

## Improving IELTS speaking skills of EFL learners through the extensive reading at a tertiary level

تحسين مهارات التحدث في امتحان ايلتس لمتعلمي اللغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية من خلال القراءة الموسعة على مستوى التعليم العالي

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### Abstract

### ملخص:

Extensive reading has increased its popularity globally as it offers flexibility to choose any book and read in an increasing volume to derive pleasure. Accordingly, the number of studies regarding it has increased in the last two decades. It has been observed that a gap is prevalent in the literature to measure the effects of ER on students' speaking competence through a standardized test at a tertiary level in Iraq context which has prompted the researcher to conduct this study. In this regard, the present study was carried out to investigate the effects of extensive reading on students' speaking competence through the IELTS Academic Speaking Test within a span of 10 weeks. 45 Foundation English course students who joined lessons actively at TISHK International University in Erbil, Iraq were chosen by convenience sampling method in the 2022-2023 Academic Year. The data were collected through speaking exams and interviews in this mixed methods design study. Collected data analysed by SPSS 23 or NVivo revealed that extensive reading substantially increased students' marks in the IELTS Speaking test, restored their self-confidence, improved their motivation and affected their overall attitudes towards learning English in a pleasurable way. This study's implications can provide a basis for education stakeholders who are considering introducing an extensive reading-enriched program at educational institutions.

زادت القراءة المكثفة من شعبيتها على مستوى العالم لأنها توفر المرونة في اختيار أي كتاب وقراءته بحجم متزايد لاستمداد المتعة. وفقا لذلك ، زاد عدد الدراسات في العقد الماضيين. وقد لوحظ وجود فجوة سائدة في الأدبيات لقياس على كفاءة التحدث لدى الطلاب من خلال اختبار ER آثار موحدة على مستوى التعليم العالي في السياق العراقي ، مما دفع الباحث إلى إجراء هذه الدراسة. في هذا الصدد ، أجريت هذه الدراسة للتحقيق في آثار القراءة المكثفة على كفاءة التحدث لدى الطلاب من خلال اختبار المحادثة الأكاديمي IELTS في غضون 10 أسابيع. تم اختيار 45 طالبا من طلاب دورة اللغة الإنجليزية التأسيسية الذين انضموا إلى الدروس بنشاط في جامعة تيشك الدولية في أربيل ، العراق ، بطريقة أخذ العينات الملائمة في العام الدراسي 2022-2023. تم جمع البيانات من خلال امتحانات التحدث والمقابلات في دراسة تصميم الأساليب المختلطة هذه. كشفت البيانات التي تم جمعها أن القراءة NVivo أو SPSS 23 والتي تم تحليلها بواسطة المكثفة زادت بشكل كبير من علامات الطلاب في اختبار IELTS Speaking ، واستعادت ثقتهم بأنفسهم ، وحسنت دوافعهم ، وأثرت على مواقفهم العامة تجاه تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية بطريقة ممتعة. يمكن أن توفر الآثار المترتبة على هذه الدراسة أساسا لأصحاب المصلحة في التعليم للنظر في تقديم برنامج مكثف غني بالقراءة في المؤسسات التعليمية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** القراءة المكثفة ، اختبار المحادثة في الثقة بالنفس ، التحفيز ، IELTS

**Keywords:** Extensive reading, IELTS Speaking Test, self-confidence, motivation.

### Introduction

The concept of literacy has received increasing attention in the last two decades for its numerous implications in people's social, educational and professional lives. Although there are different

definitions of literacy in many contexts, it can be briefly defined as the ability to read, write and make interpretations on the focused item without having difficulty (Wildova, 2014). In other

