

KURDISH EFL STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND PREFERENCES TOWARD EXTENSIVE READING

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Abstract:

This study meant to investigate the attitudes and preferences of Kurdish EFL students toward Extensive Reading. To this end, data were collected via a 12 items attitudinal questionnaire. The participants comprised of 110 Kurdish EFL students (48 male & 62 female), majoring in ELT at Tishik International University, Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq; ranging from freshmen to seniors. A convenience sampling was used to access the participants. The collected data were analyzed in percentage using Microsoft Excel according to the theory of attitude proposed by Mathewson (1994). The findings showed that the devastating majority of the students held positive attitudes toward extensive reading. Similarly, it is uncovered that students find extensive reading as an important and effective means for developing different areas of language skills. Additionally, according to the findings, it could be interpreted that these positive attitudes mostly are due the kind of materials and topics extensive reading presents which best fits students interests and gives them more autonomy. Finally, based on the findings, some recommendations are offered.

1. Introduction

Reading is considered a form of communication among an author and a reader. It is a language skill that, to a great extent, helps learners in developing a second/foreign language; undeniably when reading texts are culturally rich (Barzani, 2020). Research emphasize that reading is an essential area that helps learners to be successful in both school and latter in real daily life situations while dealing with the second language. In this line, undoubtedly, it has been

proven that for a better and speedy learning a second language an effective input is required. According to a hypothesis of input, that is discovered by Krashen (1981) and known as Reading Hypothesis states “reading is a very great source of input that someone can have in the process of learning a language”. The importance of reading in a second or foreign language is to understand and uncover the meaning (Grabe, 2009). Therefore, reading without understanding is just the decoding process of words that devastatingly has no aids in the language learning process. Moreover, reading means recognizing words and understanding them. It contains the structure of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation by reading loudly and so on. Accordingly, Kenyon (2008, p. 5) states “when reading sessions are planned with students, the teacher has to make sure that there is sufficient time to talk about the text (passage, story and to write). Thus, the readers can explain what they have read from the story or passage and they also can write some messages and explore their ideas in reading”; in this way the teacher will make sure that the reading passage is understood well.

Generally speaking, there are two types of reading; namely, intensive and extensive reading. Both, influences and helps in the process second/foreign language learning and teaching. Intensive reading (IR) is the kind of reading activities that requires a detail reading from the side of the students. That is having certain goals in mind and doing this to achieve the determined aim. Therefore, this type of reading is, generally, a language lesson. It attempts to put emphasis on examining the structure of texts and studying such passages with attention (Susser & Robb, 1990). Whereas, extensive reading (ER) is the one in which students are given simplified and enjoyable books or reading passages this is to attract the students and make the reading activity more enjoyable (Helgesen, 2005). Although these two types have their own influence in the process of second language learning (SLL), yet there still exist some controversies among researcher and educators concerning which of them would play a more important role in the aforementioned process (Mambu, 2011; Sidupa 2011; Setiamunadi, 2011; Rudianto, 2010). This controversy circles around many points; however the most common one which is also the aim of the current research is the learners’ attitudes and preferences. In learning a second language, attitudes and opinions of students are of high importance. Research has proven that attitudes greatly affect the learning process. (Feenstra, 1967; Gardner, 1960, 1968; Gardner & Lambert, 1959). In this line, Kerlinger (1984) mentions that attitude makes a person to state and show his/her own feelings about certain things. Therefore this shapes their opinions, motivation, and cognitive directions about some concerns. Saying it differently, attitude is certain feelings, believes, or opinions that people hold in viewing certain matters. Mager (1986) illustrate favorable and unfavorable attitudes, the former refers to positive attitude and the later to negative one. Mathewson (1994) shows attitudes in three different forms: affective, cognitive, and behavior. The first is feelings and/or emotions in the form of liking or disliking things. As to the second one, is a thought, belief or sensible argument. Therefore, once a person has a thought, belief or argument about a problem, this will either negatively or positively move their views. The last one is having

a factual feedback or behavior about something while having firm views or opinions (Yamashita, 2004).

