



Learners' attitudes toward extensive reading in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts

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ABSTRACT

This paper aimed to research about the influence of extensive reading on learners' attitudes in English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts, after a five-month period of supplementary activities in a university reading class. Twenty-six learners participated in the research. The material chosen to freely read comprehended graded readers and/or authentic books. Descriptive statistics method was employed to indicate the students' attitudes and analyze the collected data. The findings of the study showed that extensive reading influences learners' attitudes positively. Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research are addressed at the end.

Keywords: Extensive reading, attitudes to reading, reading in EFL contexts.



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Las actitudes de los estudiantes hacia la lectura extensiva en contextos EFL (inglés como lengua extranjera)

RESUMEN

Este artículo tuvo como objetivo investigar sobre la influencia de la lectura extensiva en la actitud de aprendices de inglés en contextos de inglés como lengua extranjera (ILE), luego de un periodo de aplicación de actividades complementarias de cinco meses en una clase de lectura en una universidad.

Veinte y cinco estudiantes participaron en la investigación. El material escogido fue libremente seleccionado por los aprendices que comprendían libros adaptados (graded books) y libros auténticos en inglés.

El método de estadística descriptiva fue empleado para describir las actitudes de los estudiantes así como también para analizar los datos recogidos. Los datos recogidos revelan que la lectura extensiva influyó en la actitud de los aprendices positivamente. Las limitaciones de este estudio y recomendaciones son abordadas al final.

Palabras clave: Lectura extensiva, actitudes hacia la lectura, lectura en contextos de inglés como lengua extranjera.



1. INTRODUCTION

Reading is a cognitive-receptive skill through which information is received and decoded in the brain for a message to be comprehended. Extensive reading (ER), sometimes known as free reading, is an approach to language learning which has been promoted in first/foreign language contexts for improving reading skills. The purpose of ER is to get learners read lots of books and accomplish this activity for pleasure, without the pressure of being tested and the best, to be exposed to the target language. "To read extensively means to read widely and in quantity" (Bamford and Day, 1997). Harold Palmer and Michael West are the pioneers of this approach to foreign language teaching and foreign language reading.

Reading is a weakness that needs to be overcome in Ecuador. Research on this area referring how extensive reading influences learners' attitudes to read in English in Ecuadorian contexts is uncertain. It is known that ER has highly contributed to the development of reading skill, thus there is scientific testimony on the efficacy ER has had along time. There are important studies which state how important it is to have a good attitude to reading for ER to be effective. For instance, Yamashita (2004) found that "a positive affective status facilitates performance in extensive Reading".

Several are the factors which might influence learners' attitudes to reading extensively. Many of the studied aspects regard reading habits, attitudes or motivation.

Some issues involve extensive reading habits such as organization of time, specific schedule to read, assignation of a place to read, autonomy and some more. One of the most relevant argument which has been identified to be developed by learners concerns autonomy. There is strong evidence in research that after being involved in an extensive reading class-program, learners presented a strong degree of independence and autonomy. This is the case of a study executed by Tanaka (2017), where he states that "Perceived autonomy had a positive impact on motivation, leading to higher intrinsic motivation and identified regulation, and lower amotivation, introjected regulation, and external regulation".

Crawford (2001) in her research found out a different aspect regarding the habit of reading books in Italian. This finding supports her idea that "the factors that apparently contribute to moulding a person into a 'reader' in L1 can also be transferred into reading in a foreign language".



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Another factor identified to be concerned in ER is attitude to reading. In most of the cases scholars affirm that attitude has been affected positively, however certain studies confirm attitude has not been afflicted neither positively nor negatively.

In a research achieved in an English speaking context, Walberg and Tsai (1985) revealed that achievement and attitude to reading have been influenced by home environment factors. Yamashita (2013) documented ER had a positive effect on EFL learners' attitude as well.

Relevant studies involving positive effects on attitudes to ER comprehend Lee, Schallert & Kim (2015), Yamashita (2004) or Crawford (2001).

