

The Effect of Extensive Reading Program on Kurdish EFL Learners' writing Performance

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doi: [10.23918/vesal2018.a7](https://doi.org/10.23918/vesal2018.a7)

Abstract

Reading and writing skills have vital roles in foreign language teaching and learning. The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of implementing reading and writing for EFL learners. The five-month study emphasize on the effect of extensive reading (ER) on writing performance for 1st year EFL Kurdish students in GASHA institute. Pre-test and posttest implemented by the Jacobs, Zingraf, Wormoth, Hartfield, and Hughey (1981) measurement of writing, including content, organization, language use, and mechanics. To gain the aim of the study, 64 students has randomly assigned to the test, 32 students were chosen for the experimental group and 32 students were assigned to the control group. The researchers collected and assessed the data using a sample t-test to measure the effect of the implemented ER program.

The findings demonstrated that the experimental group outperformed the control group as it was treated by the researchers and significant differences were seen in gains of their writing skill but in return the control group was treated by the regular teaching of English teachers without giving ER materials.

Keywords: Foreign language, EFL, Extensive reading (ER), reading and writing skills.

1. Introduction

Reading is one of the most important language skills that is crucial to learn a foreign language for anyone at any age. Reading, as an essential skill, makes the reader to interact with the text which includes tapping prior knowledge, asking questions and making connections, constructing the idea, monitoring, revising meaning, reflecting, relating, and evaluating" (Olson, 2003, p. 17). Other skills like Writing, speaking, grammar, vocabulary items, spelling, and other language sub-skills can be taught with reading when the readers look for meaning and finding pleasure in their texts they read. Reading and writing share the same procedures like drafting, re-writing and negotiation with each other, so both the reader and writer should keep each other in mind (Olson,2003). Apart from that, the proficient reader and writer automatically use their skill, which means they should both read and write actively and strategically.

While reading, a reader will automatically pick up vocabulary and language structures and s/he should be able to make use of them in their writing work. Therefore, when teaching writing as a separate skill, we can also use reading as a tool to improve student's writing. Thus, while teaching the target language, various strategies can be combined like reading and writing to achieve the production skill; writing. Language learners can be not only a skillful reader but also a writer. The practical performance is clear, implementing reading texts as a source to brainstorm and organize ideas to develop writing assignments while at the same time they use writing as a learning instrument in teaching reading strategies.

Reading for pleasure and reading as much as you like to read or so-called "extensive reading" (ER) has been repeatedly recommended by many famous reading experts and practitioners such as Grabe (2002), Eskey (2002), Nuttall (1996), Day and Bamford (1998) as an easy but as a dominant tool to improve other language skills. Practical experiments and surveys have reported that writing has been improved by many EFL learners thanks to ER with various age groups in an EFL contexts. From surveys, for example, many studies have shown a positive relationship between the amount of reading by students and their writing abilities.

Other researchers like parks and Thatcher (2000) stated that "English writing plays vital, cross-cultural, and traditional roles in business, work places, and governmental actions throughout the world geography". Leki (2003) has also reported that writing is the vital part of education which is an essential method of language learning. He also believes that writing plays a key gate-keeping role in career improvement.

EFL learners often have the lack of writing assignments due to their lack of vocabulary, grammar and sentence structure with their difficulties of transferring their ideas and opinions to a written expression (Al-Meni, 2008).

Consequently, several EFL scholars have planned and practiced useful and effective methods to simplify the writing process and improve learners' writing capabilities and using extensive reading texts which may provide that for them.

It has been also stated by Tsai (2006) that writing and reading share similar structures and learners are more likely to benefit from the teaching program that makes writing and reading activities go together in such a way that complete each other.

But at the same time, some other studies especially in EFL contexts, e.g. (Elley and Mangubhai, 1983; Tudor and Hafiz, 1989; Hafiz and Tudor, 1989; Elley, 1991; Pilgreen and Krashen, 1993; Cho and Krashen, 1994; (1995a); (1995b); Constantino, 1994), and Lai (1993b) and Krashen (1996) found no relationship between reading and writing. They showed that there is not any significant improvement from students' writing skills while giving ER program. For this reason, in this study our interest was to examine

this case in an EFL context to know that if the Kurdish EFL learners' writing performance would be improved by providing several pleasure reading materials during a five-month regular study period.