Though, IR has been found as an persuasive source in the learning of a second language, yet research figured out that learners find IR activities boring and tiresome (Mambu, 2011; Sidupa 2011; Setiamunadi, 2011; Rudianto, 2010). One of the reasons that underline this issue might be the cause that topics are not interesting or texts are not easy enough to be tackled and comprehended by the learners. On the other hand, ER activities have been found to be more interesting from the side of the learners. Therefore, teachers should take students' attitudes into consideration while deciding on teaching materials in general. Taking all the above mentioned explanation into consideration, since reading is used as a key source of input and teaching English as a foreign language here in Iraqi Kurdistan region the present study aimed at unearthing the attitudes and preferences of second language learners towards intensive and extensive reading in terms of their affective, cognitive and behavioral attitudes. To the best knowledge of the researchers, this issue has not been studied among Kurdish EFL learners. Thus, this is the first attempt in its type and it is considered the originality of the study. To do so, the present study endeavors to address and answer the following research questions:

Main question:

1. What are the Kurdish EFL students' attitudes and opinions toward extensive reading?

Sub questions:

1. What are the Kurdish EFL students' attitudes toward the use of extensive reading in developing certain areas of English language, namely reading, writing, pronunciation, vocabulary, and general language competence?
2. What are the Kurdish EFL students' attitudes and perceptions toward the materials used in extensive reading?

2. Review of Literature

2.1 The Distinction between Extensive and Intensive Reading

The literature has shown that extensive reading is one of the most effective means in learning a second language. It is because of this reason that this sort of reading has been the focus of research and given more priority over the intensive reading. In literature, ER has been labeled with various names, namely "pleasure reading, (PR)" "sustained silent reading (SSR)", or "uninterrupted sustained silent reading (USSR)" (cited in Krashen 1985, p. 91). However, it should be noted that all of these terms refer to the same mechanism and for the ease of understanding and consistency this study uses the term "Extensive Reading (ER)" henceforth. Unlike Intensive Reading (IR), in Extensive Reading large quantity of texts and reading materials are read. IR usually is done with reading slowly and often with translation exercises. IR is,

to some extent, found to be a slow process in terms of learning and there are not enough resources for the reading activities. In other words, in intensive activities students are restricted to a number of fixed reading texts and there is not flexibility on the part of students' interests (Bell, 2001; Manson & Krashen, 1997). Therefore, usually students find intensive reading as somehow tiresome. Conversely, second language learners like to read the topics that are interesting to them. To do this, extensive reading is that path and approach. In this line, Richard & Schmidt (2002, pp. 193-194) states "extensive reading assist in progressing worthy reading habits, shape up knowledge of vocabulary and structure, uphold students' motivation in learning a foreign language, and rise reading speed." Here, aims are decided by the nature of the material and based on interest of the students that let them to choose what they want to read and have the autonomy to stop those reading materials that stops to attract their interests. Additionally, in ER activities the students are able to read very fast, as well as reading about different aspects in different topics. These mentioned characteristics or values are the basis for extensive reading. These two major types of reading, as briefly mentioned in the introduction as well, differ greatly. The differences are in linguistic focus, level of difficulty, the quantity of material, how it is read, who it is selected by, and where it is read (Alderson and Urquhart 1984, pp. 246-247). For a clearer illustration, these differences are presented in the following Table 1.

Item	Intensive Reading	Extensive Reading
Linguistic Focus	Analysis of the language	Fluency, skill formation
Level of Difficulty	Usually difficult	Quite easy
Quantity Read	Little	Much (a book a week)
Material Selection	By instructor	Usually by learners
Material Read	Same material for whole class	Different materials (based on learner interest)
Where Read	In class	Out of class (mostly at home)
Comprehension check	By discrete-point questions	By summaries, reports

Table 1. Variances among IR and ER Approaches

Moreover, Waring (n.d.) describes ER as "the sole method in which students can access to language at their own level, read something they are interested in, which will let them to meet the language enough times to pick up a sense of how the language fits together". Furthermore, a large amount of research investigated the benefits of ER in L1/L2. It has been found that this type of reading greatly influence the process of learning English in both second and foreign language settings. This influence is not restricted to the development of only one skill, yet it assists in the development of many (Bell, 1998).