Motivation has been identified to be another factor which influences the development of reading skill through ER. Motivation is a key for enjoying reading. Reading for enjoyment is related to leisure-time reading (Greaney and Hegarty, 1987). When readers are motivated, there is interest and involvement, thus reading turns on a stress-free activity. Several issues surround motivation since this is a factor that makes extensive reading successful. It is obvious that reading material works as a critical factor to motivate learners to read extensively (Takase, 2009). Depending on the extensive program to be applied, the books will need to be selected appropriately according to their needs and preferences. Some authors have identified a combination of variables that contribute effective extensive reading in a second/foreign language. For instance, regarding vocabulary there are some relevant studies such as Krashen (1989) who in his Input Hypothesis (IH) points out that learners acquire vocabulary and spelling by Reading. Learners enriched vocabulary since there was evidence of incidental vocabulary gain from texts which were interesting for them (Huckin & Coady, 1999). Pigada and Schmitt (2006), Horst (2005), Day and Hiramatsu (1992), Waring & Nation (2004), and Suk (2017) agree on the success learners achieved in acquiring vocabulary through reading extensively. In a study addressing extrinsic and intrinsic motivation in higher and lower learners' ability, Fujita and Noro (2009) state that learners who showed higher ability in reading tended to increase their intrinsic motivation, nevertheless, learners with low ability read extensively with class-related extrinsic motivation. At the moment of choosing material to read, there comes the doubt of whether graded readers or authentic English books. This aspect takes part on motivation as well, since this selection implies the engagement and challenge of the reader when



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encountering new and difficult words. "Graded readers have a controlled grammatical and lexical load, and provide regular and sufficient repetition of new language forms" (Wodinsky & Nation 1988), thus learners will not go through frustrating events that might lead to disengagement. On the other hand, it may happen that learners discourage to continue reading, due to the higher level of vocabulary encountered on authentic English books.

While acquiring new grammar structures, participating in reading circles, or presenting book reports are other aspects which influence motivation; there are several more that might appear in the process. There is this strong encouraging feeling to read extensively due to the fact learners are not forced to take tests based on the books' content or vocabulary, or questionnaires to complete after finishing reading every book.

The purpose of this study was to identify the influence of ER on learners' attitudes in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. The methodology applied in this research is presented in the following section.

2. METHODS

Participants

The participants in this research comprise 26 students aged from 20 to 24 years old (20 women and 6 men) in a fourth semester reading class taught by the researcher at a public university in Ecuador during a five-month period. Learners took the subject of reading in fourth semester as part of their nine-semester program to obtain an English teacher degree. They had never participated in an extensive reading class program before. The researcher was assigned to teach this mandatory class during that period.

Instrument

The instrument used to collect data for this study includes a questionnaire which comprises 15 questions, including five-point Likert-type questions (1 strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neither agree nor disagree, 4 agree and 5 strongly agree). The reliability of the Likert-type items in the questionnaire was measured by computing the Cronbach's α , which shows satisfactory and reliable result ($\alpha = 0.86$). The criteria from two experts in TEFL (Teaching English as a foreign language) was also required to validate the instrument. The questionnaire which was anonymous aimed to know learners' attitudes to the ER program implemented in that class.



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Procedure and data analysis

Learners were not used to read a lot before the implementation of the ER class program. During the 5-month period, students used the coursebook 'Reading Power 4' by Jeffries & Mikulecky (2014) which suggested students read extensively and with which learners developed reading strategies. About 90 percent of the extensive reading activities were assigned to do as a complementary activity. A minimum of eight books of their choice (graded B2 or upper level books / authentic books) were asked learners to read. A suggested time for presenting a book report (written) and a book review (video shared on facebook) was assigned after reading every book. Book conferences were arranged during their tutorial hours to be held with the instructor twice a week. Learners were asked about their advance in their reading, suggested for improving their reading skills, given encouragement about their enhancement, and given recommendations to continue reading extensively. After the 5-month period, a questionnaire was applied to get the data about learners' attitudes toward the implemented extensive reading class program. Descriptive statistics method was employed to indicate the students' attitudes and analyze the collected data. The data were interpreted and summarized.

