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|  |  | **Exploring EFL Learners’ Perceptions of Extensive Reading in Developing Writing Proficiency**  **Zulfiqar Ali**1**, Sarala Thulasi Palpanadan**2\***, Mohammad Mujtaba Asad**3  1 Department of Social Science,  Sukkur IBA University, Sukkur, 65200, PAKISTAN  2Centre for Language Studies,  Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia, Parit Raja, 86400, MALAYSIA  3Department of Education,  Sukkur IBA University, Sukkur, 65200 PAKISTAN    \*Corresponding Author: sarala@uthm.edu.my  DOI: https://doi.org/10.30880/dils2023.03.01.003  Received 01 April 2023; Accepted 01 May 2023; Available online 10 July 2023  **Abstract**: This study explored English as Foreign Language Learners’ (EFL) perceptions of extensive reading in developing their writing proficiency. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews and students’ reflective diaries from five participants based on a purposive sampling technique. The thematic analysis and personal interpretations techniques were used for the data analysis. The findings revealed that EFL learners perceived the ER approach as a useful method for developing their writing abilities. The learners also enjoyed participating in post-extensive reading writing activities. The study recommends that teachers should engage students in extensive reading along with post-reading writing activities. More research is suggested through multiple data collection tools in various educational contexts about the role of ER in developing the writing proficiency of learners.  **Keywords**: Reading, Writing, Extensive Reading, Improvement |

1. **Introduction**

Extensive Reading (ER) is gaining popularity in various educational contexts to promote a reading culture and reading habits among students. This approach has brought about a significant improvement in the language skills of the students. Nation &Waring (2020) defined extensive reading as meaning-focused input and fluency development. Day & Bamford (1998) distinguish intensive reading from extensive reading in that, in extensive reading, L2 learners are exposed to a large quantity of meaningful and interesting reading materials to develop their reading fluency. In intensive reading, learners are taught short texts with the teachers’ support to build their language skills and focus remain on accuracy. (Renandya, 2016: Nation, 2014). Furthermore, Day and Bamford (1998) highlighted that the purpose of ER is reading for pleasure, and it improves the linguistic competence of the learners.

The term ER was first introduced to English language pedagogy by Harold Palmer in the early 20th century. However, research into this domain started gaining popularity in late 1980. This field has seen a noteworthy abundance of research studies on the effectiveness of ER. Those studies have shown the benefits of L2 acquisition. These empirical research studies in English as a foreign or second language (EFL/ESL) contexts have revealed that ER has positive effects on students’ fluency (Ateek, 2021: Suk, 2017), reading comprehension (Al-Homoud & Schmitt, 2009), reading motivation and attitude (Jang, Kang, & Kim, 2015; Suk, 2018), vocabulary acquisition (Alsaif & Masrai, 2019; Liu & Zhang, 2018), and critical thinking (Husna, 2019). However, studies on how ER impacts the writing proficiency of learners are rarely found in the literature (Park, 2016; Yılmaz, Atay & Er, 2020). The present study adds to the existing body of research by exploring the perceptions of EFL learners about the role of ER in promoting the writing proficiency of pre-university students. According to Sun (2020), reading and writing are both processes of meaning construction. If both of these skills are combined, language learning in various aspects can be enhanced (Grabe, 2009). Moreover, writing after reading is an effective way to develop the learners’ reading comprehension and writing skills (Grabe & Zhang, 2016). Therefore, this study fills the gap, it will explore how writing after extensive reading could help learners develop their writing proficiency.

1. **Methods**

2.1 Research Design

The qualitative research design was used in this study. This study aimed to explore the perceptions of pre-university EFL learners of extensive reading in developing their writing skills.

2.2 Context of Study

This study was conducted at Sukkur IBA University which is a public-sector university in Pakistan. Sukkur IBA University offers various programmes in business administration, computer science, electrical engineering, teacher training, media studies, and mathematics. The students were enrolled in the foundation semester in order to apply for regular studies at the university. The foundation programme is offered to provide students with a wide range of academic skills, such as mathematics, computer skills, and language skills. Researchers developed the research question of the study based on the purpose of the study. “What are the perceptions of EFL pre-university learners about the role of ER in developing their writing proficiency?”

2.3 Participants

The population of the study is the EFL pre-university learners of Sukkur IBA University. The participants in the study were chosen based on a purposive sampling technique. The researchers chose five participants for semi-structured interviews from all five classes of the foundation programme. The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews at the completion of the programme, for the reflective diaries, the researcher distributed five diaries at the start of the programme and also briefed them about the purpose of diary writing. The participants returned the diaries at the end of the programme.

2.4 Data Collection Tools

In this research, we used qualitative methods using semi-structured interviews and reflective diaries. For the semi-structured interviews, the researcher developed an interview guide by reviewing the literature on ER and the relevant studies on ER on writing proficiency. After making the interview guide, the researcher sent it to three experts for validation. The researchers also piloted the interview guide with two participants enrolled in the same program. The researcher revised the interview guide based on the suggestions from the experts and the results of the pilot study. For the reflective diary part, the researchers also provided reflective diary writing guidelines to facilitate the participants to continue writing. The researchers also provided a sample reflective diary to the students at the start of the programme. The participants returned the diaries to the researchers at the end of the programme.