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words, being literate has many reflections in practice with various types of literacy. It can be attested that reading literacy has a direct link with all other literacy types because reading requires the readers to figure out the themes in the text and make logical interpretations like other types of literacy (Tan et al., 2022). For example, digital literacy refers to knowing how to take advantage of the websites on the internet via mobile technologies such as cell phone, laptop or tablets. In addition, media literacy means distinguishing the fake news from realistic ones by analyzing the contents critically. Subsequently, visual literacy can be basically defined as the ability to convert written materials into a more appealing visual format or describe the images accurately. Additionally, data literacy equips the individuals with the ability to analyze and synthesize large chunks of information. After that, critical literacy urges people to evaluate the events critically to notice the weakness and inform the relevant bodies for an improvement. Afterwards, financial literacy drives the individuals to come to the right decisions financially. Moreover, health literacy directs the people to prioritize their health by taking necessary measures in advance. Additionally, mathematical and scientific literacy support the individuals during their education and later substantially. It can be stated that reading literacy can pave the way for continuous inspiration and success in life (Yildiz, 2020).

Reading can be depicted as figuring out the written texts and making interpretations based on the meaning. It is one of the fundamental macro-skills along with listening, writing and speaking (Tegmark et al., 2022). In addition, it facilitates mastering grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary if certain connections are assured between reading and these micro-skills. Being exposed to comprehensible input has been regarded as a prerequisite to master a language, so reading plays an integral role to access to a rich content (Krashen, 1992). Reading materials, which are ordered considering the readers' levels, motivate them to be more creative because they learn how to predict, infer, draw conclusions, form logical conclusions, summarize, skim through and scan while analyzing the texts. Two prominent reading approaches, which are intensive and ER, have received increasing popularity in the 21st century. Intensive reading necessitates reading materials under the strict guidance of the teacher. Focusing on form, reading slowly, choosing difficult texts, being compulsory to understand the text completely and using dictionaries are common points of intensive reading activities

(Andrés, 2020). On the other hand, ER has been known for reading to get pleasure, have freedom what to read, focus on figuring out the overall meaning, read extensively from different genres in a quick way (Nakanishi, 2015). In other words, intensive reading urges the readers to develop their accuracy in a teacher-centered setting, whereas ER drives the readers to improve their fluency in a student-centered atmosphere.

IELTS, which can be taken in a paper-based or computerized format, has been recognized as a leading standardized test by more than 11000 institutions globally since 1989 (Ebadi et al., 2023). It has been run by British Council and Cambridge University Press to measure test-takers linguistic competence in 4 essential sections which are reading, listening, speaking and writing with a scale between 1 and 9. The test takers who earn 1.0 are classified as non-user, whereas test-takers who earn 9.0 are categorized as expert user. IELTS exam has been particularly designed to facilitate the process of working and studying in English speaking countries (Baghaei et al., 2020). Additionally, the exam has been widely taken to be promoted or earn extra benefits in private or state institutions on a global scale. IELTS exam has been offered within two formats which are IELTS Academic and IELTS General Training. While the former has been taken to be admitted to higher education institutions to earn a bachelor, master's or doctorate degree, whereas the latter has been preferred to adapt to social and workplace environments within a short time. Read (2022) reports that 75.44 % of test-takers chose to take IELTS Academic, while 24.56 % of them chose to take IELTS General Training in 2021. Additionally, female test-takers accounted for 51.55 % and male test-takers' percentage was 48.45. Subsequently, test-takers residing in Greece, Malaysia and Spain were placed as the most successful ones in IELTS Academic consecutively while test-takers living in the USA, South Africa and Jamaica earned the highest scores in IELTS General Training consecutively. Moreover, German, Greek and Romanian people were more successful than others in terms of ordering them by mother tongue.

Speaking skills have an indispensable function in people's lives in this globalized world. Speaking, which necessitates combining many elements in harmony to convey the message clearly, is one of the productive skills along with writing. Additionally, it is the fastest skill to exchange ideas in conversations. Informing, entertaining and persuading people are main purposes of

speaking, so the importance of speaking skills has been prevalent regardless of being in childhood or adulthood period. However, speaking has been considered as the most challenging skills to develop on grounds that learners' background knowledge is not sufficient; their public speaking abilities are not improved or their pronunciation is not satisfactory enough (Ofiaz, 2019). In this respect, providing a welcoming atmosphere to exchange ideas, reading books to have background knowledge, watching movies, listening to podcasts or songs, joining live chat programs, playing interactive games, and recording videos for social media platforms have been suggested to overcome the barriers against speaking in English (Yildiz, 2015; Soran & Kara, 2022). It is expected that individuals, who have mastered speaking English fluently, can adapt to real-life situations, school settings, professional life more easily.

