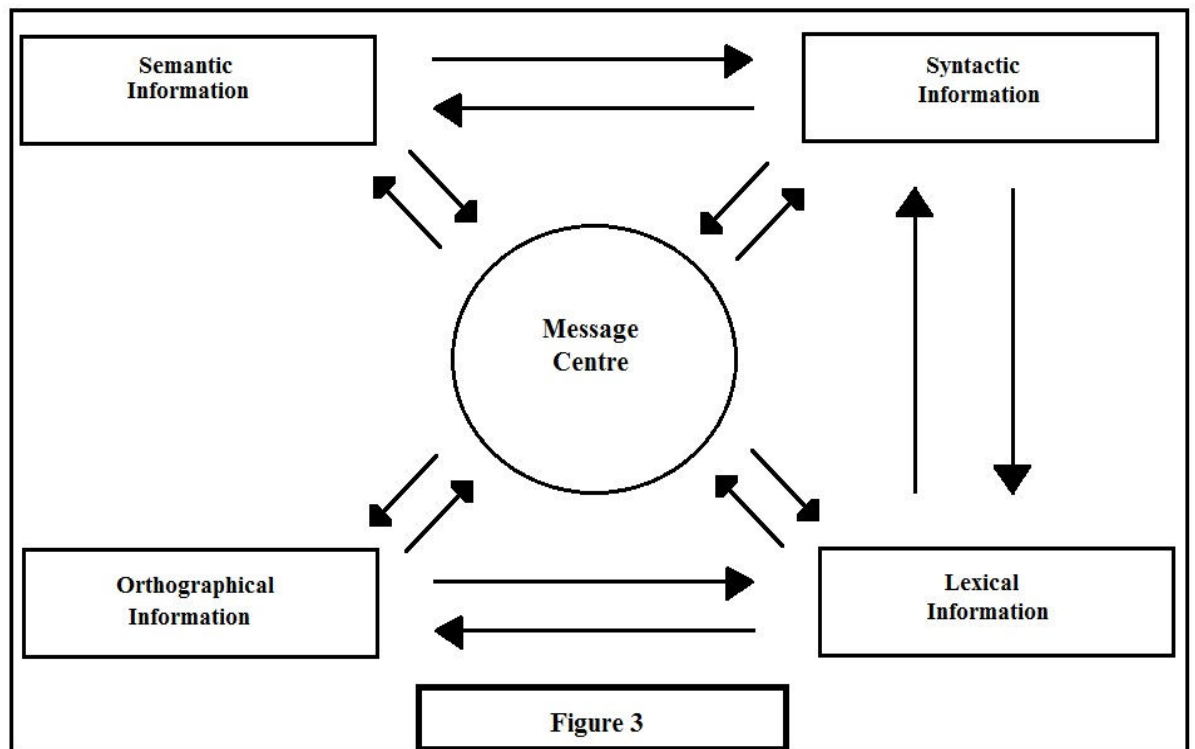
In the 1970's, Rumelhart helped in developing the field of cognitive science (psycholinguistics) with his works on long term memory and semantic mapping –in the mind. Based on Goodman's works, Rumelhart and McClelland proposed a non-sequential model relying on the use of schemata<sup>1</sup> and top-down processing. This model, or the interactive model, emphasizes flexible processing and multiple information sources (lexical, syntactic, and semantic information).

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schemata<sup>1</sup>: According to Anderson (1984), the schema (pl. schemata) is an "abstract structure of information." A schema filled in with default values is called a *prototype*. Whereas a schema is an organized abstract framework of objects and relations, a prototype consists of a specified set of expectations. A prototype is a highly typical instantiation of a schema (Langacker, 1987). If the instantiation (example) matches our schema (idea), we comprehend. If understanding does not occur, we can infer that the text does not have enough clues, or that the reader does not have the appropriate schema. Learning involves creating or changing schemata.

The multiple information sources impact on the processing of the text (reading) and its understanding. The orthographic, lexical, syntactic and semantic information are processed in the message centre. The message centre has a number of functions (figure 3). It stores information received in the short term memory. It opens up to the different sources for data analysis. And according to the results of the analysis, it confirms, denies, adds or removes from the hypothesis of the corresponding subject areas. The procedure keeps going until the 'supposed' right decision is reached (Rumelhart, 1977: 589-590) (figure 3).

A bidirectional relationship is, through the message centre, maintained between the levels (figure 3). In this model, high level processes depend on the knowledge acquired at the lower levels. The processing of information occurs in both directions (bottom-up and top-down).



### 1.5.4 Stanovich's Model or the Interactive-Compensatory Model:

The interactive model appears to provide a more accurate conceptualization of reading performance than the bottom-up or the top-down models. Yet, all these models have limitations. Proponents of top-down processing regard the reading as an interactive process. The reader simplifies textual information to check his hypothesis and predictions (high level stages seem to drive and direct the process of reading). On the other hand, the processing of reading, in the serial model, represents the flow of information in a series of stages. Serial (bottom-up) models do not explain what sort of mental mechanism allows the further processing of stages when a gap appears in a lower stage. The effects of context in the sentence or the role of possessing background knowledge of the subject, the variables that assist and facilitate the recognition of words and their meaning, are difficult to explain with this model.

The ingenuity in Stanovich's interactive-compensatory model is the assumption of compensatory processing: "... a process at any level can compensate for deficiencies at any other level" (Stanovich, 1980: 36). In this way, if there is a deficiency in a lower level, the reader will try to compensate it by means of higher level knowledge structures. For, but with a good knowledge of the subject he is reading, Top-down processing can provide the poor reader, who experiences difficulties at the level of word recognition, with the information he needs. Conversely, if the reader has no trouble in recognizing the words, but lacks contextual knowledge, bottom-up processing can help him in building the meaning.

Stanovich's model is at once interactive in the sense that any stage, regardless of its position in the whole reading process, can communicate with another. This model is also compensatory because it assumes that any reader is able to make use of the knowledge source which is the best developed for his purposes, when other sources, which are less familiar to him, are more difficult to use.

### 1.6 Strategies in teaching reading:

Teaching reading basically means teaching comprehension. The processing of a written text in order to obtain information and build meaning is indeed the overall goal of any reading activity. Yet, it is not an easy skill to master, especially for English as a Foreign Language Learners (EFL).

There are a number of widespread standard strategies that teachers make use of in their daily classroom practices when teaching reading and comprehension. These strategies are based on the retrieval and consolidation of the background knowledge, the explicit teaching of vocabulary and the constant evaluation of comprehension. Table 1.3 below shows how these strategies could be implemented and employed via a set of activities and tasks that occur before reading, while reading and eventually after reading.

Table 1.3 Pre-reading, while-reading and post reading strategic activities.

<b>Pre-reading activities</b>		
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Objectives</b>
<b>Semantic mapping</b>	Learners retrieve and categorize vocabulary they know about the topic of the text.	To retrieve learners' background knowledge and activate schemata.
<b>Previewing</b>	Learners utilize the titles, pictures, and subheadings of a text to find out the main idea and any other relevant information.	To retrieve learners' background knowledge and activate schemata. To develop comprehension by establishing familiarity with basic content and structure of the text.

<b>Questioning-enquiry strategy</b>	In reaction to a picture or a key word, learners produce facts and questions about the text and the topic.	To enhance learners' determination to identify information they need about the text will read. To motivate the learners to read.
<b>Predicting asking questions</b>	Learners guess what a text will be about or what will happen next by producing questions based on the title and reading pieces of the text one at a time.	To train learners to interpret, extrapolate, apply, infer, analyze, synthesize ideas, based on information contained in the text
<b>Skimming</b>	Especially, when dealing with long texts. Learners quickly read through it in order to match them to their main idea.	To train learners to read fast through long written pieces to see what they are about and how they are organized. Skimming allows learners to predict purposes, main ideas contained in a text before moving to focused reading.
<b>Scanning</b>	Learners engage in pair work to rapidly read through a text to find specific information.	To train learners to practice purposive fast reading of texts i.e. train them to scan.

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**While-reading Activities**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Objectives</b>
<b>Increasing reading rate</b>	Learners are required to read the text for 5 to 10 minutes at a time, silently first and one time aloud...	To enhance learners' reading fluency, so that in future readings, there'll be less bottom-up processing (more top-down)
<b>Jigsaw reading</b>	After dividing a text into subdivisions and giving each section to a group/ pair of learners to read it. Learners work in together to reconstruct it.	To raise learners' awareness about the important details in reading. It also encourages learners' team-work.

**Post-reading activities**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Objectives</b>
<b>Vocabulary exercises.</b>	Learners are trained on strategy-use while dealing with new or difficult vocabulary in the text.	To develop learners' strategies in dealing with unfamiliar vocabulary.
<b>Writing summaries.</b>	Learners are required to write a summary of the already-read text or part of it.	To raise awareness of what makes an effective summary. It aims at helping learners develop more effective understandings of future reading experiences.
<b>Three-level guide</b>	Learners react orally to a series of statements about the text they have just read.	To link the literal, inferential and applied learning that occurs when reading.

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The retrieval and consolidation of the background knowledge, the explicit teaching of vocabulary and the constant evaluation of comprehension are the three most important strategic aspects to be taken into consideration when teaching read comprehension. In a nutshell, a teacher could draw on learners' existing knowledge to activate their schemata and retrieve their background knowledge. It could be simply done by taking the learners on a tour of the text which will incite them to think and picture, then interact eventually. Key vocabulary as well as new words must be emphasized, defined and understood besides being incorporated and practiced as well.

### **1.7 Assessment:**

Assessment is the process of observing and analyzing, gathering and measuring data about learners' abilities, needs, difficulties and achievements. Moreover, it provides insights and evidence about the teaching and learning experience. The evidence ongoing assessments produce could be used reflectively as a means to make informed and consistent judgments to improve the teaching-learning experience.

Other standpoints on assessment consider it to be the process of systematic gathering and analysis of information about the abilities, needs, interests, learning styles, and achievements of learners (Birjandi, 2000). Assessing students' learning is a continuous participatory process that: provides data on your students' learning; engages teachers (or others) in analyzing and employing this data to validate and improve teaching and learning; produces evidence about the teaching and learning; provides the bases for educational and institutional improvements; evaluates the impact of these changes on students' learning (Higher Learning Commission, 2006).

According to Alden et al. (2000), assessment tools and methods are the formal or informal means which enable literacy practitioners to gather valid, reliable, and relevant information about the progress of learners. Formal assessments are systematic, planned sampling technique designed to give teachers and students an appraisal of student's achievement. These may take the form of ordinary exercises or other evaluative procedures specifically designed to uncover and substantiate students' skills and

knowledge. They periodically take place in the course of teaching. Virtually, all tests are formal assessments (not all formal assessment is testing).

Informal assessments, on the other hand, are ongoing, accompanying unplanned comments and responses. They may also take the form of unrecorded classroom activities meant to bring out student's performance and generate feedback. They often result in comments, suggestions, and pieces of advice.... This kind of assessment involves observing the learners during the learning and evaluating them from the data gathered.

The nature of assessments differs in connection to their functions, thus, a comprehensive view of assessment will include both formative and summative assessments which diverge in terms of function. Summative assessments typically occur at the end of a course aiming to determine whether learners have accomplished the course objectives. Tests (formal assessment), periodic review tests and midterm exams are examples of summative assessment (Gipps, 1994; Sadler, 1998; Scriven 1967). Initially designed on the basis of reporting and accountability purposes, summative assessments role is to help sorting learners in rank order.

Summative assessments are product-oriented, whereas formative assessments are process-oriented. Their purpose is to monitor student's learning by providing continuous feedback that can be used by teachers and learners to improve the teaching and learning experience. Virtually, all kinds of informal assessment are formative (Harne & James, 1997; Sadler, 1998; Shepard, 2008). The focus of formative assessment is on improving teaching and learning experience, by continuous evaluation of learners during the teaching and learning process. Moreover, formative assessments involve learners in the process of evaluating their achievements.

Evidently, teaching, learning and assessment are dependently and inseparably interrelated. Many forms of assessment fall in between traditional assessment and alternative assessment, combining the best of both. Therefore, it is rather complicated to draw a clear distinction between these two. More time is required to administer and score alternative assessment. In return, alternative assessment provides useful feedback to



students, develops the potential for intrinsic motivation, and ultimately grants a more comprehensive description of a student's ability.

### **1.8 Reading Assessment**

Reading is a skill of dominant significance, especially when assessments of general language ability are to be designed. Traditionally, information about the development of students' reading comprehension ability and reading skills was only gathered through testing during the course or after. Testing is one form of assessment; it serves to determine a student's ability to complete certain tasks or demonstrate mastery of a skill or knowledge of content (Overton, 2011). Formative reading assessment includes a number of different reading activities which can be tackled before, during, and after reading.

On the other hand, recent research on students' achievement has focused on problems associated with over-reliance on standardized tests (Haney & Madaus 1989; Shepard 1989). The standardization process of summative reading assessments have also been influenced by the abundant research findings in the domain of reading and reading theories. Summative assessments usually take the form of tests including a set of activities meant to develop an understanding of what students know, and what they can do with their knowledge as a final result of their educational experiences (Huba & Freed, 2000).

All reading assessment is normally carried out by inference. Strategic pathways to full understanding are often important factors to include in assessing learners, particularly in the case of formative reading comprehension assessments which take place in the classroom. In other words, the assessment of reading ability does not end with the measurement of comprehension.

Reading tests are meant to measure a reader's comprehension ability, knowledge and/ or performance through a set of structured explicit techniques or procedures (measuring instruments). These techniques (measuring instruments) must specify a form of reporting measurement, otherwise they cannot be considered as tests. Depending on the

type of reading and the reading model at its core, standardized reading tests generally include the following tasks:

- a) Non-contextualized multiple-choice vocabulary/ grammar questions.
- b) Contextualized multiple-choice vocabulary/ grammar questions.
- c) Multiple-choice cloze vocabulary/ grammar.
- d) Vocabulary matching.
- e) Selected response fill-in vocabulary.
- f) Multiple-choice vocabulary/ grammar editing.
- g) Sentence completion
- h) Open-ended comprehension questions.
- i) True/ false statements.
- j) Summarizing.

### **1.8.1 Perceptive reading assessment:**

Perceptive reading assessments comprise a category of tasks which focus on the recognition of alphabetic symbols such as letters or words. It also focuses on the recognition of morpheme-phoneme (spelling-sound) correspondences and punctuation. This type of assessment is based on bottom-up conceptualization of the reading process. It is destined to beginner second/ foreign language readers. It assumes that the reader is at the early stages of becoming literate.

Perceptive reading assessments may include:

- **Reading aloud task:**

The reader is supposed to read aloud letters, words or sentences that he sees. This task is not designed to help in developing top-down processing as all the tasks that a perceptive reading assessment may include.

- **Written response task:**

The test taker is supposed to reproduce the written stimuli.

- **Multiple-choice task (grapheme/ morpheme):**

Exclusively in perceptive reading assessments, multiple choice tasks are based on phoneme, or morpheme recognition; for instance:

**Circle the odd item, that does not belong.**

1. Food	Mood	Food
2. Two	Too	Too

- **Minimal pair distinction task:**

Minimal pair distinction task is also based on phoneme / morpheme recognition.

**Circle "S" for same or "D" for different**

Sit	Site	S	D
Bad	Bed	S	D
Fear	Hear	S	D

- **Picture-cued items task:**

Picture-cued items consist of identifying or matching written text (words or sentences) with given pictures.

Select the correct answer:

A.



B.



C.



1- Cat	B
2- Playing football	....
3- Computer	....

### 1.8.2 Selective reading assessment:

Selective reading assessments are considered to be prime examples and models of reading assessment designs in general. Selective reading stimuli may incorporate sentences, brief paragraphs as well as graphs and charts. This type of assessment may include tasks, such as contextualized multiple-choice tasks, which require the reader to construct a meaning. In order for the reader to achieve meaning and provide responses, bottom-up processing strategies must be combined to top-down processing strategies, even if the focus would still be on bottom-up strategies.