1.1 Statement of the problem

After changing the school curriculum as a new strategy to make the students to write effectively , understand clearly and speak well in English language, by studying one year preliminary English language program, according to the researcher experiences ,as the head of the English language department, the class observations, teaching the students, scoring their writing assignments, and also the writing teachers' complaints, we found the students' lack of performance in writing to make sentence structure, poor vocabulary, spelling mistakes, and their ideas organization to express what they want to say in English language. Therefore, the researchers recommend a new technique to be implemented to improve Kurdish EFL learners' writing ability through extensive reading program which they believe that this strategy could have a significant influence on students' writing performance to write better and express their ideas more logically. The results of this study can demonstrate the importance of ERP to improve learners' writing performance in an EFL context.

1.2. The hypothesis

Using extensive reading has a positive effect on Kurdish EFL learners' writing performance.

2. Literature review

There is a complicated connection between reading and writing performance and this connection is a clue to do research and work on its theoretical grounds. Over the past several decades a lot of research has been done to verify the relation between extensive reading and writing performance. Most of the EFL studies claim the satisfying results about the impact of reading on writing abilities of learners. According to their exposure to the target language, a lot of positive links between reading and writing scores were found. This section reviews the literature related to the effect of extensive reading program on the EFL learners' writing performance.

At first, you may find worth considering the exact meaning of extensive reading (ER) by Powell (2006) who states that the term "extensive reading" was originally coined by Palmer (1917) to distinguish it from "intensive reading" which is: The careful reading of short, complex texts for detailed understanding and skills practice. It has since acquired many other names such as "pleasure reading", "sustained silent reading", and "free reading".

Regardless of the different names, the characteristics generally include the relatively fast reading to understand material, with the reading done mostly outside of the classroom and at each student's own pace and level. There are few, if any, follow – up exercises, because the aim is for overall understanding

rather than word – by – word decoding or grammar analysis. For the same reason, there is minimum use of dictionaries. Most importantly, instead of an inflexible curriculum saddling students with texts they neither enjoy nor understand, with extensive reading the material is generally chosen by the students themselves, who can thereby enjoy some small measure of responsibility for decisions affect in their learning, a basic tenet of communicative teaching (Thompson, 1996).

Krashen (1989) studied the power of reading on language acquisition on the basis that reading becomes comprehensible input if texts are both interesting and understandable so that they capture the learners' attention. His research on reading exposure supports the view that it increases not only reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition, but it improves grammatical development and writing style.

Beach (1984) studied the effect of reading ability on 60 seventh-grade students' narrative writing quality. The findings of the study indicated that reading ability influenced the quality of personal incident writing. Schneider (1985) examined how re-reading functions in the composition process of six college students – three skilled writers and three unskilled ones. In fact, he tried to describe how reading and writing processes interact during composition. It was found that re-reading has an important function in helping writers shape the meaning of their written pieces.

Hafiz and Tudor (1990) investigated the effects of an extensive reading program and accuracy of using lexical items on Pakistani primary school pupils' second language learning. They found that the students had statistically significant gains in their vocabulary base and writing and the influence of extensive reading program supported the idea that students learn to write through reading.

The combination of writing skill with the other language skills can be more useful to teach composition to the students. Zaher (1990) investigated the effect of a proposed unit based on the integration of the writing skill with other language skills, mainly with reading. it was found that there was a tangible increase in the students' use of varied types of structures while writing after the treatment as compared to their writing performance before the implementation of the proposed unit. In other words, it was found that the students confined themselves mainly to simple structures and a limited number of compound and complex structures on the pre-test, while after the treatment, the students' use of compound and complex structures in writing increased significantly. So, the hypothesis of combining the language skills with writing to improve the students' writing performance was approved by the findings of that study.

Janopoulous (1986) studied the relationship between reading for pleasure and second language writing competence. The findings of the study showed a meaningful correlation between pleasure reading and students' proficiency in written English. Murdoch (1986) investigated the effect of integrating writing

with reading on developing and improving students' writing achievement. The findings showed that if writing with its mechanics were integrated into activities or exercises based on reading texts, students would no longer view writing as an unpleasant task, but as a natural part of language learning. Moreover, it was found that students' writing performance substantially improved. Shahan and Lomax (1986) suggested three models explaining the writing-reading relationship. Their models contain the interaction of writing and reading, reading-to-write, and writing-to-read. They used path analysis to investigate the impact of reading on writing. The results showed that the reading-to-write was superior to the other two models.

Grabe and Kaplan (1996) suggested that reading activities will be of a great assistance to improve and promote too many writing activities at the beginning and advanced levels. They stated that the outcome of a reading activity serves as input for writing and writing heads students to further reading sources and references. They also indicated that there is a need for students to read texts and analyze them logically, which is considered as a key component in their academic writings. Mason and Krashen (1997) investigated the effectiveness of a one-semester reading program on Japanese university students' linguistic competence, reading and writing skills. The findings of the study revealed statistically significant gains and positive attitudes in the students' reading ability and writing skill. Bell (1998) stressed that reading extensively offers teacher worldwide engagement in a concentrated and encouraging reading program to direct students along a passage to be independent and resourceful in their reading and language learning, and furthermore to be well improved and naturally-respondent to form texts, thoughts and ideas in writing.