The purpose of the study was threefold: to measure students' speaking skills in terms of IELTS, to investigate their motivation and self-confidence levels and to seek their overall attitudes towards learning English upon completion of the study. Correspondingly, given research questions were formulated:

- Does ER enhance learners' speaking performance in IELTS Academic Module?
- Does ER boost students' motivation and self-confidence?
- Does ER increase students' overall attitudes towards mastering English?

### Literature Review

ER is equal to reading large amounts of materials to get pleasure by focusing on the general understanding in a flexible format. Day (2018) who has contributed tremendously to increase the implementation of ER practices on a global scale, highlighted 10 principles of ER which can be summarized as choosing easy to comprehend texts in a variety of genres freely, reading by increasing the number of books gradually, deriving pleasure, being guided by a teacher to read individually and silently. These principles indicate that students read to get a general understanding rather than focusing on specific points and teacher serves as a guide rather than the sole authority to exert pressure. A plethora of research has been conducted which revealed positive gains in terms of reading fluency (Ateek, 2021), speaking (Abdulrahman & Kara, 2023), vocabulary (Celik, 2018), grammar (Alqadi & Alqadi, 2013), listening (Fujimori, 2007),

writing (Park, 2016) and pronunciation (Cakir, 2012). To name a few, Huffman (2014) carried out a study lasting a span of one semester on 66 Japanese students at a tertiary level which unearthed that the participants whose instructions were redesigned according to ER procedures outperformed in terms of reading rate gains without losing comprehension. In other words, the students in the experimental group could increase their word per minute (WPM) reading from 110 to 133, whereas the students in control group reduced from 103.76 to 103.14. Similarly, Horst (2005) finalized a study lasting 6 weeks on 21 ESL learners in Canada which indicated that ER expanded their vocabulary gains substantially. Subsequently, Milliner (2019) carried out a study lasting 15 weeks on 58 Japanese university students which revealed that the gains in ER increases dramatically once the learners listen the audio tracks and read the books consecutively. He attests that various learning channels are activated if they read and listen in harmony. In addition, Khansir and Dehghani (2015) finalized a study on 40 EFL learners in Iran lasting 7 weeks which revealed that the students who were exposed to ER enhanced their grammatical competence significantly, whereas the improvement was far from being noticeable in control group students who followed a traditional instruction. Moreover, a notable study was conducted by Gu and Reynolds (2013) on 37 Korean students at a tertiary level lasting 6 weeks which revealed that ER fostered students' speaking skills substantially. They concluded that reading activities can be more engaging if merged with relevant speaking exercises. Furthermore, Park (2016) conducted a study to measure the effects of ER on 56 Asian students who were taking an Academic Writing course at a US university within a span of 15 weeks which indicated that ER fostered learners' writing performance tremendously. A significant gain was also recorded in Novita's (2016) study which revealed that ER yielded better results in terms of developing 27 students' pronunciation skills at a university in Indonesia. Considering aforementioned studies, it is safe to conclude that ER is a promising approach to raise the standards in many aspects at educational institutions.

Global and local initiatives to increase the popularity of ER have increased substantially in the last two decades. For instance, Extensive Reading Foundation was founded by Dr. Richard Day in 2004 to promote reading globally. This foundation has organized 6 World Congress, expanded reading associations to many countries, offered Graded Readers List, placement tests, free reading materials and

MReader website to allow readers to take quizzes related to 4000 books. A large-scale study was also conducted by Puripunyanich (2022) in Thailand on 5000 university students and 60 lecturers which unearthed that ER activities increased students' engagement and overall attitudes towards learning English. Additionally, lecturers reiterated that an online reading platform, Xreader, was efficient to monitor students' progress, see quiz results and assign new books. It can be argued that ER initiatives have spread to many countries thanks to their numerous advantages.