Selective reading assessments may include:

- **Multiple-choice task (vocabulary/ grammar):**

In selective reading assessments, multiple choice tasks are based on lexical and grammatical selections, even though they do not merely aim at testing vocabulary and grammar, but involve comprehension as well.

**Choose the correct answer:**

- |                                    |                               |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1- He is not ill.      He is ..... | 2- My book is ..... the desk. |
| A. Happy                           | A. In                         |
| B. A teacher                       | B. On                         |
| C. Healthy                         | C. Under                      |
| B. Rich                            | D. Behind                     |

- **Contextualized multiple-choice task (vocabulary/ grammar):**

Contextualized multiple choice tasks are based on lexical or grammatical selections, which is even more based on the context and the meaning. The interactivity between bottom-up and top-down models is even more accentuated when designing such kind of tasks.

**Choose the correct answer:**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>1- Teacher: Do you like English?<br/>Pupils: Yes. we ..... it.</p> <p>A. Love<br/>B. Learn<br/>C. Hate</p> | <p>2- She: I am busy today.<br/>He: Okay. Can we meet .....?</p> <p>A. Yesterday<br/>B. Today<br/>C. Tomorrow</p> |
|---|---|

- **Multiple-choice cloze task (vocabulary/ grammar):**

A multiple-choice cloze task is similar to simple cloze deletion tasks. It is a test/ exercise consisting of a section of text with a number of words removed. The respondent is asked to restore the missing words from given multiple-choice lists. This type of task is analogous to gap-filling.

**Choose the correct answer and fill in the gap:**

He lived in London (1)..... five years. He learned (2)..... speak English there. He used to write letters to (3)..... family. He invited them to (4)..... London.

- |             |          |          |             |
|-------------|----------|----------|-------------|
| 1- A. since | 2- A. to | 3- A. my | 4- A. go    |
| B. ago      | B. will  | B. his   | B. visit    |
| C. for      | C. can   | C. her   | C. visiting |

- **Vocabulary matching task:**

It is a very rudimental task consisting of matching words with their definitions, synonyms or antonyms and vice-versa.

**Match the words on the left with their definitions/ synonyms on the right:**

- |              |              |
|--------------|--------------|
| 1. Pretty    | A. Annoyed   |
| 2. Unhappy   | B. Tired     |
| 3. Bored     | C. Beautiful |
| 4. Exhausted | D. Sad       |

- **Selected response fill-in task (vocabulary):**

The following example constitutes a model of response fill-in tasks:

**Select the correct answer from the following list and fill in the gap:**

**Powerful / Kind / Interested / Disappointed**

- 1- She is ..... in learning English.
- 2- My sister is a very kind person.
- 3- His parents were very ..... by his marks.
- 4- The country is becoming .....

- **Multiple-choice editing task (grammar):**

This method is commonly used to assess linguistic competence in reading. It is based on the edition of grammatical errors. It trains the reader to discern errors in written text which is a real and authentic task any reader may encounter.

**Choose the letter of the underlined word which is not correct.**

1- Dark clouds moved slowly across the vast sky.

A

B

C

2- He was a shy boy, but he grew to be a friendly and confident men.

A

B

C

3- The magazine devote a lot of space to advertising.

A

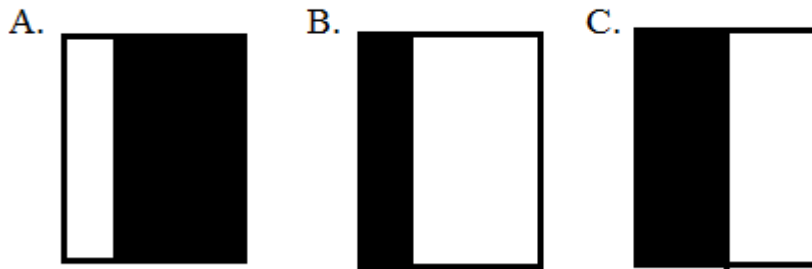
B

C

- **Picture-cued task:**

Phillips (2001) designed the following model of multiple-choice picture-cued task:

Carlo has a bar of chocolate. He gives half a bar of chocolate his brother. See the following four pictures. Choose the picture that shows the relative amount of chocolate left to Carlo?



Multiple-choice picture-cued response (Phillips, 2001)

- **Sentence completion task:**

Sentence completion tasks are also very comparable to gap-filling. The response is to write a word or a phrase so as to complete a given sentence.

**Complete the following sentences.**

Sue: What are we going to do now?

Steve: Well, we can go to .....  
and ..... a movie.

Sue: I am also a little bit hungry.

Steve: We can first start by .....

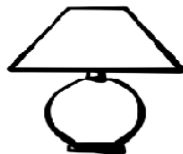
- **Picture/ diagram labeling task:**

Match the words in the list with the correct picture.

- A. Sofa
- B. Chair
- C. Alarm clock
- D. Television/ TV
- E. Lamp



1. ....



3. ....



4. ....



2. ....



5. ....

### 1.8.3 Intensive reading assessment:

This reading assessment type emphasizes the meaning more than the two previously detailed ones (perceptive and selective assessments). Interactive reading assessment combines both form-based and meaning-based reading procedures and evaluative objectives. Nevertheless, it puts the accent on top-down processing. As a matter of fact, written stimuli are longer than in the previous cases: they can go from a couple of paragraphs to a couple of pages.

Interactive reading assessments may include:

- **Comprehension questions:**

Comprehension questions are the most commonly and widely used techniques to assess a reader's comprehension ability. The respondent has to read a written text of a certain length, then he reads the series of questions that he has to answer in no more than three sentences. Comprehension questions may be formulated as in the following examples:

- a) What is the main idea of this passage (according to you)?
- b) What would you conclude from the passage about the future of humanity?
- c) What do you think was the main reason behind the war?
- d) In the third paragraph, it is said that "...". What do you think it actually means?

Open-ended reading comprehension questions are indeed very useful to measure comprehension, even if they sometimes compel the reader to scan the text considering only the pieces of information he needs. In this sense, the text comprehension may not be fully completed. Therefore, comprehension questions have to be designed carefully and adequately with the purpose they serve.



- **True/ False task:**

The respondent is given a number of sentences, based on the knowledge contained in the text. These sentences are reformulated to express ideas which accordingly to the text are either true or false, and sometimes not even mentioned.

**Read the sentences below and decide if they are True (T) false (F) or not mentioned (NM). Correct the false sentences in the provided space.**

1. The people are not environmentally aware and do nothing for nature. " ..... "

.....

- **Exact word cloze task and Appropriate word cloze task :**

Cloze tasks consist of a portion of text with a number of words removed. The respondent is asked to restore the missing words. The cloze task is meant to assess reader's ability to interpret meaning from interrupted messages accordingly with the context.

When designing an interactive reading assessment, the included cloze task should consist of at least two paragraphs in order for the respondent to process discourse and meaning then eventually guess the missing word. The missing words are not to be given.

Generally, deletion is processed following a fixed ration known as *fixed-ratio deletion*. Test designers may prefer not to use this method, but instead delete words according to their discourse or grammatical functions and the purpose they serve. This method is called *variable-ratio deletion*. The third type of deletions in cloze tasks is called *modified fixed-ratio deletion*. This method is a blend of the two preceding ones. Moreover, the task designer can skip deleting certain items such as: names of persons and places as well as dates.

Even though they may be confusingly similar, *fill-in gap* tasks are definitely different from cloze tasks. *Fill-in gap* tasks are indeed less desired than cloze tasks, especially when the reading process focuses the top-down strategies as in the case of interactive reading. Cloze tasks are constructed over connected

paragraphs, whereas *fill-in gap* tasks are designed from single separate sentences. Additionally, cloze tasks are more systematic and objective when it comes to words deletion.

Exact word cloze test expects the respondent to fill in with the original word that was initially deleted from the sentence. Appropriate word cloze task, on the other hand, considers being correct any word which is grammatically approved and is apposite and fitting to the meaning of the sentence and the general context.

**Fixed-ratio deletion (every seventh word +/- 2)**

**Fill in the gap with the appropriate word.**

Education is the most important factor for the ..... of human civilization. Education provides the ..... with man, promotes national unity and uplifts public ..... Education provides the nation with those educated hands. If people ..... educated, they can understand their ..... and rights.

**Correction:** Development / Nation / Awareness / Are / Duties

- **C-Test task:**

C-tests could be defined as a variation or an adjustment of the cloze task. The C-tests differ from their original form in deletion procedure. As a rule, in C-tests, the second half of each and every second word is deleted, starting from the second word in the second sentence. This rule is known as *the rule of two*. The first and last sentences should not contain gaps and remain whole.

**Fill in the gap with the missing part of the word.**

Education is the most important factor for the development of human civilization. Education prov\_ the nat\_ with m\_, promotes nati\_ unity a\_ uplifts pub\_ awareness. Educ\_ provides t\_ nation wi\_ those educ\_ men. If peo\_ are educ\_, th\_ can under\_ their dut\_ and rig\_. Men should be educated in order to uplift human society.

- **Ordering task:**

Ordering task strategy makes it possible to measure the overall comprehension of a text, taking into consideration coherence and cohesion that underscore the chronological order of any event or idea. As all the above mentioned tasks which interactive reading assessment may include, ordering tasks are also constructed over a minimum of two paragraphs.

Ordering tasks could be designed following two basically different methods. The first method consists in selecting the written text to be administered to the test-taker, then, as a second step, breaking it into intact and unedited smaller units (sentences) and presenting them to the test-taker in a random order. The test taker has to organize and order the given sentences so as to reconstruct the original paragraph.

The second method is to give the original written text to the test-taker. He is supposed to read it silently and to build a whole understanding of it. The test-designer is to rephrase the main ideas and events in the text and administer them to the test-taker in a random order. Even if the first method is less advantageous and challenging than the second one, both of them result in the same category of tasks, ordering tasks. Below is an example of ordering tasks designed by Phillips (2001):

---

**Read the passage then put the scrambled sentences in the right order.**

It was almost midnight. John was still awake because he did not have to get up early in the morning. His favorite actor's movie on TV had just finished. The bell rang. He opened the door. It was his friend, Tom. He had forgotten his keys at home in the morning. He seemed too tired to chat with John so he went to bed as soon as possible.

John felt lonely and decided to go to bed. He went to the bathroom and brushed his teeth. When he came into his bedroom, he noticed some candies on the table. He ate a few of them. The candies reminded him of his childhood. Since he did not want to sleep, he decided to look at some old photos. He felt sad when he saw his ex-girlfriend Laura in a photo. He remembered the days they had spent together. He checked his watch and went to bed.

- |       |                                |       |                                     |
|-------|--------------------------------|-------|-------------------------------------|
| (...) | A. John ate some candies.      | (...) | E. John remembered his childhood.   |
| (...) | B. John felt sad.              | (...) | F. The bell rang and Tom came home. |
| (...) | C. John felt lonely.           | (...) | G. John looked at the photos.       |
| (...) | D. John watched a movie on TV. | (...) | H. John brushed his teeth           |

---

**1.8.5 Extensive reading assessment:**

Extensive reading assessments involve texts of a certain length (five paragraphs at minimum) such as short stories and books, in addition to magazine or journal articles and essays. Top-down strategies are for the most part involved in this type of reading and task-taking. Nevertheless, the reader can make use of some targeted bottom-up strategy approaches to the text whenever need be.

Extensive reading assessments may include comprehension questions which can involve scanning tasks, in addition to editing and ordering tasks. This type of reading assessment is mainly constructed over the top-down model of reading. The test-taker may

resort to the use of note-taking and outlining strategies to achieve tasks like summarizing and responding.

- **Summarizing:**

Summarizing tasks consist of asking the responder to provide statements and sometimes paragraphs of the main points included in a text in an attempt to produce an overview of the very same text. It is, nevertheless, difficult to evaluate summaries.

According to Phillips (2001), criteria for assessing a summary are:

- The main idea and the supporting ideas are clearly expressed.
- Contains mostly vocabulary and linguistic structures that are personal to the test-taker. Containing words from the original text is at a certain degree acceptable.
- The summary has to be coherent and cohesive, well structured and grammatically accurate. According to Phillips (2001), the directions to the summary task should be formulated as follows:

“Write a summary of the text. Your summary should be about one paragraph in length (100-150 words) and should include your words as well as your understanding of the main supporting ideas.”

- **Responding tasks:**

In the responding task, the reader is asked to provide his own opinion on an issue or statement in the text, or on its totality. Phillips (2001) proposed the following directions for responding tasks:

“In the given text (article), the author suggests that “...” Write an essay in which you agree or disagree with the author’s thesis. Support your opinion with information from the text (from your own experience).”

- **Alternative assessments and Portfolio:**

The majority, if not all, of the previously described tasks are very standard, conventional and predictable since they have been overly and widely used by examiners to assess learners’ reading comprehension ability. Moreover, they are summative in nature, norm-referenced and product-oriented. Engel (1994) asserted that assessments based only on these tasks are usually used to monitor students’ learning.

Thought of only as instrument to give students diploma, traditional assessment creates a system that classifies and ranks students (Berlak, 1992). Consequently, they become a source of pressure and anxiety, preserving and promoting cheating. Traditional assessment distracts students from meaningful learning and considerably reduces their intrinsic motivation.

On the other hand, Herman et al. (1992) support the idea that alternative assessment methods focus on developing skills that will lead learners to observe, think, question, and eventually test their ideas in real life; as opposed to the focus of traditional assessment which is primarily on cognitive abilities.

Alternative assessment is diametrically opposed to traditional assessment also know as performance evaluation. Nevertheless, for a comprehensive description of student’s abilities, reading assessment should fall in between traditional and alternative assessment techniques, combining the best of both. More time is required to administer and score alternative assessment. In return, alternative assessment provides useful feedback to students, develops the potential

for intrinsic motivation, and ultimately grants a more comprehensive description of a student's ability. On the other hand, summative standard reading assessments are less time-consuming, very practical and easier to score.

It is obvious that the formative assessment of reading comprehension is embedded in activities for teaching both reading and comprehension. Moreover, a certain majority of these activities and tasks can also be used in summative reading assessment cases. Formative assessment practices are supposed to monitor learning and motivate students to read. While in reality, they much resemble to summative reading assessment tasks and hence may have the same impact on learners' comprehension abilities and reading motivation (Valencia, 1990).

Alternative approaches to formative assessment provably offer more effective solutions to reading problems in relation to motivation. Portfolio assessment is a type of alternative assessment consisting in systematically and purposefully collecting learners' work that show their progress and achievements as well as the efforts they had put into them.

Portfolio reading assessment approaches permit to evaluate learners' products and to collect evidence of their progress and the achievement of their learning targets. Valencia (1990) defends that a portfolio approach to assessment assumes that developing readers deserve no less. In addition to providing an alternative to conventional and very common formative reading assessments, portfolios stand as an authentic, systematic purposeful approach to assessment (Porter & Cleland, 1995). The characteristics of reading portfolios are:

- Definition of portfolios to learners.
- Definition of the learning targets.
- Establish guidelines for what will be included in portfolios.
- Learners select their products.
- Systematic collection of learners' products.

- Self-reflection and self-evaluation.
- Documentation of progress
- Portfolio discussions

As any assessment tool, method or approach, portfolio assessments also have advantages and disadvantages. Table 1.4 below lists the advantages and disadvantages of the portfolio assessment.