The available research results imply the relationship between reading and writing and its positive aspect supports the students to read more and more to improve their writing performance. Kirin (2010) gave details of a 15-week reading experiment with a group of Thai EFL learners who were encouraged to read and, by the end, were then sub-divided for statistical analysis based on their reading amounts. Designated 'high' and 'low' groups, this represented the volume of their exposure to comprehensible input. All subjects had their essay writing abilities measured every five weeks throughout the entire engagement with simplified reading books. The findings of the study showed that the high ability learners' writing improved, while low ability learners' writing abilities did not improve despite additional reading involvement over the four months of the experiment.

Yoshimura (2009) investigated the effects of connecting reading and writing and a checklist to guide the reading process on EFL learners' learning about writing. In this research, ways of reading which are likely to promote the development of writing ability were sought and operationalized into checklist questions for EFL reading instructions. The findings of the study showed that connecting reading and

writing has positive effects and that the checklist helps students consider genre and efficiently integrate the reading and writing processes.

Erhan (2011) analyzed the effects of the cooperative integrated reading and composition technique and the traditional reading and writing pedagogical methods for primary school students. It was found that there was a statistically significant difference between the reading and writing skills of the experimental and control groups in terms of academic achievement and retention. This difference was discovered in favor of the cooperative integrated reading and composition technique.

Zainal and Husin (2011) studied the effects of reading on writing performance among faculty of civil engineering students. The results showed that reading has positive effects on students' writing. Generally, the results of this study indicated that reading and writing are connected to each other. It is effectively help students in writing in several ways.

Previous findings report a positive connection between reading and writing. If we want to consider the general goal of this study which is investigating the effect of extensive reading program on the Kurdish EFL learners' writing performance, the reviewed literature results will be a good support for it. Nevertheless, the effect of extensive reading on Kurdish EFL learners have not received any attention in the previous studies, so this point was a good excuse to concentrate on the effect of extensive reading program on the Kurdish EFL learners' writing performance.

3. Significance of study

Extensive reading has been used to develop writing skills in several foreign language classrooms and it has been a crucial debate for many teachers and scholars (Abou Baker, 1996; Khater, 2002; Helal, 2003; and Bakir, 2004). This current study examines the effect of ERP on Kurdish EFL learners' writing skills in undergraduate school –which is a technical private institute. To the best knowledge of the researchers in this study, they try to see whether implementing a new tool, ERP, will improve EFL Kurdish learners' writing skills. For that reason, it is hoped that

- Students writing skills; sentence structure, content, organization, language use, and mechanics will improve through pleasure reading texts.
- It will also assist the researchers and teachers to be involved in the educational procedure to achieve insights into ERP and its impact on writing skills
- It will also help teaching and learning procedure to use more ERPs and diverse teacher class hours to teach their skills especially in both writing and reading.

The results of the ERP effectiveness will help students perhaps to open their minds towards the importance of reading to improve their writing skills.

4. Methodology

This study was conducted at GASHA institute with first year students- it is a five-year technical institute which has three departments; petroleum, computer science, accounting and management in Iraqi Kurdistan region. There is a standard designed curriculum and course books. Students have been placed with their majors and there no any placement tests before entering their classes. So, all the classes that have about 400 students within this program are mixed-ability students in 20 classes, in each class, there is 45minute reading and writing lessons for four times in a week. The participants of this study were randomly selected and divided into groups; control group and experimental group –following a pretest-posttest design for both groups. The extensive reading program was only implemented to experimental group during a five-month study program while both groups have regular teaching hours in reading lesson-four lessons (each session is 45minutes) for each week. However, the control group students were only assigned to traditional method which was reading classes only. Both groups were addressed to a writing assignment (see appendix1) pretest at the beginning of the experiment and the same test was given as a posttest immediately after it.

There were 64 Kurdish EFL first year students at GASHA institute in the first and second semester of the academic year 2017-2018. The participants were chosen randomly and they assigned into experimental and control groups of 32 subjects each.

The extensive reading program was designed for this study, students read different books at home or in the library whenever and whatever they like to read according to their own interest in various subjects; sports, history, famous characters, movie stars, health, science, technology, etc. Each weekend, they supposed to finish one of the graded reader's materials and write a summery about what they have learnt from the book (see appendix2) as a writing activity.

