

The Perceived Effect of Extensive Reading on the Development of Students' Reading Skills

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Abstract

There are four skills that students are supposed to gain while learning a language. Reading is one of these major skills and it is an important component in language learning. At the same time, it is closely related to the other language skills since the development of reading skill progresses simultaneously with the development of writing, listening and speaking. For instance, when someone learns how to write in target language, it means that he has already learned how to read in the language. As it is understood from this example, reading is a complementary element in learning a language. Therefore, classroom methodology in reading lessons plays an important role in the development of students' reading skills. It shapes the students' point of view to reading skill. Based on that, this paper aims to explain extensive reading that encourages students to read more and often by providing them to experience a wide variety of text types and *in extensive reading, students do self-selected reading with only minimal accountability, writing brief summaries or comments on what they have read.* (Krashen & Mason, 1997, p.91-102) Associated with this, the study also focuses on the effects of extensive reading on the development of reading skill depending on the attitude of students towards reading.

Method

a. Participants

This study involves 50 teacher trainees who are studying in Elt department in Gazi University. A questionnaire is administered to this group. The questionnaire consists of 25 questions measuring the attitudes of teacher trainees about reading and extensive reading as well.

b. Materials

A questionnaire is administered to this group. It has a likert-like system: "5" represents strongly agree; "4" represents agree; "3" represents no opinion; "2" represents disagree; "1" represents strongly disagree. Teacher trainees gave a point for each question about reading in general.

The Aim Of The Study

This study aims to reveal the opinions of teacher trainees about reading and extensive reading. It also focuses on positive or negative perceptions of them towards reading and extensive one.

The Problems Of The Study

The study is to answer the following questions:

- 1- What kind of attitudes do students have about reading?
- 2- Is there any positive effect of reading on students' other language skills?

Review of Literature

Today, there are a wide variety of studies that are available in ELT field. Those studies highlight the importance of reading and its essential roles in improving other language skills. In one of those studies, the necessity of reading is emphasized by McRae. According to him, "the careful building up of reader familiarity with a variety of books will lead to a wider reading range, encourage individual exploration." As it suggests, the more familiar a learner is toward reading, the more successful s(he) is in other language skills such as speaking, writing and listening as well. However, in order to get learners familiar with reading, they should feel free about what to read and how to read. If they have an opportunity to be free in choosing what to read or how to read (in class or outside, silently or loudly), it becomes easier to understand for them. ER has been suggested recently as an alternative to the traditional reading because it requires less unknown vocabulary, reading silently, more individual exploration about texts or being autonomous about what learners read, avoiding the use of marking system and follow up reading activities. According to Davis (1995; 329), ER programs should be "without the pressures of testing or marks." It explains that learners understand better target texts and take more pleasure from them. In this way, since the affective filter is low in a class, the students feel less pressure on their minds during reading.

What is Extensive Reading?

As it is known, extensive reading aims to read for general meaning in company with students' enjoyment and curiosity. In fact, the aim is not a total comprehension. That's why, extensive reading is not followed by some kinds of comprehension exercises which demand detailed information in a reading text. In this way, students focus on not the language patterns directly, but the meaning. Students contribute their fluency and speed in the development process of reading skills with the practice of this type of reading. Since ER focuses on general understanding, students try to guess the meaning from the context and they ignore unknown words and new grammar structures. They just look up the necessary words from the dictionary. Thus, reading is not interrupted by unnecessary words in a text. As this process maintains, they are getting discouraged from using dictionaries. This builds the learners' self-confidence and self-awareness as well since they feel more familiar with the context. All of these things create the atmosphere of a low anxiety situation. At the same time, that makes students read silently and individually prevents them from feeling under pressure.

In addition to that, ER offers the learners to choose what they want to read. This case can be explained by self-selection. Also Krashen(2004) defines it as "free voluntary reading(FEVER)" with his own term. It provides students to promote L2 reading with the help of students' 'own' preferences. It clarifies that reading is shaped depending on their interest. This situation sustains their motivation to read more. For instance, when a student reads the first book in the series where he/she has chosen himself/herself, he/she wants to read more if he/she understands it and enjoys from this reading material. It is what Krashen calls a 'home run book'. As a matter of fact, reading is not an obligatory activity for students. Rather than the teacher, students read it since they really want to read it. In this way, students read often and a lot.

The Roles of Extensive Reading

ER has very distinct features apart from a traditional reading way. In the traditional way, there are class atmosphere, follow-up activities after reading, using dictionary in an active way and the use of only one-type reading material in general. In extensive one, reading is not limited to the class, they also do it outside. Hence, teachers impose reading as a homework to them by not for getting mark but for pleasure. As they are busy with this skill, they feel involved in reading. Moreover, extensive reading which offers opportunities that students enjoy what they read and strength their general understanding during reading.

This advantage is provided with a wide variety of reading materials. That is to say that this approach covers a great amount of authentic materials including newspapers, magazines, literary works (such as novels, poems, stories), journals, articles, caricatures, advertisements, billboards. Thanks to different kinds of materials, it also enriches their cultural background by making interaction with target culture. One of the advantages of ER is that one does not need to use a dictionary during reading because ER focuses on less new vocabulary and new grammar structure but more general understanding. By needing a dictionary less, learners try to develop their prediction skills when they come across an unknown word in a reading text. In this way, the more they are exposed to authentic sources, the more their world knowledge enlarges. Besides this, ER makes the knowledge that they learn from a text more meaningful and comprehensible one. This contributes to make them feel more confident and motivated in reading even in long texts.

Summary

This research investigates the effects of extensive reading on the development of students' reading skills depending on the definition of the extensive reading. It points out what kind of tendency that students have towards extensive reading. The first section of paper explains what extensive reading means, what it covers and what kinds of opportunities it gives for students in this research. In the following section, the benefits of extensive reading towards students' reading development are explained; developing learners' autonomy while reading, enhancing their motivation to read more and increasing their world knowledge as Jacobs (2000) also indicates that extensive reading can help learners develop a reading habit and increase their level of autonomy. The last section includes a questionnaire, which is multiple choice measuring the attitude of students towards extensive reading. This questionnaire consists of twelve questions and it is applied for fifty teacher trainees in ELT department in Ankara and likert like answer system is employed for this in the research. In conclusion, overview of the research and some suggestions take place in the light of data acquired about extensive reading.

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Published: December 25, 2016