Table 1.4 Portfolio assessment advantages and disadvantages

<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
Actively involves learners in the process of self-reflection and self-evaluation	Difficult to score
Ongoing process of performance demonstration, evaluation and revision	Needs training and experience
Supports self-improvement	Time consuming

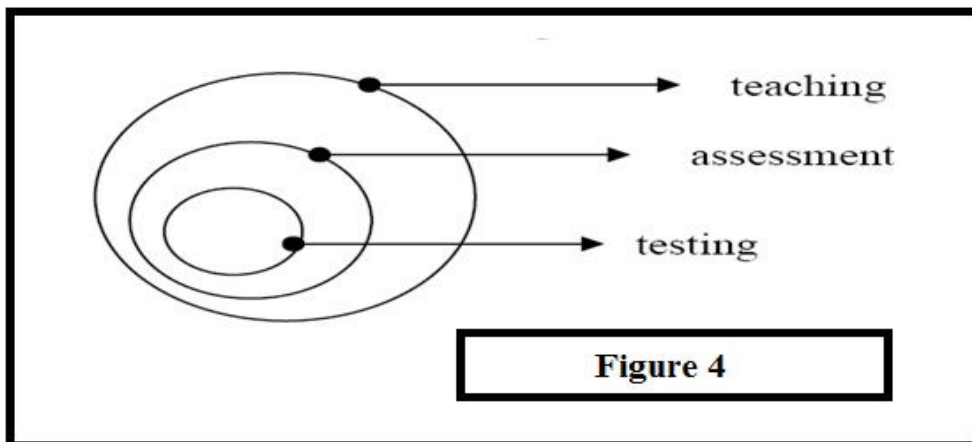




Table 1.5 Traditional and alternative assessment

<b>Traditional assessment</b>	<b>Alternative assessment</b>
Standardized and scheduled exams (tests)	Nonstandard and continuous assessment
Timed	Untimed
Multiple-choice format	Free response format
Decontextualized test items	Contextualized communicative items
Scored feedback	Individualized feedback and washback
Norm-referenced scores	Criterion-referenced scores
Focuses on the “right” answer	Focuses on creative answers
Based on recall/ recognition	Based on construction/ application
Product oriented	Process oriented
Non-interactive	Interactive
Fosters extrinsic motivation	Fosters intrinsic motivation
Summative	Formative

According to Bachman and Palmer (2010), it can be said that testing is a subset of assessment (figure 4). These represent only one among many evaluative procedures that teachers can eventually employ to assess students’ reading comprehension ability and students’ development. Alternative approaches to assessing students’ progress have been defended mainly because they address many of the problems associated with standardized reading tests (Cunningham, 1998; Frechling, 1991; Marston & Magnusson 1987; Rogers, 1989; Wiggins, 1989; Wolf, 1989). Table 5 above demonstrates the fundamental distinctions between the traditional and alternative assessment which constitute the principal reason of their complementary nature.

## 1.9 Conclusion

Reading is the process of negotiating or constructing meaning from a written text (Anderson, 1985; Widdowson, 1990). Existing theoretical understandings of the reading process provided teachers with approaches to shape its instruction and assessment. Moreover, Shapiro and Kilbey (1990) maintain that teachers must learn to question why they are using specific instructional practices and how these practices relate to current theories of literacy development. In this sense, Richards (1994) supports the idea that teachers' beliefs are mostly derived from their theoretical propensities and orientations. Finally, Kuzborska (2011) adds that reading models are of a capital importance in the exploration of teachers' theoretical beliefs about reading.

Reading models represent a systematic and operative way of explaining certain aspects of reading: what it is, how it is taught, how reading relates to other cognitive and perceptual abilities... Reading models could also be defined as theories of what is going on in the reader's eyes and mind during the process decoding, interpreting and understanding a written texts. Research on teachers' beliefs and their relationship to teachers' instructional practices has scarcely treated assessment. The standardization process of reading assessment has been influenced by research findings in the domain of reading (Shepard, 1989). Winter (1992) sees that alternative assessment forms focus on developing skills that will lead learners to observe, think, question, and eventually test their skills in real life.

# **Chapter II**

## **Research Design and Procedures**

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## 2.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the research methods and procedures. It is dedicated to the sampling approaches and the data collection instruments which constitute the corpus of this research. This chapter also aims at describing the methodological framework used to investigate the research questions and verify the hypotheses.

This study is conducted to provide insights about teachers' beliefs and theoretical orientations in connection to reading instruction and assessment. Besides, it attempts to explore the impact of classroom reading assessment on learners' comprehension ability. So as to achieve these objectives, three research instruments are used.

Triangulation mixed method design is a research design that includes different research instruments to investigate the same issue (Creswell, 2002). Triangulation is supported to confirm the validity and reliability of the research process. Data analysis procedures are also mentioned in this chapter.

## 2.2 Research procedure:

According to Strickland (1999) learning to read and write is arguably the most complex task a learner can face. Nevertheless, and in spite of the complexity of the reading process and its multidimensionality, existing theoretical understandings provided teachers with methods and approaches to shape their reading instruction, hence their reading assessment practices.

It is quite delicate to investigate these abstract theoretical beliefs and orientations, since they are likely to be unnoticed when they are at the source of the majority of instructions and decisions made by teachers. It is in this sense necessary to employ a variety of appropriate research instruments which will make available both the qualitative and quantitative data needed to answer these research questions; thus, effectively achieve

the data collection research phase. The qualitative dimension of the research consists in gathering information and analyzing abstractions and concepts.

The central methodological concerns of data collection phase in any research is the planning and designing of the tools which will produce the most significant and relevant information in relation to the research problematic. It is also the understanding of how to analyze the data obtained through instrumental inquiry, be it quantitative or qualitative data.

Data collection procedure involved three (03) research instruments fit to the type of the case study: single, holistic and exploratory. The data gathering methods comprise: two questionnaires and classroom observation. The first questionnaire and classroom observation will supposedly provide the researcher with sufficient data so that the link between teachers' beliefs about reading and its impact on the instructive and evaluative practices could be investigated. Finally, the role of the second questionnaire is to help the researcher verify the third research hypothesis and answer the last research question: Do reading comprehension teachers need to shift to alternative assessment approaches?

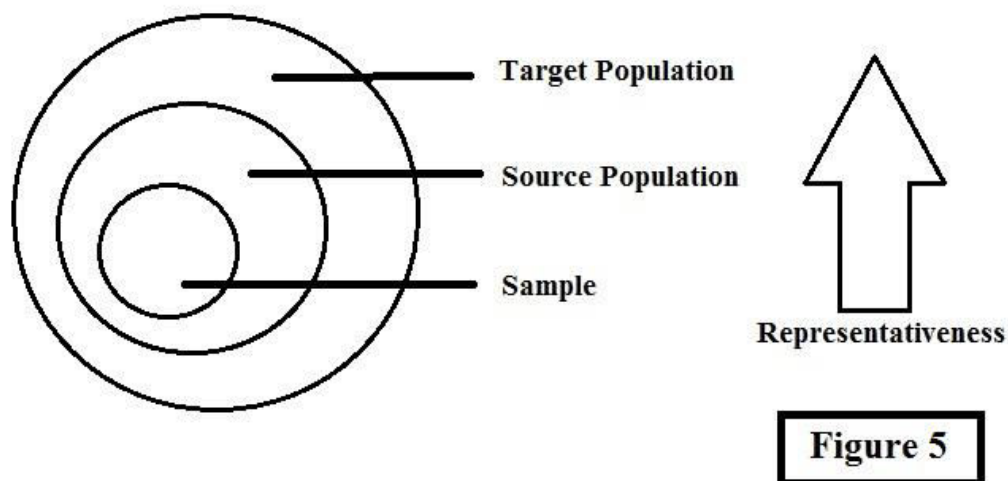
This case study included, as a study population, First (1<sup>st</sup>) Year LMD, University of Tlemcen, 2013 – 2014. Three different participants (teachers) were observed during Discourse Comprehension sessions. On the other hand, the first questionnaire addressed all the teachers of the department, part-time and full-time teachers, novice and experienced teachers. With the purpose of answering all the research questions, extracting data and properly achieving data collection phase, another questionnaire was given to the LMD2 students. In a nutshell, what follows is devoted to the methods and tools which constitute methodological framework that will grant this investigation to be conducted.

### 2.3 Sampling:

Sampling is the process of selecting units from a population of interest so that by studying the sample we may fairly generalize our results back to the population from which they were chosen (Amuyunzu, 2013). In other words, a sample is a number of selected individuals on which the researcher attempts to obtain information. The data obtained can be taken to a broader view and include the population from which the sample was first picked.

Field (2005) defines the sample as a unit of a population which is smaller, but representative and determinant of the truths about the very same population. It is, hence, important to select a representative sample in order to make inferences that can be generalized to the source population (figure 5).

As a process, sampling could be seen as a series of steps taken in order to achieve its end: selecting research units from the source population. The source population is the set of individuals from which the study population, the sample, is taken. Both of the study population and the source population are subsets of what is called the target population which is, by definition, the population to which the researcher would eventually extrapolate out the findings of his research, based on the representativeness criterion (figure 5).



It is indeed preferable to adopt a probability sampling approach in order to allow the researcher to extrapolate the results and make generalizations to the source and target population. This approach is proven to give more representative samples since all the individuals in the source population have the same chances to be selected for the study sample. On the other hand, non-probability sampling approaches, also known as nonrandom sampling, are not strongly advised since they are strongly dependent on the researcher's subjectivity and thus are considered inferior in comparison to probability sampling techniques.

Some probability sampling techniques are:

- Simple random sampling: choosing individuals in a manner that allows all the members of a population to have an equal chance to be selected.
- Systematic random sampling: like all the probability sampling techniques, systematic random sampling also permits the researcher to select his sample without any subjectivity so that all the members of a population may be selected. This sampling technique is based on mathematical procedure.
- Stratified random sampling: according to one or more criteria, the source population is divided to subsets called strata. Then, subsamples can be randomly selected.

Some non-probability sampling techniques are:

- Judgment sampling: or purposive sampling. This type of sampling, as all the non-probability sampling types, is not based on random selection. In this case, the sample is selected because the researcher, with experience and knowledge, believes it is representative of the population.
- Convenience sampling: the sample is selected based on convenience, most of the time including whoever is accessible or happens to be available.



The steps to determine a probability sample are:

- Defining the target population.
- Defining the source population.
- Forming a sampling frame: a list which contains all the individuals in the source population.
- Determining the method and procedure of sampling.
- Determining the sample size.

### **2.3.1 Defining the target population:**

This research focuses on teachers' beliefs about reading in relation to their reading evaluative practices. Because this case study takes place at the level of the English department, UT, it is common sense to consider all the English teachers as the constituents of the target population.

### **2.3.2 Defining the source population:**

The source population is included in the target population. Considering the actual purposes of this research, the researcher has opted to consider LMD1 and LMD 2 Discourse Comprehension teachers as his source population from where samples will be selected for observation.

On the other hand, the questionnaire addressed not only LMD1 and LMD 2 teachers, but all the other teachers as well. This would allow the researcher to extrapolate his findings by considering the whole target population at first as a delimited source population. The second questionnaire, on the other hand, was only administered to LMD1 EFL learners.

### 2.3.3 Forming a sampling frame:

The sampling frame is the list which contains all the individuals in the source population consisting of all who may be selected to form the sample. It is composed of seven (07) discourse comprehension teachers. Six (06) among these teachers have both LMD1 and LMD2 levels. The remaining teacher has only LMD2. This list will be anonymous and the researcher will be referred to, respectively, as:

- Teacher 1
- Teacher 2
- Teacher 3
- Teacher 4
- Teacher 5
- Teacher 6
- Teacher 7

### 2.3.4 Determining the method and procedure of sampling:

In order to determine the sample of teachers who will be observed, the researcher opts for a probability sampling approach which is the best approach to obtain an objectively selected sample, representative of the source and the target population as well, so that it allows the extrapolation of data.

Any probability sampling technique would have been much favorable to the objectivity of this research. However, it was impossible for the researcher to adopt the aforementioned approach because of the encountered difficulties which were in sum inconvenience issues. Hence, the probability sample approach was not exploitable and impractical.

So as to surmount the encountered complication, the researcher has opted for another sampling approach, less desirable, does not much negatively alter the representativeness of the sample as other even less desirable methods may do.

The actual sampling procedure is called *convenience sampling*. It is a non-probability sampling procedure whereby the sample is selected based on convenience, most of the time including whoever is accessible or happens to be available.

### 2.3.5 Determining the sample size:

The convenience sampling procedure is a simple procedure to carry out. Additionally, the source population to be potentially observed is constituted of seven (07) teachers, even if not all of them were accessible or available. After having checked teachers' availability and accessibility, only three (03) were left to form the sample, which is approximately 43% of the source population. In order for the researcher to preserve the representativeness of the sample, all of the three (03) teachers were selected to form the study population: the sample to be observed. The three (03) final participants are:

- Teacher 1 or Teacher A      ➔ LMD2 DC teacher
- Teacher 3 or Teacher B      ➔ LMD1 DC teacher
- Teacher 6 or Teacher C      ➔ LMD2 DC teacher

### 2.4 The questionnaire:

Questionnaires, a very common tool of enquiry, are basically a set of methodically formulated and organized questions used by researchers in order to obtain needed information from either the source population or the study population of his research. Brown (2001) describes the questionnaire as any written instrument that addresses respondents with a succession of questions to which they have to answer either by providing their own answers or by selecting from given answers.

A questionnaire may comprise check lists, rating scales as well as a variety of other research methods. It is a key research tool for data collection and its primary function is measurement, thus, providing quantitative data. According to Dornyei (2007), questionnaires may also be used to generate qualitative data.

There are two main types of questions that a questionnaire could possibly include: open and close ended questions (table 2.1). Open ended questions are those which allow the respondents to react independently to the questions by giving their own answers. Close ended questions are those which do not give the possibility to the respondent to truly speak his mind or give an explanation. The range of possible answers to close ended questions is limited, which make them easier to answer and analyze.

Table 2.1 Open-ended and close-ended questions items

<b>Open-ended questions items</b>	<b>Open-ended questions items</b>
Factual questions:	Likert scales:
Respondent details and information	The respondent is asked to rate from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree”
Clarification questions:	Semantic differential scales:
Seek further explanation	“Always” to “Never” or “Excellent” to “Poor” ...
Sentence completion: The respondent is asked to complete a sentence	Multiple choice questions and “True” or “False” questions
Short answer questions:	Ranking:
A respondent could answer in paragraph	The respondent is expected to rank given items in order.

In sum, the questionnaire is simply a series of questions designed to extract information. Undoubtedly, it is this forte which makes questionnaires the most commonly employed type of research instruments. Questionnaires are in fact relatively simple and therefore less time-consuming. Nevertheless, this research instruments also has disadvantages, as listed below:

- Items of a questionnaire maybe misunderstood.
- Data is limited to the voluntarily produced answers provided by respondents.
- Respondents may voluntarily omit any items from questionnaires.
- Respondents may not return the questionnaire.
- Questionnaire items may limit respondents' answering possibilities.

A questionnaire must be adequately designed to match the level of understanding of the respondents, with a clear language, grammar and spelling. It is also much important that the items contained in a questionnaire have only a single objective each. In addition to being designed to attain the objectives of the study, a good questionnaire should:

- Have a clear title.
- Have a statement of purpose
- Assure confidentiality.
- Have clear directions.
- Comprise both open and close-ended questions.
- Avoid double-barreled questions.

### **2.4.1 Teachers' questionnaire:**

#### **a) Purpose of the questionnaire:**

This questionnaire aims at investigating classroom instructional and evaluative practices conducted by teachers in connection to reading comprehension. It also tries to look into the beliefs and theoretical orientations which may be at the root of

these practices. It is also supposed to grant sufficient qualitative data to make inferences and generalizations.

#### **b) Administration:**

The questionnaire addresses all the teachers of the UT English department, whether they have an experience in teaching reading/ discourse comprehension or not, regardless of Arabic, French, Translation as well as ICTs teachers. As a matter of fact, all the responding teachers either have taught reading comprehension throughout their career, or will possibly teach it in the future. Nevertheless, this study is based on the assumption that all teachers have theoretical belief systems about the teaching of reading and, hence, its assessment.

#### **c) Description:**

The questionnaire is anonymous. It is divided into two parts (appendix 1). The first part comprises cloze and open-ended questions, whereas the second was designed on Likert Scale model. Teachers' questionnaires will help the researcher to get information concerning teachers' experience and theoretical orientations as well as their reading evaluative procedures.