2.2 ER Escalates Reading Ratio and Reading Proficiency

As its definition illustrates, ER involves a larger quantity of reading materials over an extended time. Therefore, any reading programs, if it requires such quantity materials in a lengthy time it is expected that, undoubtedly, would escalate the reading rate and proficiency. So that, ER would do. In this line, in their study Elley and Mangubhai (1981) studied the effects of ER reading on reading proficiency. The results figured out that reading proficiency amazingly increased in Fijian and Singaporean primary school students. Additionally, concerning the same issue, Robb and Susser (1989) and Masuhara, Kimura, Fukada, and Takeuchi (1996) found out that reading proficiency in Japanese university students amplified surprisingly with the use of ER program. Moreover, Cho and Krashen (1994) in their research with adult ESL students in the US noted parallel escalations. Concerning the reading rate through ER programs, numerous researches have also noted the same increase. In a comprehensive study done by Masuhara, Kimura, Fukada, and Takeuchi (1996) with Japanese university students; it is found that ER definitely increased the reading rate. Similarly, Bell (2001) uncovered the same results with Yemeni university students. Likewise, in their studies Kusanagi (2004) and Taguchi, Takayasu-Maass, and Gorsuch (2004) with Japanese adults, and Iwahori (2008) with Japanese secondary school students discovered the same results that ER programs increase the reading rate.

2.3 The Effects of ER on Writing Improvement

Generally speaking, long ago research has proven that reading leads to improvement in writing. In other words, research has showed that those learners who read a lot would write better and have fewer difficulties in writing. Yet, in order to achieve the utmost improvement in writing skills at least two points should be taken into consideration, these are reading type and amount of reading. To study the effects of types of reading on the improvement of writing, Elley (1983) discovered that ER programs resulted in the writing development of students at twice the degree of other traditional reading programs. Similarly, Hafiz (1989) and Tudor (1990) in the UK and Pakistan discovered that writing abilities of L2 through ER programs dramatically increased even though they were not exposed to any writing instruction and practice. In this line, another great study by Grabe (1991) unearthed that students who were doing ER ended up with parallel improvements in writing compared with those learners who were doing writing practice. Likewise, Tsang (1996) conducted a 24-week experimental study in which it was figured out that students who were exposed to ER leads to significant gains in writing, whereas students who were exposed and did extra writing practices throughout the same period did not. Additionally, Emilia (2005) also discovered that via genre-based ER method, Indonesian student teachers' argumentative writing skills amazingly improved. Therefore, based on the all aforementioned results it can be undoubtedly concluded that ER programs are effective means of fostering improvements in learners writing skills and abilities.

2.4 The Effects of ER on Vocabulary Knowledge

Various studies have showed a tie between the enhancement and enrichment of building vocabularies and second language ER programs. Through exposition to lexical items that are already acquired via reading, students can expand and develop their understanding of them. Additionally, there is no doubt that if students encounter words in different sentences and pieces of writing this will not only help them to broaden their basket of vocabulary, but it assist the retention as well. Similarly, since they read various and a lot of reading texts through ER this will also help them to review those vocabularies that are previously learned. In their studies, Pitts, White and Krashen (1989) and Cho and Krashen (1994) discovered that ER resulted in a noteworthy growth in incidental vocabulary acquisition with adult ESL students in the US; Horst (2005) figured out alike results with ESL adults in Canada. In the same line, Pigada and Schmitt (2006) conducted a case study with a French student to discover the effects of ER on vocabulary enhancement. The results concluded that ER massively resulted in vocabulary acquisition and development. Furthermore, Yamamoto (2011) suggests that ER exercises would assist learners to check the function and meaning of the words that they have memorized; therefore, this would possibly turn into productive-vocabulary knowledge.