The materials have been divided according to the levels. It is expected that by providing the students the chance to be put in their own levels and read according to their levels in all various subject fields, the present study program may possibly develop Kurdish EFL learners' writing performance through a pleasure reading program.

Students in experimental group were given the importance of the ERP and the researchers explained about the program in developing their writings skills.

The writing test was assigned to both groups before and after the treatment. Students were requested to write a paragraph about how they spent their last holiday. The researchers used the following checklist to evaluate the students' writing performance: (a) content, (b) organization, (c) vocabulary use, (d) sentence structure, and (e) mechanics.

The total score for writing the paragraph was out of 25, 5 points for each skill. Two English language instructors rated the students' writings. The two raters were asked to evaluate each of the five writing skills separately, and then the overall marks were calculated.

5. Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of ERP on Kurdish EFL learners' writing skills. The researchers theorize that participants who studied ERP including their regular reading hours would perform better writing assignments than those who only study reading in traditional lessons.

The data were collected through a pretest-treatment-posttest design for the equivalent groups and analyzed via the statistical package SPSS. An independent t test was carried out to determine achievement of the two groups on the pretest.

Table1. Results of the t Test of the Means of the Achievement of both groups on the pretest

Pre Test	Group	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	T	Significance
	Control Group	32	8.44	5.459	1.21	0.32
	Experimental Group	32	10.91	5.497		

Table 2 represents that the difference between the results of both groups before implementing the ERP on the pretest which is statistically not significant at $\alpha=0.00$. As it has been shown that there is not statistic difference between the control and the experimental groups at the beginning of the program-pretest, both groups were supposed equivalent. But after implementing an extensive reading program for five months in two semesters, another t-test was examined to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between the groups' results on the posttest.

Table 2 shows the data results as below.

PostTest	Group	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	T	Significance
	Control Group	32	9.09	5.761	31	0.045
	Experimental Group	32	15.91	4.283		

Table 3 explores that there is a statistically significant difference at $\alpha = 0.05$. Between the results of the experimental group and the control group on the posttest which are measured by the differences between the tests after implementing the ERP for the experimental group, it points that using extensive reading program to Kurdish EFL learners has better impact on their writing skills for the experimental group than the control group. The mean score for experimental group on posttest was (15.91) while that of the control group was (9.09).

The findings of this part of the study are consistent with studies conducted by Beach (1984), Schneider (1985), Janopoulous (1986), Murdoch (1986), Hafiz and Tudor (1990), Zaher (1990), Grabe and Kaplan (1996), Mason and Krashen (1997), Bell (1998), Ferris and Hedgcock (1998), Wong (2001), Helal (2003), Smith (2003), Bakir (2004), Hany(2007), Shen(2009), Yoshimura (2009), Kirin (2010), Alkhalwaldeh(2011), De Rycker and Ponnudurai (2011), Erhan (2011), and Zainal and Husin (2011). All these studies showed that using extensive reading in English language instruction in general and in improve their writing skill, in particular. They also found that extensive reading does offer students certain educational benefits. Moreover, the findings of the study are in line with the hypothesis of the study as it was found that the extensive reading text has a positive impact on Kurdish EFL students' performance in writing. The researcher demonstrates that the difference in the performance of the students was assigned to using the extensive reading text in the writing classes. The experimental group participants significantly improved their writing performance in a period of five months. The progress attained by the control group participants, nevertheless, was not statistically meaningful.

To ensure the reliability of scoring of the writing test, three raters from the correlation was calculated. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table3. Writing Test Interrater Reliability

The interrater Correlation	Correlation	Significance
Interrater correlation between the first rater and second rater	0.96	0.01
Interrater correlation between the first rater and third rater	0.97	0.01
Interrater correlation between the second rater and third rater	0.96	0.01

Table 3 shows that the writing test interrater reliability is statistically significant (0.93) at 0.01.

6. Discussion

The main goal of this study was about the investigating of the extensive reading effect on Kurdish EFL learners' writing performance. The data were collected by conducting a pretest and posttest for both control and experimental group. In this study it was presumed that students who were given extra reading passages should outperform the other group regarding appropriate vocabularies and structures. Most of the subjects in experimental group observed this attribute but there were several cases who had difficulty in having good word choices for their topic. Since the subjects in both groups were first-year students in GASHA institute, they had some other minor grammatical errors but they were overlooked, since they didn't serve our purpose.