### **2.4.2 Students' questionnaire:**

#### **a) Purpose of the questionnaire:**

This questionnaire aims at investigating the impact of reading assessment conducted by teachers on learners' comprehension ability. This questionnaire will supposedly provide enough qualitative data to discuss the type of impact these evaluative practices have on learners' comprehension. On the other hand, the quantitative data which this questionnaire will make available will help in measuring the impact.

**b) Administration:**

The questionnaire was administered to LMD1 2013-2014 students without exception. The impact of teachers' evaluative practices in connection to reading is most likely to be observed and investigated in these students.

**c) Description:**

Students' questionnaire is very similar to teachers' questionnaire in form. It is anonymous and divided into two parts as well (appendix 2). The first part comprises cloze and open-ended questions. On the other hand, the second was designed on Likert Scale model. The questionnaire tries to look at the reading difficulties learners may encounter, and sometimes may never overcome. It also tries to reveal the impact of the evaluative practices on learners' comprehension ability and reading motivation.

**2.5 Classroom observation in educational research:**

Genuine research instruments should be bias-free, valid and reliable in order to effectively test the research hypotheses. Some these research tools, such as the questionnaire, draw an exclusive focus on objectivity and defend that the researcher is not to be personally involved with the respondent during data collection procedures. These research tools generally fail at truthfully documenting life inside the classroom, even if they still provide the researcher with significantly relevant quantitative and little qualitative data.

Observation procedures in data collection are a form of research instruments that gives the opportunity to the researcher to collect data through watching, listening and recording, with or without interfering with respondents or imposing beliefs on them. Classroom observation of teaching provides the researcher with authentic representative insights into teacher-student interactions which may involve instruction, assessment and feedback as well as other aspects which the multifaceted teaching-learning process encompasses.

This research instrument is mostly valuable in qualitative research. Indeed, it can be used to collect information about activities, behavior as well as other aspects of teaching independently of respondents' interests to answer questionnaires (Taylor-Powell & Steel, 1996). When written data collection procedures are not sufficient, classroom observation can provide the researcher with the significant qualitative data needed to answer research questions and verify hypotheses.

As a matter of fact, this research tool is much desirable when there is evidence that can be systematically seen (observed). Two distinct types of observation can be distinguished depending on whether or not the respondent is aware that he is being observed: disguised observation and undisguised observation. Other observation types are:

- Participant and non-participant observation
- Structured and unstructured observation
- Controlled and uncontrolled observation

### **2.5.1 Participant and non-participant observation :**

Participant observation consists essentially of watching the events, behaviors or other aspects from inside classrooms or groups being observed. However, participant observation allows the observer to unreservedly interact with the group or classroom he actually observes i.e. the observer becomes a member of the group being studied. However, by getting involved in the classroom, observer's objectivity may be impacted. Consequently, the gathered data and the interpretations made may be biased.

On the other hand, non-participant observation requires the observer to be passive and to inactively watch the possible behaviors, occurrences or interactions which may take a place in an educational setting. The observer is in no right to interfere, influence or take part in activities with the observed group/ classroom.



This type of observation is very effective and provides the researcher with authentic evidence.

Non-participant observation gives the researcher an objective and detached role. As a result, members within a group are more likely to be natural and to act in their very usual ways. It also allows the observer to carefully observe and scrutinize anything that happens, since he is not involved in any other activity. Last but not least, non-participant approach is more objective in contrast with participant observation.

### **2.5.2 Structured and unstructured observation:**

Structured observation is a massively involved research instrument in educational settings. It is a systematic form of gathering data wherein the researcher has to adopt a non-participant role while observing. It is based on systematic and structured procedural tools for collecting. Structured observation provides the researcher with quantitative data (Cohen, 2006).

Nevertheless, valid and reliable qualitative data can also be collected through this systematic approach to observation. The observer should have a prior knowledge about what to observe in order for him to target his observation and thus be more focused and effective. Structured observation requires the researcher to design record-keeping plans and forms to carry out his data collection process. Examples of record-keeping forms are: ethnographic narratives, transcriptions and grids of observation or checklists. Structured observation makes the tasks of the observer which consist mainly in observing and recording easier.

Unstructured observation is very comparable to structured observation. The fact is that it also requires the observer to hold a non-participant position and eventually supply him with a rich variety of information. Also known as open observation, unstructured observation assures the observer to notices facts and

evidence that could be missed when using of structured or close observation procedures.

Indeed, unstructured observation procedures do not rely on a close and targeted approach to data collection. The observer needs to be very focused and skilled in order to make the most of an open observation. However, with such unfocused approaches to observation, the observer will probably miss much of what interests him and what is relevant to his research, concentrating on other facts, events or occurrences. Even unstructured approaches to observation may adopt a narrowing-down process, moving from the general to the somewhat specific initial purposes of the observation being conducted.

### **2.5.3 Controlled and uncontrolled observation:**

Controlled observation is primarily used in scientific experiments and research. It is a form of participant observation. In addition to the fact that it involves the observer in the samples or activities being observed, it enables him to set and carry out experiments or tests on them.

Uncontrolled observation approach is a form of non-participant observation. The observer is passive; he observes and records what he witnesses. This approach to observation does not allow the observer to interact or interfere with the thing or fact is being observed, let alone setting or conducting experiments.

### **2.5.4 Observational checklists:**

Structured observations need to be planned in advance. In this sense, an observer will be required to plan his observation by targeting the things and aspects he wants to observe. To save the collected data for future analysis, the observer does not only rely on memory.

The use of observational-data-keeping forms is indeed a crucial feature of observation as a research instrument. Observational checklists are used to

systematically record the occurrences and frequencies of the targeted matters. There different techniques for designing an observational checklist, depending on the objectives of the research and the observer's perception; they are based on rating skills and coding systems, therefore they produce mainly quantitative data. Nevertheless, an observational checklist can produce qualitative data because it allows the researcher to comment what he observes too.

### **2.5.5 Classroom observation:**

The researcher intended to proceed by a non-probability sampling method to determine the participants to be observed from the source population. However, the procedure could not be applied due to a number of inconveniences. The researcher, then, opted for a convenience sampling approach. The adopted approach has allowed the researcher to sample three teachers: Teacher A, Teacher B and Teacher C.

Each of the sampled teachers was observed accordingly with his availability, accessibility and willingness to participate in the research by authorizing the observer to take place inside his classroom, to witness and eventually record data. An undisguised, non-participant and structured approach to observation was adopted by the researcher. In this sense, the observed teachers were informed about the observation procedures and solicited for consent.

The researcher observed the sampled teachers two times each. The first observation aimed at gathering data about teachers instructive and evaluative classroom practices in connection to the teaching and assessing of the reading comprehension. On the other hand, the second observation had the same focus, with a comparative initial objective. The researcher used the same data-keeping forms both times: an observational checklist (appendix 3) and note-taking. The checklist exclusively targeted teachers' instructional and evaluative practices. Alternatively, note-taking was not much relied on; nevertheless, it was used to collect relevant information to the research problematic, which the checklist may

not target or comprise. Classroom observations took place between March and May, 2014.

### **2.6 Data analysis approaches:**

The research instruments used in the present research produce two types of data: quantitative and qualitative data; the former is objective, in contrast with the second which is interpretive and constructive. Quantitative data is of a deductive function, since it allows the researcher to test hypotheses. On the contrary of qualitative data, which enable the researcher to induct and generate theories.

Quantitative data analysis requires technical procedures, which are applied by the researcher in order to convert the collected data to numerical form. Eventually, the researcher will subject the converted data to statistical analyses. Babbie (2010) described the quantitative analysis as a numerical representation and manipulation of data.

According to Campbell (1974), all research has a qualitative basis. Qualitative data analyses, on the other hand, are commonly used in research that addresses abstractions such as teachers' belief systems. Qualitative data cannot be converted to numbers; therefore, it excludes numerical representations and statistical approaches to analysis. Qualitative data analysis is founded on an interpretive philosophy. They are principally inductive in nature, especially when quantitative aspects dominate the research.

### **2.7 Conclusion**

An exploratory case study was designed in order to test the research hypotheses and answer the research questions. This research included First (1<sup>st</sup>) Year EFL, University of Tlemcen, 2013 – 2014. Exploratory case studies look at distinct phenomena characterized by lack of detailed preliminary research. Three research instruments were used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data from different sources and participants: a questionnaire for teachers, learners, and classroom observation.

Teachers' questionnaire seeks at exploring teachers' beliefs and theoretical orientations in connection to reading. Learners' Questionnaire looks at the impact of reading assessment on learners' comprehension ability and learners' reading motivation. Structured, uncontrolled, and non-participant classroom observations aim at providing the researcher with more observable evidence to support or undermine the results of the questionnaires. The observed participants were selected on the basis of a non-probability sampling procedure, known as: convenience sampling.

**Chapter III**  
**Research Findings and Discussions**

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### **3.1 Introduction**

This study seeks to explore the beliefs and theoretical orientations that underlie teachers' instructional and evaluative practices in connection to the teaching and assessment of reading. It also aims at measuring the impact of classroom reading assessment on learners' comprehension ability. The analysis of data resulting from all instruments of research is undertaken, qualitatively and quantitatively. Finally, some conclusions that answer the research questions are drawn.

This chapter is dedicated to data exposition and analysis, in an attempt to answer the research questions. Research findings will be discussed accordingly with the research hypotheses formulated in the general introduction. This chapter ends with conclusions that answer the research questions, in addition to recommendations that are centered on the development of reading assessment and learners' comprehension ability.

### **3.2 Data analysis**

Data analysis is the process of examining and exposing the transformed and modeled data quantitative or qualitative data. This process allows the researcher to discover information that will help him test and verify hypotheses. Data analysis procedures also enable the research to eventually make generalizations and conclusions. The data is firstly gathered, then inspected and analyzed enabling the researcher to expose findings and formulate conclusions and suggestions.



### 3.2.1 Teachers' questionnaire

The first research instrument is the teachers' questionnaire (appendix 1). As mentioned in the previous chapter, it aims at investigating teachers' theoretical orientations in connection to reading classroom instruction and assessment. The questionnaire was distributed to 25 teachers, but only 20 could be collected.

The questionnaire is divided into two sections: A and B. Section A was qualitatively analyzed by means of numerical representations such as: percentages and graphs. Section B, on the other hand, was statistically analyzed using the SPSS software, since the researcher used Likert Scale to gather data.

#### a) Section A:

It is composed of six questions.

#### - Question 1 and Question 2:

Question 1 and Question 2 seeks at providing information about teachers' experience as English Language teachers, then as Reading Comprehension teachers, in order to determine two distinct groups of teachers and compare their theoretical orientation: Teachers who have taught reading comprehension and those who have never done (Table 3.1). This differentiation and comparison helped the researcher draw conclusions and make generalization.

Table 3.1 Reading comprehension teaching experience

Experience	Number	Percentage
Have taught RC	13	65%
Have never taught RC	07	35%

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The total number of teachers who have responded to the questionnaire is (20). Thirteen (13) teachers have taught reading comprehension in the past. The other teachers had never taught reading comprehension, but may do in the future.

- **Question 3:**

Question 3 seeks at the constructive aspect of reading which consists of retrieving and using prior knowledge and schemata to build new knowledge. It considered the reasons or beliefs that underlie this type of action to shed light on teachers' theoretical orientations.

Eighteen (18) teachers have agreed that it is necessary to activate prior knowledge and schemata before engaging in any reading activity. In other words, 90% of the respondents defended that introducing the topic helps students retrieve and categorize vocabulary and familiarize with the topic, growing interested and motivated to read. This, according to the respondents, would lead to a better comprehension of the text. This, in other words, means these teachers are top-down oriented.

Two (02) respondents, however, said that it was not necessary to retrieve background knowledge before engaging in a reading activity. These teachers, which represent 10% of the respondents, maintain that students should be accustomed to exam situations and that through reading they are supposed to activate their prior knowledge and schemata.

- **Question 4:**

This question also focused on the beliefs that underlie a very particular type of classroom instruction to find out more about teachers' theoretical orientations towards the teaching and assessment of reading. Question 4 not merely checked the frequency of reading aloud task, but also tried to look at the reasons which make teachers opt for or avoid this kind of instruction.

Table 3.2 shows the occurrence frequency of reading aloud task. Table 3.2 was obtained using SPSS software, since question 4 comprised a Likert Scale in addition to an open-ended question aiming at understanding the beliefs underlying the read aloud instruction.

Table 3.2 Reading-aloud task frequency

<b>Answer</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Mean</b>	
Always (5)	03	15	n= 0.75
Often (4)	04	16	n= 0.8
Sometimes (3)	08	24	n= 1.2
Infrequently (2)	03	06	n= 0.3
Never (1)	02	02	n= 0.1

Table 3.2 above shows that there is a considerable number of teachers who usually rely on the read-aloud task to teach reading comprehension. Since, reading aloud is considered to be a bottom-up reading strategy, it can be said that UT teachers are bottom-up oriented in terms of reading instruction.

The maximum mean that could have been reached is n= 05 and that is if all the respondents had answered *always* in the questionnaire. Nevertheless, the actual mean was n= 3.15. In other words, the findings that table 3.2 exposes call attention to the fact that respondents are 63% bottom-oriented in terms of reading instruction and evaluation.

On the other hand, the second part of question 4 provided an insight on the reasons behind the use of this particular reading task which is driven from a bottom-up conceptualization of reading. The collected answers centered principally on the fact that reading-aloud task is believed to help students identify the surface structure of text very rapidly and hence interact with it in a minimal time. In this sense, it develops students' reading fluency.

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Other respondents did not give any reason or explanation concerning the use of this very particular task. On the other hand, respondents who have stated that they rarely, or never, ask students to perform this type of reading said that reading aloud is a beginner reader task and that it could possibly slow down or even obstruct comprehension.

- **Question 5:**

Question 5 tried to look at teachers' beliefs in connection to being an effective reading comprehension teacher. This question attempted to provide meaningful data about which theoretical beliefs and orientations make the most effective reading comprehension teachers.

Responses to this question varied, focusing on the objectives behind the teaching of reading, the differences that exist between reading and analyzing a text, as well as teaching and applying reading strategies. The collected data showed that teachers draw a clear distinction between reading to learn English and reading to find information and build knowledge based on understanding.

Accordingly, an effective reading comprehension teacher is one who adopts both approaches to teach reading. Teachers agreed that such an effective approach to teaching reading will enable students to develop a comprehensive understanding about how the elements of language work together to convey meaning. It also equips the student with authentic reading material and purposes for reading.

These interpreted answers revealed that respondent teachers have both bottom-up and top-down orientations concerning reading comprehension instruction. Question 5 revealed, according to respondents' opinions; that an effective reading teacher is one who does not draw solely on one conceptualization of the reading process. Rather than that, an effective EFL RC teacher should adopt an interactive approach towards reading.

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- **Question 6:**

Question 6 comes to conclude the first section of the questionnaire addressed to teachers. It tried to look at teachers' beliefs and approaches to reading assessment. It focused on effective reading comprehension assessment techniques.

The collected information underscored the respondents' agreement that there are not much ways and approaches to assess reading. Along with the gathered responses, all reading assessments, be them formative or summative, would unavoidably be similar. First, the students are presented with a text, which need not be long. Students are required to read the text in order to answer comprehension questions and work on a series of tasks which focus on vocabulary and grammar essentially and comprehension. The collected responses pointed out that (RC) teachers used conventional and somewhat traditional strategies to evaluate students' reading skill and comprehension ability.

**Section B:**

It is composed of six items. Each of the items tried to look into teachers' theoretical orientations concerning the instruction and evaluation of reading and comprehension.