On the other hand, a limited number of studies conducted could not reveal a positive relationship between extensive reading and grammar (Johansson, 2014) conducted a study in Sweden on a PhD student who was exposed to ER which indicated that ER did not yield satisfactory results in terms of showing progress in grammar. Likewise, Archer (2012) underlined that poor reading habits, several distractions, consecutive exams reduce the quality of extensive reading activities, so learners cannot take advantage of this reading cycle as much as expected. Similarly, Huang (2015) postulates that time-consuming assignments, stressful projects, thinking about future job prospects, students' priority may be switched from ER to other topics. It can be stated that some pre-requisites should be considered to increase the success rate of ER programs.

## Methodology

### Research Design and Instruments

Interview and speaking exams, which were analyzed through NVivo and SPSS 23 respectively, were employed as data collection instruments in this mixed methods design study. The rationale to implement a mixed methods

design was to take advantage of strengths of each method harmoniously. Additionally, it was expected to cross-check results whether exam results were compatible with students' opinions in the interview. Leavy (2022) postulates that a mixed methods design offers ample opportunity for researchers to use verbalized and numerical data equally.

### Participants, Setting and Sampling Procedure

The population of the study was chosen TISHK International University (TIU hereafter) serving to 5000 students in 29 departments since 2008 in Erbil Iraq. TIU was chosen on grounds that all courses have been conducted in English, so this setting was feasible to implement an ER program successfully. Additionally, the university has taken initiatives to offer a welcoming atmosphere for students from different countries, so the scope of the study was enriched with students from 10 countries accordingly. The participants, who were taking Foundation English course at TIU in 2022-2023 Academic Year, were chosen through convenience sampling method from the population. Stratton (2021) states that convenience sampling method has been preferred in studies widely as it is handy to choose participants conveniently without requiring so much effort. Foundation English course is a non-elective technical course which appeals to students who need to improve their English considerably to adapt to lessons in their departments. Thus, these students were placed in the Foundation English category upon taking TIU Proficiency Exam run by Language Preparatory School. In this regard, 45 participants out of 150 Foundation English students were chosen to be exposed to an ER program within 10 weeks. Their syllabus was redesigned to accommodate the needs of ER program.

**Table 1.**  
*Participants' distribution of gender and age*

Variable(s)	Option	F	%
Gender	Female	28	62.22
	Male	17	37.78
Age	17-20	43	95.56
	21-25	2	4.44
Total		60	100

As shown in Table 1, 28 (62.22 %) female students participated in the study, whereas 17 (37.78 %) male students joined the study. Additionally, 43 (95.56 %) were between 17 and 20 years old and 2 (4.44 %) students were

between 21 and 25 years old. It was observed that female students were higher than male ones, and students aged 17 and 20 were higher than other categories in this study.

### Data Collection Procedure

The students are exposed to ER activities systematically within a span of 10 weeks in this study. Certain steps were followed rigorously to conduct the study successfully, so the highest benefits can be reaped. Prior to conducting the study, the participants joined a workshop to be familiar with key points of the study, sign the consent form to join voluntarily and ask any questions to be clarified as well as taking the exam on IELTS Speaking to be used as pre-test. Subsequently, they were introduced with a large collection of Oxford Dominoes Graded Readers available in the library. Oxford Dominoes Series Graded Readers have a good reputation in ER activities which made them reasonable in this study. Participants decided the name of the publishers, levels and books under the supervision of the lecturer. After choosing the books, they read a book in a week, listened to the audio version, watched some relevant videos or movie versions of the books if available readily. In the second week, the lecturer created a debate atmosphere to welcome students' ideas about specific themes in the book. In addition, the lecturer highlighted some key words which can

be helpful while responding to speaking questions in IELTS. Moreover, the lecturer converted some topics of the book into IELTS speaking format. For instance, the lecturer asked them about their role models, favorite footballers or telling some reasons to read books while analyzing *True Heroes of Sport* book which was about inspiring stories of famous figures with different occupations ranging from athlete to dancers. After speaking activities were completed, they wrote a summary for each book, so students were granted equal rights to foster their English in a written and spoken format. As can be seen clearly, speaking activities were at the heart of the instruction in ER activities, but other skills were integrated into activities to support each other. Once a 10-week period was over, the students took a speaking exam including questions of IELTS Speaking Part 1 and Part 2 as post-test. The results of two exams were fetched to be analyzed and interpreted correspondingly. Subsequently, the interview was held to uncover students' sincere opinions on the effects of ER based instruction.

