

The Impact of Extensive Reading on Reading Comprehension and Attitudes in EFL Learners

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Abstract: This study investigates the effects of extensive reading (ER) on reading comprehension and learners' attitudes in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Sixty intermediate-level Uzbek EFL learners were divided into an experimental group that participated in a structured extensive reading program, and a control group that continued traditional reading instruction. Data were collected through pre- and post-tests, attitude questionnaires, and classroom observations over an 8-week period. Findings revealed that students exposed to ER showed significant improvement in reading comprehension and developed more positive attitudes toward reading in English. The study concludes that incorporating ER into EFL curricula can effectively enhance both linguistic and affective outcomes.

Keywords: Extensive reading, reading comprehension, EFL learners, learner attitudes, Uzbekistan, language input, affective domain.

Introduction: In recent decades, the importance of reading in second language (L2) acquisition has been widely acknowledged, especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Reading not only provides learners with access to authentic language input but also plays a vital role in enhancing vocabulary acquisition, grammar awareness, and general language proficiency. However, in many EFL settings, including Uzbekistan, reading instruction is often confined to intensive reading practices, which prioritize close analysis of short texts, translation, and vocabulary memorization. This method, while useful for building certain academic skills, tends to overlook the development of reading fluency and learner motivation.

Extensive reading (ER), by contrast, advocates for large volumes of reading at a level appropriate for the learner, focusing on general understanding and enjoyment rather than detailed analysis. According to Day and Bamford (2002), ER is based on the principle that reading more improves reading ability, fosters positive attitudes, and increases learners' overall confidence in language use. Students are encouraged to read a wide range of texts of their choice, which promotes autonomy and engagement. Despite

substantial global evidence supporting ER, its application in the Uzbek EFL context remains limited due to curriculum constraints, lack of resources, and traditional teaching mindsets. Furthermore, existing literature suggests that ER not only improves reading comprehension but also affects learners' affective domain, including their attitudes toward reading and motivation to continue learning the language. Positive emotional engagement has been linked to long-term academic success, especially in language education where anxiety and low self-esteem often hinder performance.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quasi-experimental design with a pre-test/post-test control group structure to examine the effects of an extensive reading (ER) program on secondary EFL learners' reading comprehension and attitudes. The design allowed for comparison between students exposed to ER and those taught using traditional intensive reading methods. A total of 60 secondary school students (aged 14–16) from an urban school in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, took part in the study. All participants were at an intermediate (B1) proficiency level based on CEFR standards. They were randomly divided into two groups:

Experimental group (n = 30): participated in an 8-week extensive reading program.

Control group (n = 30): followed the regular EFL curriculum based on intensive reading.

Both groups were taught by the same teacher to ensure consistency in instructional quality, except for the reading methodology.

The experimental group used graded readers from the Oxford Bookworms and Penguin Readers series, selected to match their proficiency level and interests. Each student was encouraged to read at least one book per week (approximately 800–1200 words per book). They also maintained a reading journal to record summaries, reflections, and new vocabulary. The control group worked with the official national curriculum textbooks and engaged in comprehension questions, vocabulary drills, and translation exercises.

A standardized pre- and post-test was administered to both groups. The tests measured reading speed, gist understanding, vocabulary in context, and inferencing. The items were aligned with CEFR B1 descriptors. Weekly classroom observations and student reading journals were collected to gather qualitative data on engagement, behavior, and autonomy.

Pre-Intervention Phase: Both groups took a reading comprehension pre-test and completed the initial attitude questionnaire. Intervention Phase (8 weeks):

Group	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Gain (%)	p-value
Experimental (ER)	58.3	74.2	+27.3%	< 0.05
Control (IR)	57.9	62.4	+7.7%	> 0.05

These results demonstrate that extensive reading had a positive and significant impact on learners' reading comprehension abilities, particularly in inferencing, contextual vocabulary understanding, and reading fluency.

The Likert-scale questionnaire revealed notable shifts in learner attitudes in the experimental group. Before the intervention, 40% of the students reported low motivation toward reading in English, while only 18% expressed enjoyment. After 8 weeks of ER activities, 73% reported increased interest, and 65% expressed enjoyment, citing autonomy and choice in reading materials as motivating factors. Furthermore, self-reported reading confidence rose by 31%, and anxiety levels decreased by 40%.