- **Item 1:**

Table 3.3 Schemata and comprehension ability

<b>Answer</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Mean</b>	
Strongly agree (4)	12	44	n= 2.4
Agree (3)	08	24	n= 1.2
Disagree (2)	00	00	n= 0.0
Strongly disagree (1)	00	00	n= 0.0

Reading comprehension teachers agreed on the fact that retrieving background knowledge and activating students' schemata, before engaging in any reading activity, undoubtedly facilitates comprehension. As table 3.3 shows, none of the twenty respondents had disagreed with the given statement which purpose was initially to look at the beliefs teachers hold about the good practices for effectively teaching reading comprehension. Additionally, table 3.3 explains that the respondents are 80% top-down oriented in terms of beliefs about reading.

- **Item 2:**

Table 3.4 Reading-aloud and comprehension ability

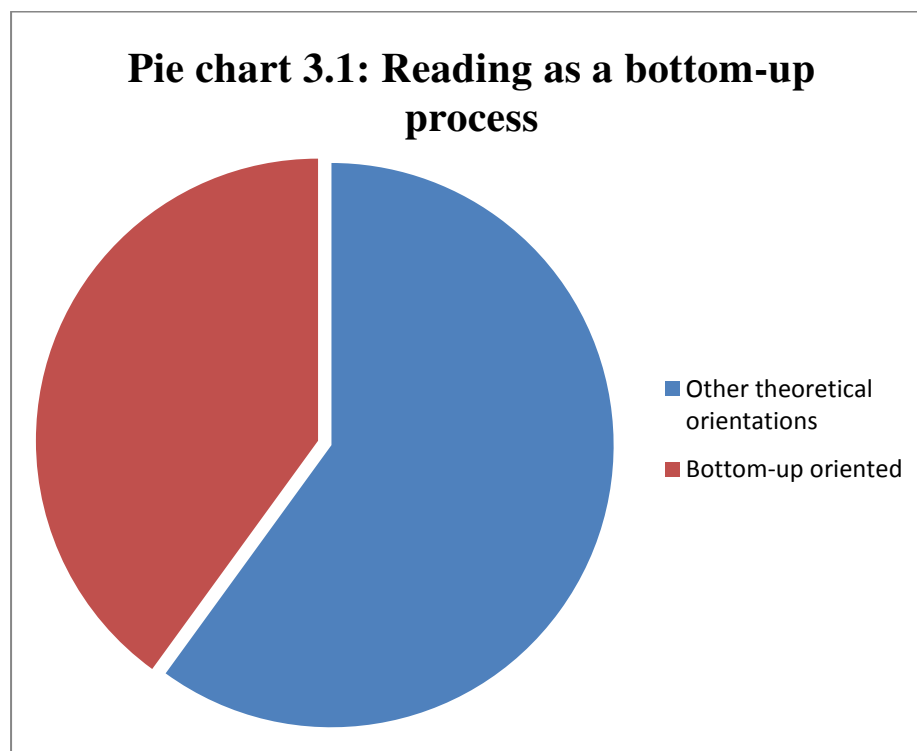
<b>Answer</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Mean</b>	
Strongly agree (4)	02	08	n= 0.4
Agree (3)	06	18	n= 0.9
Disagree (2)	10	20	n= 1.0
Strongly disagree (1)	02	02	n= 0.1

Table 3.4 shows that 40% of the respondents believed that engaging students in reading-aloud tasks would facilitate and increase their comprehension ability. On the other hand, 60% of the respondents had opted for the opposite, implicating that this kind of task is by no means in favor of comprehension. Table 3.4 exposes the fact that 60% of the respondents are bottom-up oriented in terms of reading instructional and evaluative practices.

- **Item 3:**Table 3.5 Reading as a bottom-up process

<b>Answer</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Mean</b>	
Strongly agree (4)	03	12	n= 0.6
Agree (3)	05	15	n= 0.8
Disagree (2)	10	20	n= 0.1
Strongly disagree (1)	02	02	n= 0.1

Table 3.5 expresses in numerical values the degree of theoretical orientations that respondents hold in connection to reading instruction and assessment. The collected information revealed that 40% of the respondents are bottom-up oriented, strongly focusing on decoding skills and fluency when it comes to the teaching and assessing of reading. Conversely, the rest of the respondents (60%) base their instructional and evaluative practices on different theoretical orientations (Pie chart 3.1).



- **Item 4:**Table 3.6 Inference ability in reading comprehension assessment

<b>Answer</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Mean</b>	
Strongly agree (4)	10	40	n= 02
Agree (3)	08	24	n= 1.2
Disagree (2)	02	04	n= 0.2
Strongly disagree (1)	00	00	n= 00

Table 3.6 shows that 90% of the respondents agreed that that reading assessment should comprise reasoning activities which involve analysis and interpretation. However, 10% of the respondents revealed that they hold different points of view concerning this item. In view of table 3.6, it can be said that 90% of the respondents are oriented towards a top-down representation of reading instruction and assessment, primarily based on the capacity to reason and the ability to infer.

- **Item 5:**Table 3.7 Comprehension ability at the centre of reading assessment

<b>Answer</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Mean</b>	
Strongly agree (4)	08	32	n= 1.6
Agree (3)	06	18	n= 0.9
Disagree (2)	04	08	n= 0.4
Strongly disagree (1)	02	02	n= 0.1

The collected data showed that respondents concurred on the fact that reading assessments should be limited to the measurement of student's comprehension ability. Indeed, as table 3.7 exposes it, 70% of the respondents see that reading assessment should not incorporate other evaluative considerations different from comprehension. The rest of the respondents, which represents 30%,



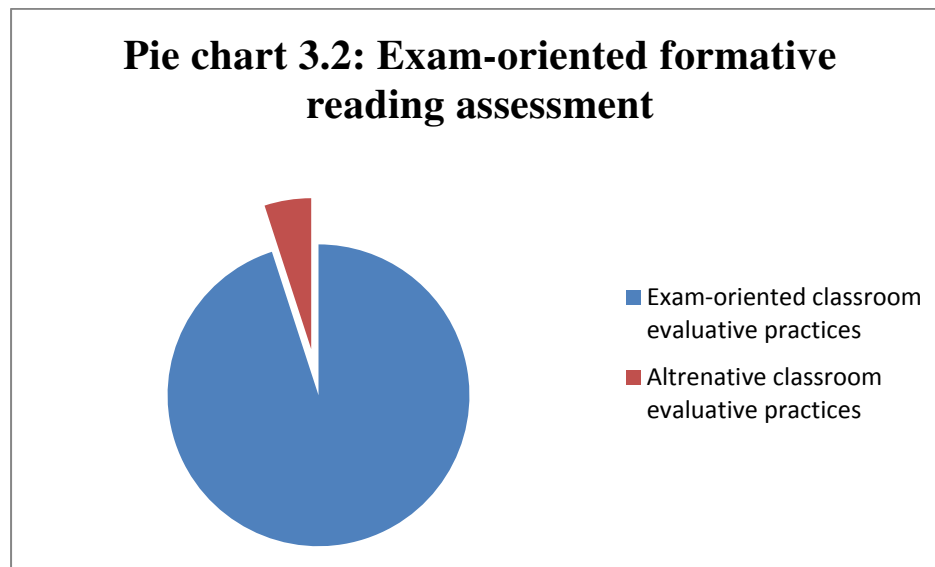
defended that reading assessment should not be limited to the measurement of comprehension.

- **Item 6:**

Table 3.8 Exam-oriented formative reading assessment

Answer	Respondents	Mean	
Strongly agree (4)	11	44	n= 2.2
Agree (3)	08	24	n= 1.2
Disagree (2)	01	02	n= 0.1
Strongly disagree (1)	00	00	n= 0.0

An overwhelming majority of the responding teachers concurred that classroom reading assessment, which is formative in nature, should be designed on an exam-oriented basis. Table 3.8 shows that 95% of the respondents agree that formative reading assessments should be developed on an exam-oriented or summative model.



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These results come to corroborate the findings of Question 6 in the same questionnaire i.e. There are not much approaches to assess reading and, in this sense, all reading assessments, be them formative or summative, would unavoidably be similar. The expressed disagreement of the remaining minority possibly indicated that some respondents had different approaches to formative reading assessment, which are not exam-oriented (Pie chart 3.2).

### **3.2.2 Students' questionnaire**

The second research instrument is the students' questionnaire (appendix 2). As mentioned in the previous chapter, it looks at the reading difficulties learners may encounter. It also tries to reveal the impact of the evaluative practices on learners' comprehension ability and reading motivation.. The questionnaire was distributed to 40 students.

The questionnaire is divided into two sections: A and B. Section A was qualitatively analyzed since by means of numerical representations such as: percentages, graphs and charts. Section B, on the other hand, was statistically analyzed using the SPSS software, since the researcher used Likert Scale to gather data.

#### **a) Section A:**

This section includes six questions.

##### **- Question 1:**

Considering the aims of the questionnaire that was addressed to students, this question tried to provide a broad insight about students' willingness and motivation to attend RC sessions with their teachers essentially to develop reading strategies and build new schemata. Twenty-six (26) students affirmed their motivation about RC sessions, which is almost equivalent to 63% of the

respondents. Conversely, 37% of the respondents reported that they were simply not motivated by reading comprehension.

Respondents forwarded varied reasons to support their answers. The motivated students, who constitute 63% of the respondents, said that learning new vocabulary is the most interesting aspect of these sessions. They also appreciated the varied range of information they had access to each time they had to work on a new material during RC sessions. Last but not least, it was also found that some of these students were motivated by reading comprehension classes because they scarcely engage in any extra reading activity if it is not in the classroom.

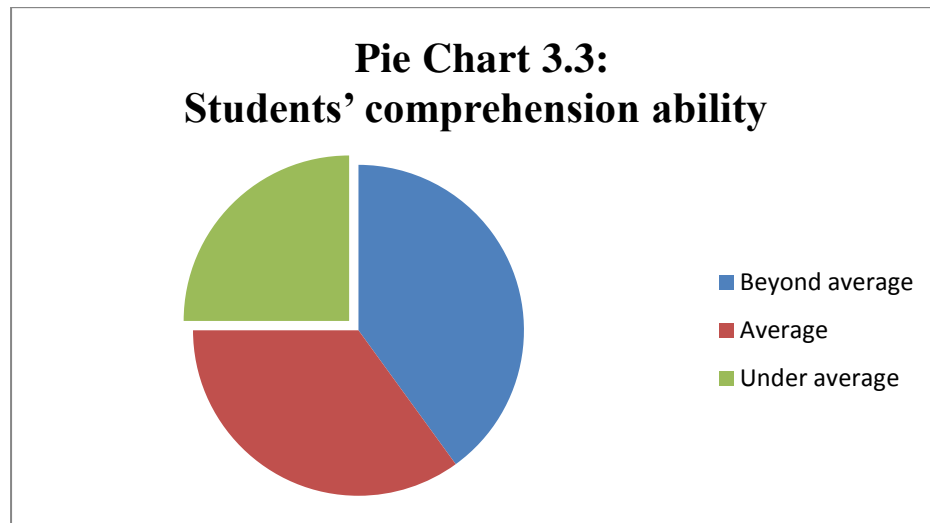
On the other hand, respondents who admitted to have no motivation in relation to RC classes said that it was mainly because they had been doing the same thing for years: reading texts then engaging in activities and tasks. Besides, comprehension difficulties were suggested.

- **Question 2:**

Table 3.9 Students' comprehension ability

Answer	Respondents	Mean	
Very good (5)	04	20	n= 0.5
Good (4)	12	48	n= 1.2
Average (3)	14	42	n= 1.05
Bad (2)	08	16	n= 0.4
Very bad (1)	02	02	n= 0.05

The collected data showed that 40% of LMD1 EFLL considered their comprehension ability to be beyond the average level. Conversely, 25% believed totally the opposite about their interpretive and inferential abilities; ten out of forty students admitted having reading and comprehending issues. The rest, which represents 35% of the respondents, considered their inference ability to be modestly average (Pie chart 3.3).



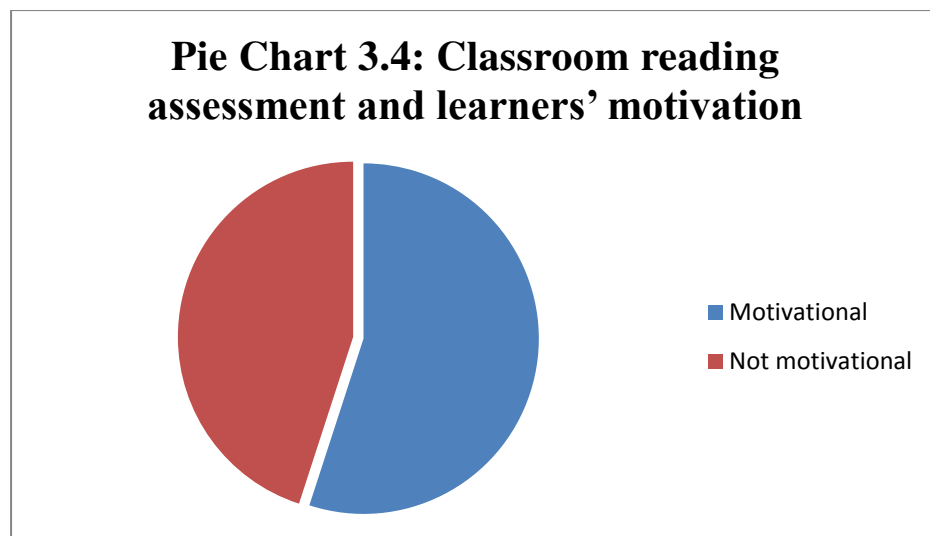
- **Question 3 and Question 4:**

Reading for pleasure indicates students' motivation to engage in extra reading activities, independently of any instruction connected to the teacher or the classroom. The obtained results indicated that only 30% of the respondents read for pleasure, which is equivalent to twelve (12) students. The other students, representing 70% of the respondents, had negatively answered Question 3.

Table 3.10 Extra-reading frequency

Answer	Respondents	Mean	
Always (5)	03	15	n= 0.4
Often (4)	06	24	n= 0.6
Sometimes (3)	13	39	n= 1.0
Rarely (2)	14	26	n= 0.7
Never (1)	04	04	n= 0.1

Table 3.10 exposes the frequency of reading outside the classroom, be it for pleasure or other purposes. It shows that almost 23% of LMD1 EFLL had regular and somewhat frequent extra-reading activities outside their reading classes. On the other hand, 45% of the respondents affirmed that they scarcely, if not never, undertake any extra-reading, limiting themselves to the texts they practiced during their RC sessions. The remaining respondents, representing almost 33%, had described their reading activity to be average (Pie chart 3.4).



- **Question 5:**

Question 5 aimed at investigating the difficulties that students encounter when reading. The collected data showed that respondents faced some difficulties in processing a written text. A noticeable set of students pointed the lack of vocabulary as their principal weakness, complicating reading and comprehension. Respondents had also identified their interest in the topic and motivation to read as hindrances, causing their comprehension to lag.

Furthermore, respondents had stated that length, as a characteristic of any text, plays a paramount role in the process of reading and comprehending. Therefore, length represents a factual difficulty augmenting the impenetrability of texts and limiting comprehension.

- **Question 6:**

The present question concentrated on respondents' awareness of the existence and importance of reading strategies, putting emphasis on their role in reading and achieving comprehension. The gathered data showed that not all the students were actually aware of the existence of such reading strategies. Nevertheless, a certain majority had mentioned *skimming* and *scanning*, without drawing a concrete distinction between them. It is this dissimilarity which is at the root of their different functions and appliances.

A great majority of students responded to Question 6 by simply stating that developing reading strategies would ultimately help them overcome reading comprehension difficulties that they had mentioned in the previous question (Question 5). It is noteworthy to state that two students did not answer the present question.

**Section B:**

It is composed of six items.

- **Item 1 and 2:**

The responses collected from the first item in the second section of students' questionnaire brought evidence that classroom reading materials did not really vary in terms of length, since a notable majority of 75% had disagreed with the first item in the present questionnaire (appendix 2).