2.5 The Effects of ER on the Improvement of Listening, Speaking, and Pronunciation Abilities

Generally speaking, there exist a noticeable number of studies indicating on positive influences in areas such as listening, speaking, and pronunciation skills. It has been proven in literature that even if the aim of the class is not on the aforementioned skills, still ER program would help students to improve in each of them. This is due to the massive exposure to the reading materials and texts that are rich in vocabularies and other linguistic items. In this line, the findings of their study Cho and Krashen (1994) revealed that ER increased oral fluency of the participants; and Elley and Mangubhai (1981) found out an enhancement in listening proficiency of the participant students. Concerning pronunciation, Malmeer and Araghi (2013) conducted a study on the effects of ER on the enhancement of pronunciation of Iranian learners of English. The findings indicated that ER has a positive impact on the improvement of pronunciation.

2.6 ER Improves General Language Competence of Learners

Though ER is not a new technique in the process of second language teaching, many teachers are not totally aware of the possible rewards that it might contribute to this process. Grabe (1991) have emphasized the significance of ER on enabling learners in word recognition and decoding the meaning of signs on the printed page. Similarly, Elley & Manghubai, (1983) in a study with Fijian school children discovered noteworthy post-treatment improvements in

recognizing words and reading comprehension after eight months, and broader increases in oral and written skills after 20 months. Moreover, several studies on ER have figured out students improvements in specific skills, namely enhancement in general language proficiency by (Elley and Mangubhai, 1981; Bell, 2001; Sheu, 2003; Iwahori, 2008).

3. Review of Related Empirical Studies

In literature, there is much support toward learners' attitudes and motivation as significant components of language learning. Students get motivated when they show positive attitudes towards certain issues Gardner, (1985); Dornyei, (1996). It is, mostly, because of this reason that learners' attitudes are studied extensively. Hence, in order for the students to make best of what is being taught and presented to them, it is critically important for the language instructors to concede learners' attitudes and preferences towards the target language.

In a study conducted by Fujita and Noro (2009) it was discovered that extensive reading improved both intrinsic and extrinsic reading motivation of EFL high school students. Similarly, Lao and Krashen (2000) utilized a questionnaire to study the motivation of second language learners. The results showed that students involved in literature-based pleasure reading were dramatically motivated and had positive attitudes than those students who were involved in traditional academic instruction. In the same vein, Gao (2004) through a one year experimental study investigated whether ER increases motivation in learning English. The participants of the study were Taiwanese female senior high school students. The results indicated that the experimental group that was taught through ER increased markedly higher motivation in language learning, and were more confident that the controlled group that was taught with the traditional reading materials.

Concerning learners' attitudes and preferences, Nishino's (2007) study discovered that students' positive attitudes toward reading resulted in increased literacy level in English. Likewise, to find out students attitudes about ER Grundy (2004) carried out a survey a study in New Zealand. The findings showed that students hold positive attitudes toward ER and 95% of students revealed that due to ER they are more interested in reading English than before. Additionally, to investigate the impact of ER on students' attitudes toward reading Yamashita (2013) carried out a study. The participants were sixty one ESL undergraduates at a Japanese university. The study took fifteen weeks with exposé and implementation of ER. The findings discovered that ER had a strong effect on enhancing positive feelings. The results further showed that autonomy and reading enjoyment in a learning context would develop via ER. Moreover, Johnson (2012) studied Japanese engineering students' attitudes towards EFL learning. The results indicated that the majority of students held positive attitudes toward ER, as they indicated that ER made them to like learning English better.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

For investigating Kurdish EFL university students' perceptions towards Extensive Reading, a quantitative research design was utilized owing to its effectiveness to address the research objectives and answer the research questions. This design also helped the researchers to access a larger number of participants.

4.2 Participants and Setting

The participants of the study were 110 Kurdish EFL students (48male & 62 female). All of them were ELT students studying at Tishik International University, Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq; ranging from freshmen to seniors. A convenience sampling was used because they were selected based on their availability and willingness of participation. The study was conducted during the academic years 2019-2020.

4.3 Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected using a questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised 12 items concerning three attitudinal values: Affective, cognitive and behavioral attitude towards extensive reading. The breakdown of the items is as follows: 2 items were related to affective component (number 1 and 4) these aimed to find out participants' attitudes toward reading in general; 2 items were for behavioral component (number 5 and 6) these items aimed at figuring out participants' attitudes towards ER, specifically towards materials in ER. Additionally, 8 items were for cognitive component (numbers 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12) these items aimed at discovering participants' attitudes towards the effectiveness and usefulness of ER in learning English, in general, and its impact on developing different areas of English language. The questionnaire was in the form of a four-point Likert-Scale consisting four options (*SA, strongly agree, A, agree, SD, strongly disagree and D, disagree*). The participants had to choose one option only.