### Graded Readers and Items of IELTS Academic Speaking Test

**Table 2.**

*Graded reader list chosen by the participants in cooperation*

Title & Author	Type	The number of pages & words	Level	Publisher	Title & Author
Around the World in 80 Days by Jules Verne	Adventure	56, 1918		Starter	OUP
Journey to the Centre of the Earth by Jules Verne	Science Fiction	56, 2674		Starter	OUP
Sherlock Holmes The Speckled Band by Arthur Conan Doyle	Detective Fiction	56, 3372		Starter	OUP
Lisa's Song by Lesley Thompson	Drama	33, 1426		Starter	OUP
True Heroes of Sport by Donatella Fitzgerald	Biography	5611		Starter	OUP

*Around the World in 80 Days* depicts Phileas Fogg's incredible adventures with his servant Passepartout, embarked on it as a bet, around the world in 80 days. Phileas Fogg lives in London in the 1870s, and he embarks on a journey to travel round the world in 80 days after making a bet with Stuart. They visit France, Italy, Egypt, India, Hong Kong, China, Japan, Ireland. During their journey, they save a princess from dying in the fire, enter a temple with shoes which is against the law, are mistaken as a thief, are attacked by gangs, lose each other. Once they return to London, Mr. Fogg wins the bet which is related to travelling round the world in 80 days. Finally, Fogg and Mrs. Aouda get married and

live happily. The lesson to be learned in this book is that challenges encountered during the journey can lead to victory in the end after combating fake news and misinformation.

*Journey to the Center of the Earth* describes the journey of German Professor Otto Lidenbrock with his nephew Axel to an old volcano called Snaefells in the 1860s. They start this journey after buying an old Icelandic book which is about a message to the center of the Earth. They go to Denmark to sail to Iceland. They hire a guide called Hans. They went up the mountain. They see three black holes in the crater. They went forward inside the tunnels with the help of the

compass and a portable lamp. They see magnificent crystals on the wall. They make a hole in the wall to quench their thirst. They have a journey under the sea with a hand-made raft, see fighting monsters. Their raft blows up after being hit by lightning. They see some monsters and skeletons, use gunpowder to clear their ways. Finally, the raft exits the tunnel with the help of a large amount of water, but their raft is under fire due to the lava from the volcano. Next, they meet a lonely boy who tells that they are near Etna in Italy. They see that they travel 5000 kilometers from Snaefells. Finally, they return and the professor writes a book about this unforgettable expedition. The lesson to be learned is that life is full of surprises with expeditions which can be fruitful or terrible.

*Sherlock Holmes the Speckled Band* revolves around the murder of Julia and finding the culprit. Helen Stoner arrives at the residence of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John Watson early one morning in April 1883 to investigate the murder of his beloved sister Julia. Helen and her twin sister Julia are just two years old when their father passes away and their mother marries Dr. Grimes by Roylott. Mrs. Stoner passes away shortly thereafter, leaving behind a fortune. Julia dies in a suspicious incident. On the night of her death, Julia notices the smell of their stepfather's cigars seeping into her bedroom and a strange continuous whistle. Helen blames the people outside for the endless sound and smell. Julia collapses into her sister's arms and utters her final words: "It is the band!" The band Speckles!" Helen is unable to know what to say, but she assumes that her sister is killed by people chatting outside, some of whom wear spotted handkerchiefs. After a thorough probe, it is confirmed that Dr. Roylott's poisonous snake kills Julia and Dr. Roylott, respectively. Dr. Roylott hopes that the snake will kill Helen and Julia, so he will receive the fortune left by Mrs. Stoner. The lesson to be learned from this detective story is that realities concealed beneath the surface are revealed sooner or later.