Table 3.11 The impact of length and topic on learners' comprehension

<b>Answer</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Mean</b>	
Strongly agree (4)	09	36	n= 0.9
Agree (3)	16	42	n= 1.2
Disagree (2)	10	20	n= 0.5
Strongly disagree (1)	05	05	n= 0.13

Table 3.11 above tried to offer an insight on the true difficulty that learners face while reading a text and which as a consequence can obstruct and slow their comprehension. More than 62% of the respondents affirmed that they were susceptible to find difficulties reading and understanding a text if it is long. In other words, the shorter a text is the better it is for their comprehension. On the other hand, the remaining respondents, which represent less than 38%, had a different opinion and defended that the topic of text is the true hindrance to the achievement of comprehension.

Considering table 3.11 and the obtained results, it can be statistically declared that the length of text influences respondents' comprehension to an extent of 64.4%, which is clearly superior to the impact of the topic on their comprehension which represents 35.5%.

**- Item 3 and 4:**

The data collected through the third item of the present questionnaire did not merely confirmed the results that were obtained previously (item 1 and 2), it also helped the researcher comment on learners' motivation to read texts of a certain length.

Indeed, a large majority was constituted of those who lack the motivation to engage in reading activities when the text is long (30 respondents; 75%). The remaining percentage positively reacted to Item 3, suggesting their motivation to read even lengthy texts.

Moreover, the information that Item 4 enabled the researcher to gather, pointed out that a certain majority of respondents (55%) do set purposes before engaging in reading. Most of the time, these purposes are limited to the tasks that accompany any given text, to measure learners' comprehension. Eighteen respondents reported that they do not determine any objective before reading, which in other words would assumingly mean that their sole purpose when they first read a text would be to identify it and to build an understanding out of it.

- **Item 5:**

In order to collect sufficient data that will make the verification of the hypotheses possible, in addition to answering the research questions, the researcher had to reflect on students' views concerning classroom reading assessment, particularly if they considered it to be challenging and motivating.

Table 3.12 Classroom reading assessment and learners' motivation

<b>Answer</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Mean</b>	
Strongly agree (4)	07	28	n= 0.7
Agree (3)	15	45	n= 1.13
Disagree (2)	13	26	n= 0.7
Strongly disagree (1)	05	05	n= 0.13



Table 3.12 represents the respondents' feedback on the fifth item in the second section of students' questionnaire (appendix 2). It clearly shows that the number of students who find classroom reading activities challenging and motivating is almost equivalent to the number of students who expressed their disagreement with the item. Fifty-five percent (55%) of the respondents were in opposition with forty-five percent (45%) of them concerning the challenges that these evaluative practices present them with as well as the motivation it generates.

- **Item 6:**

The present item aimed at gathering respondents' appraisal of their own reading skills and comprehension abilities, emphasizing their development during the academic year. Table 3.13 below introduces the collected data.

Table 3.13 The development of students' reading comprehension skills

<b>Answer</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Mean</b>	
Strongly agree (4)	06	24	n= 0.6
Agree (3)	16	48	n= 1.2
Disagree (2)	14	28	n= 0.7
Strongly disagree (1)	04	04	n= 0.1

Twenty-two (22) students agreed with the Item six, meaning that 55% of the respondents do have a positive judgment, considering the development of their reading and comprehension skills; on the contrary of the rest of the respondents, which represent 45% and which do not believe that their skills have developed. It is interesting to draw attention to the similarity and correspondence of the results obtained in the present and previous item. From a different stand point, it could also be said that the set of respondents estimate that their reading skills and comprehension ability have developed to a degree of sixty-five percent (65%).

### 3.2.3 Classroom observation

Classroom observation is the third and final research instrument that was adopted in this investigation. It ensures a bias-free, valid and reliable data so as to effectively test the research hypotheses, after the completion of the data collection phase. Its principal purpose is to genuinely document life inside the classroom through observation procedures that gives the opportunity to the researcher to gather data through watching, listening and recording. In the present research, classroom observation of teaching provides the researcher with authentic representative insights into teacher-student interactions which involve the instruction and assessment of reading.

As a matter of fact, this research tool is much desirable when there is evidence that can be observed. The present structured observations were planned in advance. So as for this targeted observation to work properly and to record the collected observational-data, a checklist had been designed (appendix 3). Observational checklists are used to systematically check in the occurrences and frequencies of the targeted issues. There different techniques for designing an observational checklist, depending on the objectives of the research and the observer's perception; they are based on rating skills and coding systems, therefore they produce mainly quantitative data. Nevertheless, an observational checklist can produce qualitative data because it allows the researcher to comment what he observes too.

Observational-data collection procedures involved three reading comprehension teachers from seven. The three teachers, which represent the sample, were selected based upon convenience issues.

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For confidentiality and trust matters, the sampled teachers have been referred to all through this research as: Teacher A B (LMD2), Teacher B (LMD1) and Teacher C B (LMD2).

In spite of the fact that the present research focuses on first year LMD, convenience selection conditions had let in LMD2 teachers in the sample. As a matter of fact, this had permitted a more consistent generalization, which impacts this research only positively.

Each of the sampled teachers was observed two times, during two different sessions. The observational-checklist targeted some aspects that had already been undertaken in the questionnaire, in addition to others which were more logically to be observed inside the classrooms (appendix 3). The checklist focused on the type and the length of the reading material that is provided to students, in addition to the different stages of reading instruction. It also draws a particular focus on classroom reading assessment tasks, in order to support or disprove the research hypotheses after a comparison with the already obtained and previously presented data.

As pointed to earlier, the first aspect that the checklist targeted was the reading material that students were provided with during reading/ discourse comprehension sessions, with a specific focus on its length and type, assuming that it is authentic. Through observation, it had been noted that the reading material used by the sampled teachers is authentic, retrieved either from internet or reading textbooks. It had also been noted that these texts do not really differ in type, since most of them were articles that dealt with miscellaneous topics.

Moreover, another common point to these written stimuli is that the great majority of them did not exceed five paragraphs, at a single and unique exception of an LMD2 teacher. The second observation of Teacher C revealed the use of a somewhat longer reading material: a short story that is two pages long and that comprises twelve (12) paragraphs. This was the only exception that could be raised from the comparison of the

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findings concerning the reading material that was used during the observations of the sampled teachers.

The second part of the checklist, which focused solely on reading instruction through its three stages revealed more relevant information to the research. The pre-reading section showed that teachers made use of the same instructional activities such as: semantic mapping, questioning and predicting. It is noteworthy to mention that students were each time asked to read the text silently, which is a while-reading instructional activity, and never asked to scan or skim which are necessary reading strategies that need to be taught and developed and which have the priority when still in a pre-reading instructional stage. Therefore, the pre-reading stage was somewhat short and limited and most of the students were engaged in the while-reading stage prematurely.

Each of the sampled teachers implemented both reading-aloud and silent-reading to his reading instruction. Teacher C, however, relied solely on silent-reading as an instructional while-reading activity. Nevertheless, he did not instruct his students to scan or skim at any point of the observed sessions. It is also noteworthy to mention that these were the two only while-reading tasks that had been observed, at the expense of other interesting instructional activities such as: jigsaw reading.

Post-reading activities included the use of vocabulary tasks, which most of the time did not really take the aspect of a task, but more of a mere explanation, which at its best required the students to use their dictionary. This may truly hinder the development of students' strategies to deal with unfamiliar vocabulary and guess the meaning.

As a matter of fact, Teacher A and C encouraged their students to use their dictionaries, even though they did not really instruct them guess first. Teacher B, on the other hand, preferred to directly explain the difficult vocabulary. It is interesting to note that these teachers, particularly Teacher B, sometimes put more emphasis on pronunciation than the meaning of the new vocabulary.

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Observation has also revealed that instead of instructing their students to write summaries as a part of the post-reading stage activities, Teacher A, Teacher B as well as Teacher C preferred to ask them to write the general ideas of the texts they had just read – the sub-ideas too, in the case of Teacher B and C. Writing summaries was used as a reading comprehension assessment technique and not as an instructional practice. Besides, no use of the three-level guide task had been recorded. This post-reading task can also appear in the pre-reading stage. Nevertheless, in spite of its paramount importance in developing comprehension, it had not been used by any of the sampled teachers. The three-level guide task focuses on the three levels of comprehension (literal, inferential and applied); in this sense, it must not be mistaken with a true-or-false task performed orally.

The third and final section of the observational checklist focused exclusively on classroom reading assessment. This section attempted to reveal the similarities and discrepancies in teachers' evaluative practices, in attempt to shed more light on their theoretical orientations concerning the instruction and assessment of reading comprehension. Firstly, it had been noticed that teachers implement almost the same tasks to assess their students' comprehension. Indeed, all of the observed teachers used: true-or-false tasks, vocabulary matching tasks and open-ended comprehension questions, in addition to exact-cloze tasks and selected response fill-in tasks which did not only emphasize vocabulary, but grammar too, sometimes.

Teacher A and Teacher B used reading-aloud task as a tool to assess students' reading comprehension, even if they're students had already read the text aloud in the while-reading stage. During the second observation of Teacher C, students had been asked to elaborate a summary of the short story they had been reading, after a discussion of the content of the text.

Last but not least, the observations that had been carried out revealed the nonexistence of any alternative assessment of reading. In this sense, it could be said that formative reading assessment (classroom evaluative practices) are altogether exam-oriented.

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The collected data that had been exposed had been analyzed accordingly with theoretical background of this research. This analysis enabled the researcher to assert that the sampled teachers are oriented towards an interactive reading model, with a certain emphasis on the bottom-up process of the written stimulus, except the case of Teacher C, whose instructional and evaluative practices indicate his top-down orientation. Finally, the present observational data is still to be combined and compared to the questionnaires data in order to verify the research hypotheses and answer the research questions.

### **3.3 Discussions**

The following discussions represent a systematic and objective attempt to interpret the collected findings so as to verify the research hypotheses and answer the research questions raised and formulated in the general introduction. The research questions attempt to explore and identify the beliefs about reading comprehension which underlie teachers' instructional and evaluative practices. Additionally, the possibility of implementing, or shifting, to an alternative reading assessment form will also be discussed.

#### **3.3.1 Teachers' beliefs in connection to reading comprehension**

The research instruments used in this investigation enabled the researcher to collect evidence about teachers' theoretical orientations concerning the instructional and evaluative practices in connection to the teaching of reading comprehension. Indeed, both teachers' questionnaire and classroom observation had enabled the researcher to record indicative data that helped in testing the aforementioned hypotheses and answering the research questions.

The process of data analysis permitted the researcher to test the first hypothesis of this research which is: Algerian EFL university teachers are bottom-up oriented in terms of beliefs about reading. Indeed, on the one hand enough evidence about teachers' bottom-up orientation was recorded. The use of reading-aloud task during the instruction and assessment of reading is the ultimate proof of it. As a matter of fact, 75% of the respondent teachers had admitted to employ this task in their instructional and evaluative

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practices. To that, the strong emphasis on phonological and morphological aspects of new vocabulary could be added.

The length and the type of the provided written stimuli is also an indicative criterion of teachers' theoretical orientation about reading comprehension. Recorded observational data demonstrated that reading materials given to students were generally short essays or articles comprising an average of five paragraphs. However, this is a typical characteristic of selective interactive reading which involves top-down processing. In fact, the collected data had brought enough support to these findings too by showing that none of the observed teachers had omitted to instruct his students to read silently and that 90% of the teachers agreed on the necessity to activate prior knowledge and schemata.

An overwhelming majority of the teachers who, on the one hand, were evidently presumed to be bottom-up oriented were revealed to hold an observable top-down orientation too. The juxtaposed use of these two diametrically opposed theoretical orientations suggests that the teachers have an interactive theoretical conception of the reading process, which is at the root of their interactive approach to reading instruction and assessment.

Reading models are a systematic and operative way of explaining certain aspects of reading: what it is, how it is taught... These models have a significant impact on the teaching approaches, textbooks as well as reading assessment. Hence, these models were of a paramount importance in the exploration of teachers' theoretical beliefs about reading. It could be asserted that UT EFL teachers are not merely bottom-up oriented in terms of beliefs about reading, but conceive reading as an interactive model, and believe that it is good to mix between both bottom-up processing and top-down processing to develop reading skills and achieve comprehension.

These interactive representations of reading were all observed in the reading instruction as well as the process during the evaluative processes that principally aimed at

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measuring students' comprehension. A thorough data analysis and strict comparison of the results showed that teachers' evaluative practices are influenced by their beliefs about reading. The length of cloze tasks that students were administered is, in fact, a characteristic of an assessment which founded on a top-down conception of reading, in addition to the true-or-false tasks and open-ended comprehension questions as well.

Furthermore, the fact that students were asked to perform reading-aloud tasks at the end of each session point out their parallel bottom-up conception of reading and theoretical orientation. In a nutshell, it could be deduced that teachers' evaluative practices are indeed influenced by their beliefs about reading, which confirms the second research hypothesis. In effect, UT EFL teachers have an interactive conception of the reading process, which influences their classroom instructional and evaluative practices in connection to the teaching of reading.

Observation had revealed that Teacher B, who was an LMD1 RC teacher showed more preference and reliance on the bottom-up model of reading, in spite of his interactive theoretical orientations. Contrastingly, Teacher A and Teacher C, who were LMD2 teachers, were found to rely more on a top-down representation of reading. Comparatively, their instructional and evaluative practices mirrored their top-down theoretical orientation more than their bottom-up beliefs in connection to the reading process.

### **3.3.2 The impact on learners' comprehension ability**

Teachers who responded to the questionnaire as well as those who had been observed showed their orientation towards an interactive model of reading, which comprises both bottom-up and top-down beliefs about the instruction and assessment of comprehension. LMD2 teachers seemed to rely more on top-down processes, including inferences, on the opposite of LMD1 teachers, who appeared to draw more emphasis on bottom-up processes and literal meaning and the surface structure of the text. This is indeed reflected in their classroom evaluative practices, approaching assessment from two diametrically opposed standpoints, centering on reading comprehension as a whole.



As a matter of fact, Teacher B (LMD1) observation revealed that the written stimuli he uses during the instruction and assessment of reading are rather short, focusing on the surface structure and literal meaning. In contrast with Teacher A and C (LMD2) observation revealed that they are more top-down oriented when it comes to reading assessment, concentrating on interpretative and inferential skills of students. This distinction resulted from the impact of teachers' theoretical orientations on their classroom evaluative practices.

Moreover, the investigation of teachers' classroom evaluative practices in connection to reading revealed these practices are extremely exam-oriented, besides being traditional and common. Fifty-five percent (55%) of LMD1 students who responded to the questionnaire admitted to find these exam-oriented evaluative practices challenging, whereas forty-five percent (45%) of them agreed on the absolute opposite, implying their lack of reading motivation. Over and above, seventy-five percent (75%) of the students confirmed their absolute disinterest in reading long texts. Besides, only thirty-three percent (33%) of them reported to engage in extra-reading activities regularly. Last but not least, it is also a fact that twenty-five (25%) of the LMD1 students who responded the questionnaire estimated that their comprehension ability is clearly under the average.

These statistical data underscore the impact of exam-oriented classroom evaluative practices on students' motivation to read as well as their comprehension ability. Classroom reading assessment had been found to be very similar to a training which focuses on the skills that students need to pass their biannual examinations. These classroom evaluative practices were proved to be influenced by teachers' theoretical orientations, sometimes emphasizing the bottom-up processes at the expense of top-down inferential processes.

Moreover, forty percent (40%) of responding teachers had agreed on the incorrect assumption that reading-aloud tasks are beneficial to learners' comprehension ability. It is also noteworthy to point out the fact that students were not familiarized with the scanning and skimming strategies, nor with long written texts processing. Almost all reading

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teachers concentrated on both reading aloud and focused silent-reading, scarcely instructing the students to scan a paragraph or the whole text.

This research brought evidence that information about the development of students' reading skills and reading comprehension ability was only gathered through testing, focusing on student's ability to complete certain tasks or to display mastery of a skill or knowledge of content (Overton, 2011). These exam-oriented classroom evaluative practices do certainly impact positively students, in view of their participation in developing reading skills and comprehension at a certain extent. However, it is logical to think about the inadequacies that the present investigation revealed. Thus, it would be practical to consider going back over and reassessing teachers' reading classroom evaluative practices. This does not mean that it is necessary to change them, since data had shown a certain positive impact on students' reading skills and inferential abilities.