3. RESULTS

Learners' attitudes toward extensive reading

After implementing the extensive Reading class program, important results were obtained from the applied questionnaire. Table 1 presents how extensive reading has influenced learners' attitude to reading. Students' attitudes for extensive reading were identified as follows: 24 learners (92.3%) agreed that they have become more autonomous, now they know English literature is a good way to improve their reading skill, nevertheless only 17 learners (65.4%) enjoy reading and do not feel obligated to read. This percentage seems lower than expected since during the application they seemed to enjoy the activity. Another finding which is important but a little lower than expected is that 18 learners (69.2%) felt motivated to read than before. This is not a weak percentage, however more than 20 learners (84 to 88,5%) agreed they have learned to organize their time for reading better, find extensive reading interesting and challenging, preferred to record videos to share on facebook to present them in front of the class, and felt motivated when choosing the material to read. The latter was an outstanding criterion, since when asked about suggestions for future extensive reading



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activities to be implemented in class, 19 learners (73 %) expressed they would like to continue with the opportunity of selecting books they like.

TABLE 1. Learners' attitudes toward extensive reading

	Items	Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Mean	SD
		N	%	N	%	N	%		
1	I have learned to organize my time for reading better	0	0	4	15,4	22	84,6	4.3	.70
2	I have become more autonomous	0	0	2	7,7	24	92,3	4.3	.62
3	I find Extensive Reading interesting and challenging	0	0	4	15,4	22	84,6	4.8	.72
4	I know reading English literature is a good way to improve reading skill	0	0	2	7,7	24	92,3	4.4	.65
5	I read for pleasure, not for obligation.	2	7,7	7	26,9	17	65,4	3.7	1.01
6	I finished reading a book before the suggested time	0	0,0	6	23,1	20	76,9	4.0	.74
7	I increased my comprehension by applying reading strategies the teacher taught.	6	23,1	5	19,2	15	57,7	3.7	1.15
8	I increased my comprehension by applying reading strategies set by myself.	0	0,0	3	11,5	23	88,5	4.4	.59
9	I expanded my vocabulary	0	0,0	2	7,7	24	92,3	4.2	.58
10	I acquired new grammar structures	2	7,7	9	34,6	15	57,7	3.7	.82
11	I feel more motivated to read than before	4	15,4	4	15,4	18	69,2	3.9	1.16
12	I felt motivated when choosing the material to read	2	7,7	2	7,7	22	84,6	4.3	.97
13	I felt motivated when recording the videos to share and not to present them in front of the class	0	0,0	4	15,4	22	84,6	4.22	.74
14	I felt motivated when receiving comments from classmates and teacher on videos	0	0,0	6	23,1	20	76,9	4.22	.85
15	I liked attending book conferences	2	7,7	4	15,4	20	76,9	4.04	.98

Note: 1. Agree % included the percentages of "Totally agree" and "Agree"
 2. Disagree % included the percentages of "Totally disagree" and "Disagree"

Several learners indicated that they felt motivated when receiving comments from classmates and professor on videos, this was a valuable aspect since it could be evidenced that learners highly supported, encouraged and congratulated their classmates' work in most of their comments. Only 9 learners (57.7%) believed they have acquired new grammar structures. On the other hand, what they felt they have increased mostly was vocabulary (92.3%). Furthermore, it is evidenced most learners enhanced comprehension by applying reading strategies set by themselves (88.5%) and not the ones taught by the professor (57.7%), which is important for them since they will not expect the instructor to guide their work all the time.



4. CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the influence of extensive reading on learners' attitudes. People's attitudes is somewhat complicated to measure, however a questionnaire to collect information about learner's motivation and perceptions to reading was designed. The main results after implementing extensive reading in a class indicate that extensive reading influence learners' attitude positively.

First, ER has influenced their autonomy, organization of time for reading, their reading speed, and reading comprehension. Learners were assigned to do most of the extensive reading activities outside classroom. There they found important to organize their time to read to be able to achieve their minimum ten books goal. As that became a custom, they improved their reading speed in every book they read thus they were able to read some books before the suggested time, enhancing comprehension by the application of their own reading strategies.

Second, learners find ER interesting and challenging, a good way to improve reading skill, and as a means to enhance vocabulary since most learners found ER as an opportunity and not as a threat.

Third, learners felt motivated to read when: choosing the books they liked, recording book reviews (videos) to share on facebook and receiving valuable comments from classmates and instructor, as well as attending book conferences with their professor. The ER class program implemented in a reading class was successful and of great benefit to EFL learners in an Ecuadorian university.

Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research

One of the limitations in this study is the number of participants (only 26 learners) of English as a Foreign Language at only one institution, thus the results cannot be generalized to other populations. Further research may consider increasing the numbers of participants and investigating learners' attitudes to extensive reading in different institutions and contexts, as well as extending to other specialties.

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