*Lisa's Song* illustrates the life of a boy called Al Brown who lives in the USA with his parents. He is interested in playing guitar in a band. His life changes dramatically after having a sister called Lisa. His parents spend all their time with Lisa which drives Al to feel alone at home. Unfortunately, Lisa's heart does not beat properly. The family needs a lot of money to send her to the USA for an operation which is not available in the UK. Al's grandpa comes up with a wonderful idea to write a song for Lisa and launch a charity campaign. The audience come to

the concert and pay the money for Lisa's operation. The band also broadcast the song on the website. Finally, they can collect sufficient money to cover the expenses of Lisa's operation in the USA. The lesson to be learned in this book is that there may be ups and downs in life, but launching some campaigns to show solidarity helps society to be happier again.

*True Heroes of Sport* tells incredible success stories of sportspeople from a lot of different races and nationalities. In other words, it shows to power of defying and overcoming challenges starkly with each example. To illustrate, it can be learned that Pele scores 1363 goals, stops a war for a while; Mohammed Ali raises the awareness for black people in the USA after earning an unmatched respect in boxing; Babe Ruth becomes one of the most successful baseball players of all time despite being away from the parents due to staying at a boarding school; Cathy Freeman wins gold medals as a sprinter despite being raised in a poor family who can't buy running shoes for her; Nadia Comaneci becomes the best gymnast in the world by breaking many records when she is 15; Michael Phelps earns 8 gold medals as a swimmer in spite of being diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder as a child and being labelled as "too unmotivated to learn and be successful at school and in life"; Lance Armstrong wins many trophies in cycling tournaments after beating cancer disease successfully; Niki Lauda wins many cups in Formula 1 after being burned by a terrible accident and restoring her health within a short time. The lesson to be learned in this book is that given sportspeople can be a genuine inspiration for many people who have some difficulties in their lives but drive their ambition to earn a huge success in sport.

### **IELTS Speaking Questions Directed to Participants**

The questions were chosen from the readily available materials on the internet.

#### **Pre-test**

- Could you introduce yourself briefly?
- What do you like doing at the weekends?
- Do you want to live in a nuclear or extended family?
- What is the best invention?
- What are your predictions about the life in the 2050s?

**Post-test**

- Could you describe your neighborhood in detail?
- What have you done recently?
- What are the key differences between the life in the previous century and now?
- What is the best book you have ever read?

- What are the pros and cons of internet?

The degree of difficulty has been increased based on the concept of IELTS speaking section.

Additionally, the questions were customized according to students' status.

**Table 3.**  
*Speaking grading rubric*

Criteria	Percentage
Fluency and Coherence	25 %
Lexical Resource	25 %
Grammatical Range and Accuracy	25 %
Pronunciation	25 %
Total	100 %

*Note.* Adjusted from "Ielts.org". Retrieved March 15, 2023, from (<https://www.ielts.org/-/media/pdfs/speaking-band-descriptors.ashx>.) Copyright 2023 by British Council and Cambridge University Press.

Students were expected to develop topics from different points, use varied words to convey the meaning, command principles of grammar and pay attention to articulation, stress and intonation. Their marks were finalized based on these expectations meticulously checked by the committee.

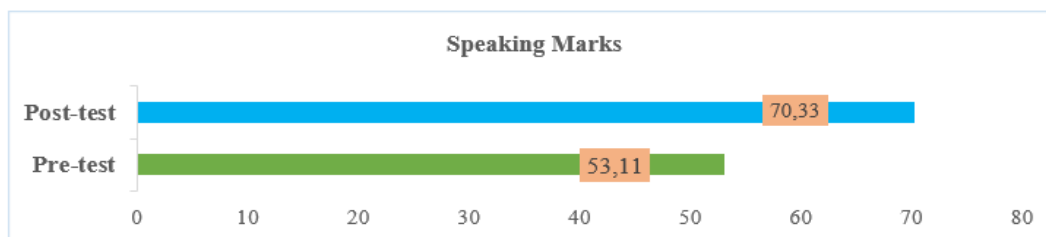
collected via an interview. The findings of each instrument were explored below:

**The Analysis of the IELTS Speaking Tests**

Descriptive data were gathered and analyzed via paired samples t test to run to test whether the means of two paired measurements within control or experimental group are statistically different. Students' marks were graded over 100 instead of a range between 1 and 9 to analyze the results easily.