It is not enough to just consider the language input to explain the growth of the participants' writing ability. Language output or the production of written work may be required to coordinate and confirm language learned from the reading engagement. According to Silva and Matsuda (2002) understanding some of the writing strategies through practice is helpful especially for less experienced writers. In fact, several ER studies; for example, Mason (2004) and Caruso (1994), have proven that writing practice supports the improvement in a readers' writing performance. On the other hand, studies by Mason and Krashen (2004) also claim writing progress despite any formal instruction or practice.

Swain (1999) proposed the Output Hypothesis and it relies on the writing practice and according to this hypothesis, the production of language is necessary because while creating a piece of work by a writer can br along with taking notice of the language they are using in their writing. Without choosing appropriate words to create longer sentences it is highly probable that the language is not adequately noticed and besides, the acquired knowledge a reader gains from comprehensible input could be easily lost.

Motivational ER activities which focused on playing with words and sentences found in stories read are considered as conscious learning. However, according to Harmer (2001) the noticed language infers neither the acquisition of language nor the ability to use it immediately. The spontaneous production of the acquired or learned language needs a longer time because it needs enough processing time in the learners' memory through noticing and may be restructured before being available for use.

Moreover, the findings of the study agree with the hypothesis of that study as it was found that the extensive reading program has a positive effect on Kurdish EFL learners' writing performance. The researchers demonstrate that the difference in the achievement of the students was attributed to using the extensive reading program in the writing classes. The experimental group subjects significantly improved their writing performance in a period of five months. By comparing the results achieved by the two groups, the researchers reached the conclusion that the improvement achieved by the experiment group may have been attributed to the way they render instruction: the extensive reading program. Furthermore, the differences between the two groups may be attributed to many other reasons.

First, using the extensive reading program in the writing classes is a creative method. This novelty may have motivated the students to cope with it enthusiastically, which may have been reflected in better writing achievement. Second, reading a lot of various passages and doing many reading and writing activities helped the students to develop beneficial reading and writing habits and at the same time it improves their writing performance through the consistent exposure to the meaningful content of the texts. Extensive reading program makes a better comprehension of the content, which in turn led to improving writing performance. Third, extensive reading program encouraged the students to practice the skills they acquired when writing a paragraph on a certain topic which surely leads to develop their writing performance. Fourth, the program was effective in encouraging the students to read on different genres (narrative, argumentative, descriptive, scientific, and expository texts) which increased their writing proficiency. Fifth, by reading passages, the students can learn a main idea is developed through out a passage. Moreover, they offered the students a range of vocabulary to be used later in their writing. Besides, the students could gain necessary ideas and information for writing through reading the passages. Finally, integrating reading and writing skills to improve their performance in writing a paragraph and it decreased the feeling of boredom and kept them active all the time. This supports Grabe and Kaplan (1996) speech who suggested that reading activities will be a great assistance to improve and promote too many writing activities at the beginning and advanced levels. They also stated

that the outcome of a reading activity serves as input for writing. Zamble (1992) stressed that the teaching of reading and writing cannot be torn apart nor can be arranged in linear order so that one necessarily precedes the other. Ferris and Hedgcock (1998) also indicated that voluntary-pleasurable reading has empirically proved to bring about positive impacts on developing writing skill.

7. Conclusion

Improving the writing skill is so important for many EFL teachers. Second language writing ability is a complex skill and teachers may need to use a variety of methodologies to best ensure their students' abilities improve over time. According to this study, a partial improvement was also seen in the control group by using the direct instruction and doing a lot of writing tasks and practice over the course of five academic months.

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers believe that the using extensive reading for EFL learners helps them to make learning more interesting. Extensive reading programs can motivate the students. Moreover, the findings of this study demonstrated that integrating extensive reading programs into writing instruction, was effective for improving students' performance and made a good learning experience.

Because of the limitations of the classroom and the time available for teachers to directly interact with each student, ER can be helpful for the second language learners to become more autonomous learners, especially in EFL environments where exposure to the target language may be limited.

If an ER method is as effective as the results of this study and other studies suggest, then the implications for using an ER method as a secondary method of improving learners' writing abilities in the teaching of EFL may be extraordinary. Therefore, it is crucial for EFL teachers to seriously use the ER method to help learners in their classrooms.

Maybe, one of the limitations of this study was about time management and about the time which was spent out of class for reading or working on English homework assignments. Another limitation was perhaps about the manner of scoring the pre- and post-writing samples. During the present study, the pre- and post-writing tests were scored at two separate times, one at the first month and the other at the fifth month. A blind scoring system has been preferred, where all of the writing samples are scored after the study has been concluded without the raters knowing which samples were pretests and which samples were posttests. This may be a good subject for the future researchers to consider.

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