4.4 Data Analysis

The collected data were grouped according to the three attitudinal values suggested by Mathewson (1994), namely affective, cognitive and behavioral attitude. Then, in order to interpret those responses according to the aforementioned classification the responses were calculated in percentage using Microsoft Excel.

5. Results and Discussions

Results and discussions are presented according to the three attitudinal values suggested by Mathewson (1994), namely affective, cognitive and behavioral attitude.

1. Affective Component: participants' attitudes toward extensive reading in general

Two items in the questionnaire (number 1 & 4) (*1- As a daily task, reading is very useful*), (*4- I find reading enjoyable, if I am given the option to decide on what to read.*) were addressing the affective component. As mentioned previously, affective attitude is the kind of interest that can be “like-dislike” towards something. The findings revealed that 44% of the participants selected *strongly agree* and 55% showed *agree*. Only 1% stated negatively. This indicates that the overwhelming majority 99% were of the opinion that reading, as a daily task, is dramatically beneficial. Concerning the second item in the questionnaire, the results showed that 61% of the participants were *strongly agree* and 33% showed *agree*; whereas only 6% indicated *disagree*. This finding is in line to a statement by Koch’s (2006) which suggests extensive reading, as for pleasure, is an effective learning tool with the condition if students are given the option of selection of the reading materials. Additionally, the result also supports Yamashita’s finding (2004) that uncovered the same positive attitudes among university foreign Language learners in Japan. Based on these results it can be stated that, to a great extent, Kurdish EFL learners are with reading, especially if they are given a chance to choose reading materials. Table 1 below displays the results of the two items for the Affective Attitude.

Table 1. Students’ Attitude toward Reading and Self-Selection of Reading Materials

Item	S. Agree	Agree	Disagree	S. Disagree
1- As a daily task, reading is very useful.	44%	55%	-	1%
4- I am interested in a topic that I like most to read	61%	33%	6%	-

2. Cognitive Component: Participants’ attitudes towards the effectiveness of ER in learning English and its impact on developing different areas of English language.

The second addressed component of attitude was cognitive. This mainly means thoughts or believes of people about something. In the questionnaire 8 items were set to address this altitudinal component (*numbers 2, 3, 7, 8, 9 10, 11, and 12*). These items were meant, specifically, to find out the students’ attitudes toward the effectiveness of Extensive Reading for learning English and the development of different language areas. As to the first component, similarly students showed a positive attitude. The percentage to each item varies, yet the overwhelming majority of the participants indicated a positive attitude towards

the 8 items. Concerning item number 2 (*Extensive reading is personally rewarding for me.*) 18% of the participants stated *strongly agree*, 78% indicated agree and only 4% showed negatively. As to the item 3 (Students at English Department should be exposed and stimulated toward Extensive reading.) 45% of the participants chose *strongly agree* and 49% indicated *agree*; while only 6% chose *disagree*. Table 2 below shows throughout the all 8 items, the overwhelming majority of the participants showed a positive attitude towards the effectiveness of Extensive Reading in learning English and development of different skills. These results are in line with those of (Elley and Mangubhai 1981; Grabe 1991; Bell, 2001; Sheu, 2003; Iwahori, 2008; Krashen 1994; Malmeer and Araghi 2013; Cho and Krashen 1994; Horst 2005; Pigada and Schmitt 2006; Yamamoto 2011; Hafiz 1989; Tudor 1990; Tsang 1996; Emilia 2005) each of them discovered that ER in one way or other is dramatically developing language skills and it is an effective tool for language learning. Therefore, based on the findings of the current study it could be understood that Kurdish EFL students hold a firm positive attitude towards ER and find it as a useful tool in learning English and developing various areas of language, namely reading, writing, vocabulary, pronunciation and general language competence.