**Findings**

Quantitative data were gathered via IELTS Speaking Tests, while qualitative data were



**Fig. 1.** Students' progress in IELTS speaking test

Paired samples t test analysis was given in Table 4.

**Table 4.**  
*Paired samples t test analysis*

	Paired Samples Test							
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Lower				Upper				
Control Pre-test Post-test	-17.222	19.527	2.911	-23.089	-11.356	-5.916	44	.000

*Note.* P<0.05

Paired samples t test was run to figure out whether students' speaking marks differed significantly after treatment period lasting a span of 10 weeks. Upon comparing pre-test results with post-test ones, p-value was recorded as .000

which was less than 0.05 significance level. Recorded p-value revealed that there was significant progress in terms of speaking marks. Additionally, mean, standard deviation, t and df figures were -17.222, 19.527, -5.916 and 44.

**Table 5.**  
*Participants' common words to describe ER based instruction*

	Categories	Frequency	%
1	Enjoyable	41	91.1
2	Fun	42	93.3
3	Interactive	37	82.2
4	Developing Good Habits Towards Reading	39	86.6
5	Improved Vocabulary	36	80
6	Enhanced Self-Confidence	44	97.7
7	Reading Fast	38	84.4
8	Increased Comprehension	37	82.2
9	Being More Creative	43	95.5

Table 5 figures revealed that participants used some expressions more commonly than others. To illustrate, enhanced self-confidence (44), being more creative (43) and fun (42) were expressed more than others, while improved vocabulary (36), increased comprehension (37) and interaction (37) were chosen less than others.

### The Analysis of the Interview

The participants' genuine opinions were transcribed and categorized with the help of NVivo software program. Common themes were highlighted below:

#### Selected Interviews in Experimental Group

It was a mind-blowing period for me to be a part of this study. I had the freedom to choose any books in cooperation. Additionally, we had many opportunities to expand our learning. For example, we read the books from our mobile devices; we watched the video or movie versions of the books and made a comparison; we summarized the books in a written and spoken format; we composed new sentences by the key words and we raced against time while answering questions in IELTS speaking section. I wish all students around the world could grab this opportunity. (P21)

Reading books traditionally and electronically enriched our learning substantially because we could see the meaning instantly once we install a dictionary on our mobile devices. Additionally, we exchanged our ideas after reading, so peer-learning period was so fruitful. Moreover, our instructor converted reading activities into

speaking formats, so we practiced a lot to sharpen our skills for IELTS speaking section. I noticed that my imagination, creativity and word power expanded tremendously once I joined this study. I recommend all educators to consider positive influences of ER and implement it at educational institutions. (P 27)

Although we read many books, True Heroes of Sport was special for me because I not only expanded my English knowledge but also learn how to boost my motivation. During the book, I was familiar with many success stories despite the obstacles sports people encountered. Additionally, I figured out how to contribute to society with humanitarian activities after earning much money and fame. Now I believe that there is a chain reaction between being successful and supporting needy people with logical initiatives. (P 32)

Reading activities were quite fun in this study because the level of the books was not challenging. Additionally, the themes in each book were interesting enough to follow till the end. For example, we had an incredible journey when we read Around the World in 80 Days and Journey to the Centre of the Earth because these books had some mysterious and intriguing moments. Additionally, Lisa's Song taught us how charity events can transform society and increase the level of happiness in society. Moreover, Sherlock Holmes the Speckled Band showed us how to examine the clues and ultimately uncover the truth. In addition, True Heroes of Sport inspired us to follow our dreams although there were some barriers in life. In the end, these reading activities produced better



results in terms of speaking, so I improved my performance in IELTS speaking section. (P34)