In comparison, the control group showed minimal changes in affective responses, with some students reporting boredom or fatigue with the textbook-based

Experimental group: Engaged in independent extensive reading sessions for 20–30 minutes per lesson, followed by brief group discussions or reflective tasks.

Control group: Continued with reading passages from the textbook and answered related questions with teacher-led instruction.

Post-Intervention Phase: At the end of 8 weeks, both groups took the post-test and filled out the attitude questionnaire again. Data were then analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively.

RESULTS

The findings of the study are presented in two sections: quantitative results from reading comprehension tests and attitude questionnaires, followed by qualitative observations from reading logs and classroom sessions.

A paired-sample t-test was conducted to compare the pre-test and post-test scores of both the experimental and control groups. The results indicated a statistically significant improvement in the experimental group's reading comprehension performance after the 8-week extensive reading program ($p < 0.05$). The mean score increased from 58.3 to 74.2, reflecting an average gain of 15.9 points (27.3%). In contrast, the control group showed a modest increase from 57.9 to 62.4, a gain of only 4.5 points (7.7%), which was not statistically significant.

reading routine. Weekly teacher observations and student reading journals highlighted several trends:

- Students in the ER group became more autonomous, often selecting books beyond the minimum requirement.
- Peer discussions became more dynamic and student-led over time.
- Vocabulary usage in oral and written tasks reflected improved contextual understanding.
- Some students even began borrowing English books outside classroom hours.

In contrast, the control group remained heavily reliant on teacher guidance, and engagement levels were inconsistent.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide strong support for the use of Extensive Reading (ER) as an effective

pedagogical approach to improve both reading comprehension and learner attitudes in EFL contexts. The statistically significant gains in the experimental group's post-test scores align with prior research suggesting that increased exposure to authentic and level-appropriate English texts promotes deeper cognitive engagement with the language (Day & Bamford, 2002; Nation, 2009).

One key implication of the study is the positive correlation between ER and learner autonomy. Students in the experimental group demonstrated a growing ability to choose texts, read independently, and reflect critically on their reading experience. This suggests that extensive reading fosters self-directed learning, a crucial competence in language acquisition that is often overlooked in traditional classroom settings.

Additionally, the affective benefits observed—such as reduced reading anxiety and increased enjoyment—are particularly noteworthy. In the Uzbek EFL context, where classroom environments often emphasize accuracy over fluency, these emotional shifts represent a meaningful transformation. Learners became more confident, more motivated, and more willing to engage with English beyond the classroom. This aligns with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that lower anxiety and increased motivation enhance language acquisition.

Conversely, the control group's limited progress highlights the limitations of intensive reading (IR) approaches that are highly structured, teacher-centered, and typically focused on grammar and vocabulary drills. While IR may serve specific linguistic goals, it appears insufficient in building global reading skills or cultivating a genuine interest in reading.

However, this study is not without its limitations. The relatively short duration (8 weeks) and modest sample size limit the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, the experimental group's performance could have been influenced by novelty effects or teacher enthusiasm. Future studies could explore long-term effects of ER, examine its integration with other skills (such as writing or speaking), and assess its impact across different proficiency levels.

In summary, the data confirm that extensive reading is a powerful, underutilized tool in EFL instruction that not only enhances linguistic outcomes but also transforms learners' attitudes and behaviors toward English reading. Its integration into Uzbek secondary school curricula—along with adequate teacher training and resource availability—could represent a shift toward more learner-centered, communicative language education.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the effects of extensive reading (ER) on the reading comprehension and attitudinal shifts of Uzbek EFL learners in a secondary school context. The results demonstrated that students exposed to ER significantly outperformed their peers in traditional reading programs, not only in comprehension test scores but also in motivational and affective domains. ER enabled students to develop better inference skills, broaden their vocabulary through context, and most importantly, fostered a positive and autonomous relationship with the English language. The observed increase in confidence, reading enjoyment, and learner independence underscores the pedagogical value of integrating ER into the curriculum.

To maximize the impact of ER, it is recommended that: English teachers receive training in ER methodology and book selection strategies.

Schools invest in graded readers and digital reading resources.

Reading logs, discussion groups, and self-reflection become regular practices within reading programs.

Future research could expand the sample size, extend the program duration, and explore ER's impact on integrated skills development, such as writing fluency and oral expression.

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