However, data had also revealed a negative side to these exam-oriented evaluations; indeed, quite a consequent number of respondents affirmed their lack of reading motivation and their habituation to a particular type of written stimulus. Eventually, students are simply taught how to score in the exam, because no information would eventually be grasped or memorized; during the exam, students will probably be given a different text and asked to perform the same tasks in order to demonstrate their skills, preferably critical, interpretive and inferential (Overton, 2011).

In view of the third and final hypothesis of the present research as well as its findings, it is evident that teachers' classroom evaluative practices need to be updated because they do not have a positive effect on learners' reading comprehension ability and reading motivation. The implementation of alternative assessment approaches is discussed below, in addition to the other changes that could be operated by teachers to improve the quality of their instructional and evaluative practices in connection to the teaching of reading comprehension.

### 3.4 Recommendations

Classroom reading comprehension assessment is supposedly of a formative nature, focusing mainly on the leaning process and the learners. Ideally, it should reflect on learners' needs so as to adapt the instruction consequently. This type of assessment should provide students with challenging and motivational instructional tasks in order to properly and effectively track their achievements. Embedded in instruction, formative assessment is meant to put forward opportunities to improve for all the learners (Stiggins, 2001). By extension, it can be agreed that reading instruction is embedded in reading classroom assessment which is formative in nature.

However, the present research had revealed inconsistencies between teachers' classroom evaluative practices in connection to reading and the true nature of formative assessment and its objectives. As a matter of fact, classroom reading assessment had been found to be standardized and observably exam-oriented, impacting negatively on students' reading motivation by strongly emphasizing on the development of their skills; skills they have been training for years, considering their prior experience in secondary and high school.

Furthermore, the standardization of the written stimulus, in view of its length and type, as well as the tasks included in the operated exam-oriented classroom evaluative constitutes a real issue. Obviously, exam-oriented classroom evaluative practices have formative intentions and aims, but are designed and presented as if they were summative, focusing more on the product and the outcome rather than the motivation and the process. Often presented to students as a series of tasks (a test) after the third stage of reading (post-reading), focusing mainly on the evaluation of their learning; then when a mistake is committed, as an instance, it is the mistake which is corrected and not ever the thinking process which lead to it.

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Undeniably, research had revealed that the operated classroom reading-assessment approaches do have a relatively positive effect on students' comprehension ability, since fifty-five percent (55%) of the responding students affirmed self-confidence about reading comprehension skills. There is, however, a significant part constituted of forty-five percent (45%), which did not share the same self-confidence. Moreover, seventy-five percent (75%) of the students reported that they scarcely engage in any reading activity, even in other languages assumingly. This same portion of students revealed a huge lack of reading motivation. It is very logical to reason that these previous negative aspects have for cause the fact that students limit themselves to what teachers instruct them to read during reading comprehension sessions, which are texts of a common average length and some redundant topics and types. Their comprehension ability is demonstrably limited to the literal meaning, mainly because of the length of the text and the type of questions and tasks which follow the reading activity. Therefore, the development of students' interpretive and inferential abilities is hindered, especially when the written stimulus differ in terms of length and type from the usual, or when the tasks aim at inferential and implied levels of comprehension.

It is, nevertheless, possible to remedy and improve the situation, focusing on the development of students' comprehension ability, the renewal and revival of their reading motivation, in addition to the enrichment of their reading experiences. The initiative of improvement should be taken by teachers who will need first to document and learn about reading theory which is a systematic and operative way of explaining reading and comprehension processes: what are they? How are they taught? How does reading relate to other cognitive and perceptual abilities (comprehension)? How it interfaces with memory?

Reading theories have impacted significantly on the teaching approaches, textbooks as well as reading assessment. As a matter of fact, a teacher who is well-informed about the processes underlying reading and comprehension will have much more readiness to teach them genuinely. Expectedly, these teachers would not exhibit instructional or evaluative practices which are founded on incorrect assumptions, such as

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the commonly received idea that reading-aloud tasks raise learners' inferential abilities. A well-informed reading comprehension teacher would put a strong focus on the teaching of inference rather than fluency, even if fluency is not to be completely omitted.

An informed reading comprehension teacher would know that the teaching of reading involves three crucial stages: pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading. First, a teacher would proceed to the activation of learners' prior knowledge and schemata is primordial to their reading motivation and comprehension aiming at enhancing comprehension by creating familiarity with basic content and structure of the text. This also motivates the learners to read and enhances their determination to identify information they need about the text either through scanning or skimming. Ultimately, the purpose is to train learners to analyze, predict, verify, interpret, extrapolate, apply, infer, synthesize ideas, based on information contained in the text. While-reading and post-reading stages are as important as the pre-reading instructions.

Reading instruction is embedded in reading assessment and each of the three instructional stages encompasses a series of evaluative tools that are appropriate to the aims underlying the instruction. These evaluative tools were designed on the basis reading theory; therefore, some of them draw on bottom-up orientations, whereas the others emphasize the top-down processing of texts. Theoretical awareness of teachers is supposed to help them select or design tasks that are adequate to their students' needs and the objectives already set.

The three-level guide is a post-reading task which engages students in a focused-reading by providing clear purposes and directions. This task supports the learners to use their bottom-up and top-down strategies so as to test a number of given sentences. It is called the three-level guide because it draws attention on the three levels of comprehension: the literal level, the inferential level and the applied level. The learners are directed to concentrate on the relevant information to shape an informed opinion about the content of the text. Learners, then, share their answers and discuss their opinions in order to explain the interpretations and assumptions which helped them develop their opinion and to form an agreement. This task is believed to be very

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motivating and challenging; it could embody a real asset, particularly because it does not belong to the series of conventionalized classroom reading assessment tools.

Crooks (2001) asserted that the process of assessment should be carried out so as to make available information about students' thinking, achievements and progress. Teachers' classroom evaluative practices in connection to reading were revealed to be extremely exam-oriented aiming at making judgments about learners' achievements and training them to score in reading tests. Boud (1995) defends that assessment should not be conceived as a tool to give students grades and marks, then diplomas eventually. Reading assessment should also be a process that leads up to better learning conditions and applications as well as development, with a particular focus on learners and their motivation.

Charvade, Jahandar and Khodabandehlou (2012) affirm that there are innovations in reading assessment procedures, where the change is from summative assessment to formative assessment. These innovative changes involve the consideration of alternatives, which require questioning the learning process and using learning and assessment activities together rather than the habitual test-oriented applications.

Alternative views on assessment have given rise to novel approaches like portfolios: a self-assessment approach that serves as an effective learning strategy to promote motivation and autonomous language learning, encouraging language learners to assess their learning progress (Chen, 2005; O'Malley & Pierce, 1996). According to Oscarson (1997), engaging in self assessment can help students become skilled judges of their own strengths and weaknesses and establish significant and manageable goals for themselves, thus developing their self directed language learning ability.

By systematically collecting works and documenting growth over time, portfolios enable learners to make reflections, redirections, and confirmations of their own learning efforts. Many researchers discussed the merits of using portfolios as an assessment instrument and reported that using portfolios for assessment is important to show the learners' competence, rather than only choosing the correct answers. Additionally, it

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provides more data about the learners. Portfolios enable the students to produce various types of authentic works and urge them to be more creative. Besides, portfolio assessment gives the learners more independence and helps them develop higher order thinking skills and meta-cognitive strategies. Therefore, portfolios have been utilized as an assessment instrument and as part of activities, in recent years.

Charvade, Jahandar and Khodabandehlou's research on the impact of portfolio assessment on students' comprehension ability (2012) confirmed that there is a considerable difference between the impact of portfolio assessment and traditional assessment on EFL learners' interpretive and inferential abilities. The positive effect of portfolios assessment on EFL learners' reading comprehension ability was corroborated in the same research. Alternative assessment proponents agree that portfolio assessment methods could enhance students' achievements.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

The integration of alternative strategies to the assessment of reading is highly accentuated and strongly recommended by modern research in the field of assessment and reading. As a matter of fact, a combination of traditional exam-oriented assessment of reading with alternative approaches to reading assessment would, undoubtedly, have an even more positive impact on learners' comprehension ability and reading motivation. Adopting a portfolio assessment strategy maybe be the key to overcoming the miscellaneous negative impacts of traditional assessment on learners' reading skills, comprehension abilities, and reading motivation. Nevertheless, and in spite of all the benefits of alternative assessment approaches, traditional evaluative procedures cannot be passed over and excluded. In fact, traditional reading assessment are as much needed as alternative assessment, because it is still the most common form of reading assessment that virtually all standardized language tests adopt, with its positive and negative aspects and impacts on EFL.

In short, it is crucial for a teacher to be well-informed about reading theory so as to effectively teach and assess reading and comprehension. Theoretical knowledge raises teachers' awareness about their belief systems in connection to reading instructive and

evaluative practices inside the classroom. Finally, a well-informed reading comprehension teacher would systematically adopt alternative approaches to reading assessment and combine them with traditional classroom reading assessment approaches, in light of all the support and the benefits that recent research attributed them.



## **General Conclusion**

## **General Conclusion**

The need to investigate the beliefs and thinking processes, which are at the origin of teachers' classroom practices and teachers' decision making, has resulted from all the investigations attempting to explain how teachers cope with the teaching process. Existing research on teachers' belief systems and their relationship to teachers' instructional practices has, nevertheless, treated assessment somewhat superficially. In spite of the scarcity of research that addressed teachers' beliefs about reading in connection to reading assessment, it is maintained that their evaluative practices are likewise influenced by their conceptions of what constitutes effective classroom assessment.

The present study puts emphasis on teachers' beliefs about reading instructional and classroom evaluative practices. The research aims at providing insights on teachers' theoretical orientations and approaches to the teaching and evaluation of reading comprehension. It also looks at the impact these evaluative practices may have on students' comprehension ability and reading motivation. To conclude, this study discusses the possibility of adopting other approaches to reading assessment and implementing alternative assessment. Research questions attempt to explore and identify the beliefs about reading comprehension that lie behind teachers' instructional and evaluative practices. Additionally, the possibility of implementing, or shifting, to an alternative reading assessment form will also be discussed.

This research work is composed of three chapters. The first chapter encompasses the literature related to teachers' belief systems. Additionally, it puts up a theoretical background for both reading and reading assessment, so as to establish the environment of the study. The second chapter is dedicated to the description of the research design and methodology, in order to present the tools that had permitted the researcher to conduct his investigation. In other words, it includes a detailed description of the sampling procedures and data collection instruments, with a particular focus on their design, aim and function.

The third and final chapter is dedicated to the analysis and interpretation of the collected data. Discussions, in the same chapter, concentrated on the verification of the formulated research hypotheses and answering the research questions. Concisely, the main findings of this study are:

- UT teachers possess interactive theoretical orientations towards the instruction and assessment of reading and comprehension. LMD1 RC teachers demonstrated a notable emphasis on bottom-up strategies, in contrast with LMD2 RC teachers, who manifested more interest and reliance on top-down strategies.
- Teachers' theoretical orientations in connection to reading influence their classroom instructional and evaluative practices.
- The consistency of some incorrect theoretical beliefs about reading with teachers' instructional and classroom evaluative practices; for instance: some teachers assume that reading-aloud task is in favors the development of comprehension ability and, therefore, they it used somewhat frequently.
- Teachers' influenced evaluative practices do impact students' comprehension ability somewhat negatively, particularly their ability to process long texts, besides their reading motivation and experience.
- Classroom reading comprehension assessment, which is formative in nature, is as a matter of fact traditional, conventional and extremely exam-oriented.

Centered on the research questions and hypotheses, as well as its findings and objectives, the third chapter ended with the following, concisely formulated, recommendations:

- UT RC teachers should reinforce their theoretical knowledge concerning the reading process, so as to revise, correct and improve their instructional and evaluative classroom practices in connection to the teaching and assessment of reading.
- Reading comprehension should be taught by inference.
- Reading activities should be centered on the following:
  - Fluency: The automaticity of basic processes. Cognitive capacities.
  - Strategy: Considering the purpose, using of the appropriate strategies.
  - Constructiveness: Using prior knowledge and schemata to build new knowledge.
  - Motivation: Maintaining attention and interest, in addition to enhancing extra-reading motivation.
- Classroom evaluative practices should include the three-level guide task.
- In addition to the already existing strategies of formatively assessing reading and comprehension, alternative reading assessment strategies, such as portfolios should be adopted and put into practice, in view of the positive impact they have on the development of learners' comprehension ability and reading motivation.

In short, the implementation of alternative assessment approaches would presumably have a better impact on students' reading comprehension as central point and students' reading experience as a whole by enhancing their motivation and interest. In order to achieve a comprehensive description of student's abilities, reading assessment should fall in between traditional and alternative assessment techniques, combining the best of both. Even if more time is required to administer and score alternative assessment, it provides useful feedback to students, develops their intrinsic motivation, and ultimately allows a more comprehensive description of a student's ability.

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# Appendices

# Appendix 1

## Teachers' Questionnaire

### Reading Comprehension Instruction and Assessment

Dear teachers,

I am currently conducting a research about reading comprehension instructional and evaluative practices that focuses on the reasons or beliefs that may underlie them. You are kindly asked to answer the present questionnaire. This questionnaire is anonymous; the provided information will be strictly confidential.

#### Section A:

1) How many years have you been teaching English?

.....

2) Have you ever taught reading comprehension?

Yes

No

3) Is it necessary that teachers devote time to introduce the topic before engaging students in a reading activity? Yes  No

Why:

.....  
.....

4) As a reading comprehension teacher, how often do (would) you ask students to read a text aloud: Never  Infrequently  Sometimes  Often  Always

Why:

.....  
.....

5) What are the characteristics of an effective reading comprehension teacher?

.....  
.....  
.....

6) According to you, what is the most effective way to assess reading comprehension?

.....  
.....  
.....

**Section B:**

The following statements are centered on teachers' beliefs in connection to reading process, instruction and assessment. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement by placing a tick in the appropriate box.

1= Strongly disagree / 2= Disagree / 3= Agree/ 4= Strongly agree

- |   |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1) Retrieving prior knowledge about a topic facilitates comprehension         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2) Reading aloud facilitates comprehension.                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3) When teaching reading, focus should be put on decoding skills and fluency. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4) Reading assessment should be carried out by inference.                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5) Reading assessments should only measure students' comprehension ability.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6) Formative reading assessment should be based on an exam-oriented model.    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

## Appendix 2

### Students' Questionnaire

#### Reading Comprehension Abilities and Difficulties

Dear students,

I am currently conducting a research about reading comprehension evaluative practices, focusing on the impact it has on learner's comprehension ability and reading difficulties. You are kindly asked to answer the present questionnaire. This questionnaire is anonymous; the provided information will be strictly confidential.

#### Section A:

1) Do you feel motivated about discourse comprehension sessions?

Yes

No

Why:

.....  
.....

2) How would you rate your reading comprehension ability?

Very bad

Bad

Average

Good

Very good

3) Do you read for pleasure?

Yes

No

4) Besides classroom reading, how often do you read?

Never

Rarely

Sometimes

Often

Always

5) Which difficulties do you encounter when reading?

.....  
.....  
.....

6) What is the importance of developing reading strategies?

.....  
.....



**Section B:**

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement by placing a tick in the appropriate box.

1= Strongly disagree / 2= A=Disagree / 3= Agree / 4= Strongly agree

- |  |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1) Classroom reading materials vary in length.                           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2) The length of a text influences my comprehension more than its topic. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3) I feel motivated to read long texts.                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4) I always set a purpose before reading.                                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5) Classroom reading activities are challenging.                         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6) My reading skills and comprehension abilities have developed.         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

## Appendix 3

### Classroom Observation

#### Reading Comprehension Observational Checklist

**Classroom Observation Checklist.**

**Discourse Comprehension.**

**Observer:**

**Teacher:**

**Date:**

**Level and Group:**

This checklist is used by the researcher to report data from the classroom observation. It provides a list of items related to the teaching and assessment of reading comprehension which are particularly relevant to this research. Therefore, this observation will be of a non-participant nature, structured and uncontrolled. The collected information will be treated with strict confidentiality.