One of my major obstacles in speaking activities was choosing the right word. I solved this problem after this study by enriching my vocabulary considerably. I used in English in many situations during the study, so I fostered my communication skills. In addition, my instructor showed us some sample responses in IELTS speaking section, so it was a piece of cake for me to analyze the questions and respond accordingly within the given time. (P37)

I learn well when I am exposed to some visual materials. My instructor displayed e-books, showed some related movies and illustrated some words with images in presentations which increased my learning and motivation dramatically. In addition, sample responses displayed by the instructor helped me to compose my templates in my mind. Once different materials were used harmoniously, I became more engaged to go beyond my current level in English. (P40)

The books chosen in this study were so interesting and relevant. While we were reading the books, we noticed that the stories were catchy to tell in our social lives as well. For example, I told the story of *Around the World in 80 Days* within my friend circle who listened to it attentively. Additionally, inspiring stories of sportspeople captured their attention to research further on the internet later. I can assure you that reading under the guidance of the instructor was a great idea to learn in cooperation. (P43)

### Discussion

This study investigated the effects of ER on students' IELTS speaking section score via exams and an interview which showed that ER helped them to progress in multiple dimensions. To name a few, exam results revealed that ER boosted students' marks in IELTS speaking dramatically from 53.11 to 70.33 which was in line with Mart's (2012) findings. He found that the correlation between ER and speaking was positive. Likewise, Muravev (2023) states that reading activities helps the students to learn subconsciously in a context which can increase students' marks in standardized tests such as IELTS, TOEFL and PTE. In addition, not only students but also teachers appreciated the learning period as it was supported by different tools such as e-books, e-dictionaries, movies, presentations which was consistent with Celik and Kara's (2022) and Ulker et al.'s (2021)

findings. They postulated that combining traditional methods with proven modern teaching ones can pave way for an improvement in learning. Subsequently, the students reiterated that their self-confidence was restored because they joined numerous activities in a written and spoken format. Arnold (2009) states that ER increases speaking performance of the readers because it urges the readers to summarize, join a debate, compose sentences etc. Furthermore, students were more engaged as they increased their knowledge in each book. They noticed that they could use the themes they learned in the book in daily lives. Boyd et al. (2009) and Ulker and Yildiz (2021) attest that real life connections and authentic materials raise students' engagement with well-designed reading activities. Another notable finding of the study was related to imagination and creativity which were boosted by reading different genres in a welcoming atmosphere. The books chosen included science fiction, detective stories and biographies, so students had a chance to trigger their imagination and come up with novel ideas. Sumara (2002) states that reading books changes the atmosphere of educational institutions because they learn how to imagine, predict and be creative with numerous activities

### Conclusion and Recommendations

This study sought the effects of ER on students' IELTS speaking score at a tertiary level. The findings, gathered by employing qualitative and quantitative instruments, indicated that ER period was promising in many aspects. The results of IELTS speaking revealed that students' achievement levels improved substantially. Likewise, students' engagement levels were more noticeable because they derived pleasure while reading books in a welcoming atmosphere. In addition, students transferred the knowledge they gained from the book to their real lives which boosted their motivation as well because they thought that they had to listen more attentively to express their ideas about the book well later in their circle of friends. Subsequently, their self-confidence was restored because they were urged to be active participants in different activities. All in all, their overall attitudes towards learning English have changed positively because they read in large numbers; they learned many new words; they watched some movies; they read e-books and they exchanged their ideas in peer-learning activities. This study reflected the effects of ER on IELTS Speaking Test at a tertiary level. Further studies can be conducted to investigate the effects of ER on other essential skills. Additionally, only

freshman students accounted for the participants which can be expanded with other stages such as sophomore, junior and senior ones. Subsequently, only Graded Readers published by Oxford Dominoes were employed which can be enriched with other prominent publishing companies such as Collins, Macmillan, Pearson, Penguin or Cambridge.

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