Table 2. Students’ Attitudes toward ER as an Effective Tool in Language Development

Items	S. Agree	Agree	Disagree	S. Disagree
2- Extensive reading is personally rewarding for me	18. %	78. %	4%	-
3- Students at English Department should be exposed and stimulated toward Extensive reading.	45 %	49%	6%	-
7- Extensive Reading helps to me develop my reading skill.	34%	57%	9%	-
8- Extensive Reading helps to increase and enrich my vocabularies.	43%	54%	3%	1%
9- Extensive Reading helps me to develop my writing skill	30%	53%	15%	2%
10- I believe Extensive Reading develops my reading ability and proficiency.	47%	48%	4%	1%
11- I feel my pronunciation gets better through Extensive Reading.	31%	56%	10%	3%
12- I feel Extensive Reading improves my General Language Competence.	48%	46%	5%	1%

3. Behavioral Component: participants’ attitudes towards ER, specifically towards materials used in ER

Lastly, to discover Kurdish EFL learner’s attitudes toward ER, in general, and materials used in ER, in specific, two behavioral attitude items were set in the

questionnaire. These were (5. *I like Extensive Reading because it comprises kinds of materials and activities which are interesting and enjoyable.*) and (6. *I like and enjoy Extensive Reading because it includes many different reading types, such as short stories.*). Interestingly, as can be seen in Table 3 below the results of the both statements indicated a positive attitude by the participants. Regarding the first statement, 73% of the participants showed a positive attitude while only 23% responded negatively. As to the second statement, 83% responded positively whereas 17% held negative attitude. These findings are in line with those of (Yamashita, 2013; Johnson, 2012; Gao, 2004; Noro, 2009). Koch (2006), suggested that ER materials should be interesting, fun, and enjoyable. Taking into account the findings of the present study, it could be discussed that Kurdish EFL learners have a positive attitude towards ER, mostly due to the kind of materials it presents.

Table 3. Students' Attitudes towards materials used in ER

Item	S. Agree	Agree	Disagree	S. Disagree
5. I like Extensive Reading because it comprises kinds of materials and activities which are interesting and enjoyable.	18%	55%	24%	3%
6. I like and enjoy Extensive Reading because it includes many different reading types, such as short stories.	21%	62%	16%	1%

6. Conclusions

Learning a second/foreign language is not a straightforward process; there are many factors involved. Therefore, very often, new methods and techniques of teaching are occurring to make this process easier. Likewise, new teaching materials are flocking to the market rapidly. The way that learners are exposed to these materials is another factor. Reading, in general, is found to be a very effective way of providing input to the students. In this line, Extensive Reading, in particular, is found and attested in literature that it positively affects the learning process of a second/foreign language. That is, it helps learners to develop different language skills. However, on the other hand, students' attitudes and preferences is another dynamic factor. Undoubtedly, it has been proven that attitudes greatly affect the learning process. Therefore, the current research started with aim of addressing the main research question (*What are the Kurdish EFL students' attitudes and perceptions toward extensive reading?*). Thus, the results constructed that the participants showed positive attitudes toward extensive reading. More specifically, the three attitudinal components of the students were affirmative. The overwhelming majority of them defiantly agreed that extensive reading can make a great influence on improving English as a foreign language. The participants' responses showed if anyone has a regular amount of extensive reading it makes an incredible improvement. The findings are in line with those of (Elley and Mangubhai, 1981; Bell, 2001; Sheu, 2003; Iwahori, 2008). Additionally, it was figured out that the materials extensive reading presents to them attracts their interests. This finding is in line with as theory of Bamford & Day (1998) in which it states when the students are given reading materials according to their interest,

undoubtedly, they will show positive attitudes, confidence, and motivation. Thus, this would definitely result in language learning development. In the same line, Noro (2009) discovered that extensive reading improved both intrinsic and extrinsic reading motivation of EFL high school students.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study and reviewed literature, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Students' preferences and attitudes are considered very important; consequently, it is an imperative that teachers should take them into consideration. In this case, the inclusion of Extensive Reading is an imperative.
2. Students should be provided with a variety of reading materials, which are interesting and fits students' proficiency level.
3. EFL low proficient learners often avoid reading tasks; so that, it is recommended teachers should provide an environment which encourages students participate in reading activities.

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