Observed Items		Session 1	Session 2	Comments
<b>Text Type and Length</b>	Text < 3§			§= ..... Type: .....
	3§ < Text < 6 §			§= ..... Type: .....
	1 page < Text < 2 pages			§= ..... Type: .....
	More than 2 pages			§= ..... Type: .....
Reading Instruction Activities		Session 1	Session 2	Comments
<b>Pre-reading</b>	Semantic mapping			
	Previewing			
	Questioning			
	Predicting			
	Skimming			
	Scanning			

Reading Instruction Activities		Session 1	Session 2	Comments
<b>While-reading</b>	Reading aloud			
	Silent reading			
	Increased rate			
	Jigsaw reading			
<b>Post-reading</b>	Vocabulary tasks			
	Summaries			
	Three-level guide			
Reading Assessment		Session 1	Session 2	Comments
Reading aloud				
Picture-cued tasks				
Non-contextualized multiple-choice				
Contextualized multiple-choice				
Multiple-choice cloze				
Vocabulary matching				
Selected response fill-in				
Exact word cloze				
Sentence completion				
Open-ended comprehension questions				
True/ false statements				
Other:				

**Other observation:**

.....

.....

.....

.....

## ملخص:

القراءة هي عملية استخراج المعلومات و استنتاج المعنى من النصوص المكتوبة. معتقدات المعلمين وتوجهاتهم النظرية، في ما يتعلق بمضمون وعملية تدريس وتقييم القراءة، تشكل خلفية صلبة لممارساتهم التعليمية والتقييمية داخل الأقسام. هذا العمل يهدف إلى التحقيق في هته المعتقدات والتوجهات النظرية وتجلبها في الممارسات التعليمية والتقييمية للقراءة. علاوة على ذلك، ينظر هذا البحث إلى تأثير هته الممارسات التقييمية على تطور قدرة الفهم لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية و يناقش ضرورة الطلبة وتطوير. تحديث استراتيجيات التقييم التكويني للقراءة واعتماد مناهج تقييمية بديلة من شأنها تعزيز دافع القراءة لدى قدراتهم على الإستدلال، الإستنتاج و الفهم

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** النظم العقائدية المعلمين، القراءة والفهم، نماذج القراءة، التقييم التكويني، التقييم البديل.

## Résumé:

La lecture est essentiellement considérée comme le processus de recherche d'informations et négociation de sens d'un texte écrit. Les orientations théoriques des enseignants, en relation avec le contenu et le processus d'enseignement et d'évaluation de la lecture, constituent une base solide pour leurs pratiques instructives et évaluatives. Ce travail de recherche vise à explorer ces orientations théoriques et leurs manifestations durant l'enseignement et l'évaluation formative de la lecture. En outre, cette recherche se penche aussi sur l'impact de l'évaluation formative de la lecture sur la capacité de compréhension des étudiants d'Anglais en tant que Langue Etrangère et discute la nécessité d'une mise à jour des stratégies d'évaluation formative ainsi que l'adoption d'approches alternatives qui sont supposées renforcer la motivation de lecture chez les apprenants et favoriser le développement de leur capacité de compréhension.

**Mots clés:** systèmes de croyances des enseignants, la lecture et la compréhension de l'écrit, les modèles de lecture, évaluation formative, évaluation alternative.

## Summary:

Reading is basically regarded as the process of finding information and inferring meaning from a written text. Teachers' beliefs and theoretical orientations, in relation to the content and process of teaching and assessing reading, constitute a solid background for their classroom instructional and evaluative practices. This research work aims at exploring those beliefs and their manifestation in classroom reading instruction and assessment. Furthermore, this research looks at the impact of classroom reading assessment on English as a Foreign Language learners' comprehension ability and discusses the necessity of updating reading assessment strategies, considering the adoption of alternative assessment forms that would promote learners' reading motivation and support the development of their comprehension ability.

**Key words:** teachers' belief systems, reading comprehension, reading models, formative assessment, alternative assessment.

**Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research**

**University of Tlemcen**

**Faculty of Letters and Languages**

**Department of English**



**INVESTIGATING TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT READING COMPREHENSION  
IN RELATION TO CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT PRACTICES:**

**Case of 1<sup>st</sup> Year EFL Students at Tlemcen University**

*Dissertation Summary Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Magister Degree in Assessment and Testing*

**Presented by:**

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- |                     |        |            |                         |
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**June - 2016**

The scientific interest in the beliefs and thinking processes, which lie behind teachers' classroom practices and teachers' decision-making, has developed from all the studies and enquiries attempting to explain how teachers cope with the very complex teaching process. Teachers' beliefs, in relation to the content and process of teaching, are deeply sealed in teachers, constituting a solid background for their decision planning and their decision making.

The most productive contributions to our understanding of the relationship between teachers' beliefs and teachers' practices have taken place in the field of reading. Numerous studies in the field of reading support the notion that teachers do possess theoretical beliefs toward reading and that such beliefs tend to shape the nature of their instructional practices.

According to Richards and Lockhart (1994), teachers' beliefs may have six origins; these are:

- Teachers own experience as a language learners.
- Teachers experience of what works best.
- Teachers' established practice.
- Teachers' personality factors.
- Teachers' educationally based, or research-based principles.
- Teachers' principles derived from an approach or a method.

Teachers' orientations and approaches to the teaching of reading are mostly characterized in their theoretical conceptions about how a reader actually processes reading, and how he consequently achieves comprehension. These theoretical inclinations and preferences find their roots in each of the elements listed by Richards and Lockhart, such as: teachers' own experience as a language learner and teachers' experience of what works best.

There are four dominant theories which disambiguate and explain the reading-comprehension process. In short, teachers' theoretical beliefs about reading manifestly correspond to one of these four dominant reading models: the bottom-up model, the top-down model, the interactive model and finally, the compensatory model.

Existing research on teachers' belief systems and their relationship to teachers' instructional practices has, nonetheless, treated assessment somewhat superficially. In spite of the scarcity of research that addressed teachers' beliefs about reading in connection to reading assessment, it stands to reason that their evaluative practices are likewise influenced by their conceptions of what constitutes genuine and appropriate classroom assessment. These discrete views on such tasks as lesson planning and assessment may lead to different and divergent instructional and evaluative classroom practices.

Even if there is a surge of interest in the field of teachers' belief systems, at present, there is not much information on teacher beliefs related to assessment in general and classroom reading assessment in particular. There is even less understanding about how various factors such as learning experience and professional background might influence these beliefs and practices. Thus, it is crucial to investigate these beliefs, mainly with the increasing need for some changes, or a reform, to guarantee a genuine assessment which expresses intelligibly student's level of proficiency.

This study emphasizes teachers' beliefs about reading. Most importantly, the consistency of these beliefs with the actual teachers' instructional and evaluative practices is to be investigated. In the light of shifting paradigms affecting education, some teachers have adopted new beliefs and assumptions about reading, in contrast with others who have not updated or changed theirs.

These different beliefs about reading highly influence teachers' theoretical orientations and approaches to teaching and assessing reading. For instance, some teachers may consider reading as an interactive or compensatory process, while others may consider it as a psycholinguistic or serial process. Particularly at this level, the instructional similarities and dissimilarities, shaped by theoretical beliefs, are practically observable and identifiable during a reading class in contrast to the instructional diversity among teachers which stems from their singular learning and professional experiences.

These distinct theoretical orientations are diametrically opposed, centered on reading. It is, thus, crucial to try to identify them in teachers' instructional practices, then to determine whether or not they influence their approaches to reading assessment, concentrating attention on its nature, function, and impact on learner's reading comprehension ability. Significantly, it is primary to define the extent to which these beliefs about reading match teachers' instructional and evaluative practices.

As a matter of fact, some teachers still draw on conventional traditional and conventional assessment, in spite of all its discernible negative aspects, as opposed to others who have opted for modern alternative assessment. Therefore, goals, values and beliefs underlying classroom reading assessment practices need to be investigated and clarified. These belief systems particularly influence teachers' theoretical orientations and understandings of reading, which, in turn, form and typify the nature and function of reading assessments designed afterwards.

Teachers' beliefs and orientations are distinguishably embodied in these assessment practices. Defining the impact of these influenced evaluative practices on learner's reading comprehension ability is crucial and central to conclude whether or not a shift from traditional assessment to alternative assessment is necessary and urgent. The initial and principal purpose of this research is to investigate teachers' belief systems about literacy, with a distinct single focus on reading. Studies' in the field of reading support the notion that teachers do possess theoretical beliefs toward reading and that such beliefs tend to form the nature of their instructional practices. Nevertheless, links between teachers' beliefs and reading assessment have rarely been investigated, until



recently. In this sense, the second aim of this research is to identify the impact of teachers' beliefs about reading on their evaluative practices i.e. on classroom reading assessment, focusing on its nature, function and impact on students' reading comprehension ability.

The Algerian educational system is based on traditional assessment and rote learning. These traditional evaluative practices may also be carried out at the level of the Algerian universities. It is very important to find out whether or not these conventionalized testing methods are still perpetuated at the level of higher education classrooms. Indeed, traditional testing and assessment are not authentic and do not demonstrate actual level of proficiency. Teachers' beliefs about reading may be at the origin of these sustained evaluative practices. Traditional assessment, as opposed to alternative assessment models, may also have a very unconstructive, negative, impact on student's skills development in general, and student's reading comprehension ability in particular. Hence, both the possibility and need for a shift from traditional evaluative practices to alternative assessment practices will be debated.

According to the previously expressed problematic, the following questions were raised:

- 1- What beliefs about reading comprehension underlie teachers' instructional and evaluative practices?
- 2- To what extent do these beliefs influence classroom reading assessment?
- 3- Do reading comprehension teachers need a shift to an alternative assessment?

Based on the theoretical framework of the study, the review of literature, as well as observation and reasoning, three hypotheses were formulated:

H1: Algerian EFL university teachers are bottom-up oriented in terms of beliefs about reading.

H2: Teachers' evaluative practices are influenced by their beliefs about reading.

H3: These evaluative practices need to be updated because they do not have a positive effect on learners' reading comprehension ability.

This research work is composed of three chapters. The first chapter covered the literature related to teachers' belief systems. It also put up a theoretical background for both reading and reading assessment, so as to establish the environment of the study. The second chapter was dedicated to the description of the research design and methodology, in order to present the tools that had permitted the researcher to conduct his investigation. In other words, it included a detailed description of the sampling procedures and data collection instruments, with a particular focus on their design, aim and function. The third and final chapter was dedicated to the analysis and interpretation of the collected data. Discussions, in the same chapter, concentrated on the verification of the formulated research hypotheses, so as to answer the research questions.

An exploratory case study was designed in order to test the previous hypotheses and answer the research questions. This case study included First (1<sup>st</sup>) Year LMD, University of Tlemcen (UT), 2013 – 2014. Three research instruments were used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data from different sources and participants. It is quite delicate to investigate these abstract theoretical beliefs and orientations, since they are likely to pass unnoticed. It is, in this sense, necessary to employ a variety of appropriate research instruments which will make available both the qualitative and quantitative data needed to answer this research questions.

The central methodological concerns of data collection phase in any research is the planning and designing of the adequate tools which will produce the most significant and relevant information in relation to the research problematic. It is also the understanding of how to analyze the data obtained through instrumental inquiry, be it quantitative or qualitative data.

Data collection procedure involved three (03) research instruments fit to the type of the case study: single, holistic and exploratory. The data gathering methods comprise: two questionnaires and classroom observations. The first questionnaire provided the researcher with sufficient data so that the link between teachers' beliefs about reading and its impact on the instructive and evaluative practices could be uncovered and investigated.

The role of the second questionnaire was to help the researcher verify the effects of classroom evaluative practices in connection to reading on learners' reading comprehension ability, so as to see whether or not classroom reading assessment needs to be updated.

This case study included, as a study population: First (1<sup>st</sup>) and Second (2<sup>nd</sup>) Year LMD, University of Tlemcen (UT), 2013 – 2014. The first questionnaire addressed all the teachers of the department, part-time and full-time teachers, novice and experienced teachers. With the purpose of answering all the research questions, the second questionnaire was given to the LMD1 students. In a nutshell,

Classroom observation, as a research instrument, provided the researcher with authentic and representative data, which was necessary to verify the information obtained through the questionnaires and triangulate data. On a convenience sampling basis, three different participant teachers were observed twice during Discourse Comprehension sessions.

The research instruments used in this investigation had enabled the researcher to collect evidence about teachers' theoretical orientations concerning the instructional and evaluative practices in connection to the teaching of reading comprehension. The

investigation revealed that teachers' theoretical orientations in connection to reading influence their classroom instructional and evaluative practices. Moreover, it was also found that University of Tlemcen English teachers possess interactive theoretical orientations towards the instruction and assessment of reading and comprehension. LMD1 discourse comprehension teachers demonstrated a notable emphasis on bottom-up strategies, in contrast with LMD2 teachers, who manifested more interest and reliance on top-down strategies.

The present research had revealed inconsistencies between teachers' classroom evaluative practices in connection to reading and the true nature of formative assessment and its objectives. As a matter of fact, classroom reading assessment had been found to be standardized and observably exam-oriented, impacting negatively on students' reading motivation by strongly emphasizing on the development of their skills; skills they have been training for years, considering their prior experience in secondary and high school.

Furthermore, the standardization of the written stimulus, in view of its length and type, as well as the tasks included in the operated exam-oriented classroom evaluative constitutes a real issue. Obviously, exam-oriented classroom evaluative practices have formative intentions and aims, but are designed and presented as if they were summative, focusing more on the product and the outcome rather than the process and the reading motivation. It is often presented to students as a series of tasks (a test) after the third stage of reading (post-reading), focusing mainly on the evaluation of their learning; for instance, when a mistake is committed, it is the mistake which is corrected and not ever the thinking process which lead to it.

Consequently, University of Tlemcen reading/discourse comprehension teachers should reinforce their theoretical knowledge concerning the reading process, so as to revise, correct and improve their instructional and evaluative classroom practices in connection to the teaching and assessment of reading.

Reading theories have impacted significantly on the teaching approaches, textbooks as well as reading assessment. As a matter of fact, a teacher who is well-informed about the processes underlying reading and comprehension will have much more readiness to teach them genuinely. Expectedly, these teachers would not exhibit instructional or evaluative practices which are founded on incorrect assumptions, such as the commonly received idea that reading-aloud tasks raise learners' inferential abilities. A well-informed reading comprehension teacher would put a strong focus on the teaching of inference rather than fluency, even if fluency is not to be completely omitted.

Reading instruction is embedded in reading assessment and each of the three instructional stages encompasses a series of evaluative tools that are appropriate to the aims underlying the instruction. These evaluative tools were designed on the basis reading theory; therefore, some of them draw on bottom-up orientations, whereas the others emphasize the top-down processing of texts. Theoretical awareness of teachers is supposed to help them select or design tasks that are adequate to their students' needs and the objectives already set.

In addition to the already existing strategies of formatively assessing reading and comprehension, alternative reading assessment strategies, such as portfolios should be adopted and put into practice, in view of the positive impact they have on the development of learners' comprehension ability and reading motivation.

In a nutshell, the implementation of alternative assessment approaches would presumably have a better impact on students' reading comprehension as central point and students' reading experience as a whole by enhancing their motivation and interest. In order to achieve a comprehensive description of student's abilities, reading assessment should fall in between traditional and alternative assessment techniques, combining the best of both. Even if more time is required to administer and score alternative assessment, it provides useful feedback to students, develops their intrinsic motivation, and ultimately grants a more comprehensive description of a student's ability.