2.5 Data Analysis Techniques

The present study was qualitative in nature, and the purpose was to explore the perceptions of EFL learners about the role of ER in developing writing proficiency. Researchers followed the techniques of qualitative data analysis suggested by the relevant experts in the area of qualitative research. The thematic analysis technique and personal interpretations were used for the data analysis. For the interview part, all five interviews were transcribed, and then the researchers followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six steps of thematic analysis. For the reflective diaries, the researchers read the diaries intensively and repetitively and supported the interview findings with relevant quotations from the diaries. The validity and reliability of the data were checked by the researchers. For the validity and reliability of the data, member checking was employed to increase the credibility of the study (Motulsky, 2021). In this technique, two participants were involved in reviewing the transcripts and interpretations of the data, and all the discrepancies were resolved after negotiation between the participants and the researchers.

1. **Results and Discussion**

The findings of the study revealed that EFL learners improved their writing abilities after their exposure to the ER approach. When students were asked how ER had an impact on their writing development. It was discovered from the majority of the participants’ comments that ER helped them develop their writing skills as they were exposed to abundant material and some kind of post-reading writing activities were also included in the classes. The findings from the interview data and reflective diaries revealed that students perceived reading as a helpful and useful method to develop their writing proficiency.

*P1 wrote in her diary that she used to make mistakes in her writing like the spelling of words and mixing of words but by continuously reading the articles and novels, I am improving my writing. By reading frequently, I understand the content easily but I also get alternative words that I can use in my academic writing.*

Most of the participants revealed that while reading during the foundation semester, they read books and articles by great authors like Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens, Seven Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen Covey, and Old Man and the Sea by Ernest Hemingway. As a result of that, they learned the style of writing and also tried to adapt it to their routine writing, as the writing style of those authors was very impressive.

*The readings from textbooks and the young world magazines were very useful to me, the reason was that the writing style of those writers was so impressive that we wanted to write like that. When we started reading those writing styles, we saw how they were using the word structure in the sentence. So, it helps us to copy that thing. These things helped us to write in a better way (P1, P3).*

Similarly, some participants were of the view that while reading the passages using the word-to-word approach, they closely evaluated the text from the language point of view so*, this approach also helped them develop their writing proficiency (P3, P4, P5).* Moreover, some of the participants revealed that reading and writing had a closer connection and their writing proficiency enhanced just because of more exposure to reading. Before this programme, they were very poor at writing and could not write even a well-developed paragraph. *Through extensive reading, we also knew how to write a well-developed paragraph as well as a well-developed essay (P4, P2*). Moreover, they attributed their writing proficiency to reading for pleasure and recreational reading. The current literature and the present findings also suggested that reading and writing went hand in hand and there was a close connection between them. To further elicit how this skill was enhanced through reading, A startling and amazing finding came from a comment from the respondent that writing is directly proportional to reading. *I think reading is directly proportional to writing as you read more, you write more (P5).* The findings reported that students were also aware of the importance of reading in developing their writing proficiency which echoed in their comments.

Some students also commented that due to the use of multiple natures of reading material in the form of fiction and non-fiction, their writing proficiency improved. *I think my writing also improved as we were exposed to various kinds of reading resources (P3)*. After reading those books and other reading resources, students were also engaged in various post-reading writing activities such as writing a book report and summary of the article. *I participated in the post-reading writing activities like writing a book report or the summary of the article which really helped me develop my writing skills (P2)*.

Similarly, *P4* wrote in the diary *Today our teacher asked us to read an article from the Young World Magazine. After reading the article, we also discussed it with our class fellow. In the end, we wrote a summary of it. We were also provided feedback from our teacher on that summary as our teachers identified the errors that we made in the draft. I wish this activity may be continued in future classes as it helped me a lot in improving my writing skills.* These comments indicated that students not only read various types of reading materials but also did some post-reading writing activities.

It has been revealed through the findings that learners developed their writing through reading and by adapting the style of the writers. The results also portray that learners considered reading and writing interlinked and interconnected. It is also observed from the comments that ER exposure made a major contribution to enhancing the learners’ writing skills (Rahmawati & Dzulfikri, 2022; Bamford & Day, 2004; Grabe, 2009). The present findings are also consistent with the existing literature that claim that reading and writing go hand in hand (Wang, 2020). Moreover, the results also suggest that students learned to write in an effective and coherent way with more exposure to reading and ER was a better source to provide learners with the maximum opportunity of writing after reading. Furthermore, it is more likely that students became proficient in writing through their involvement in ER reading approach The teachers also involved students in post-reading ER-related writing tasks that became a motivating factor in the development of their writing skills. So far, the findings indicate that ER input in the form of reading books and articles was a major contribution to their proficiency in writing. (Mermelstein, 2015; Park, 2016; Yılmaz, Atay, & Er, 2020). Thus, it can be inferred that ER activities may be encouraged in the EFL classrooms for building not only their reading abilities but also their writing skills. The integration of ER and writing activities can be a successful and effective strategy in EFL classrooms (Azizi et al, 2020: Linuwih, 2021).

1. **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study explored the perceptions of EFL learners about the role of ER in developing the writing skills of pre-university EFL learners. The findings of the present study present a clear picture of how ER could enhance the writing proficiency of students. The study also revealed that introducing more ER material in the classroom could benefit learners in developing their writing proficiency. The introduction of maintaining a diary in language classrooms could also become a better source for the learners to continue writing, as in the present study, the learners kept writing in the diaries regularly, and visible improvements were seen in the writing abilities of students. The present study contributes to the existing body of knowledge about the role of ER in developing the writing proficiency of learners. The implication of this study is that teachers should engage students in more reading of multiple natures and then they should encourage them to write about the material. Moreover, the teachers should make some post-reading ER-related writing activities like summary writing or writing a book report after reading a book and other such activities that could encourage writing after reading.

A limitation of the research is that this study only explored learners' perceptions about the role of ER in developing their writing proficiency. Although participants reported having benefited from ER in their writing development, it is worth investigating through some writing tests if the learners improved their writing proficiency through the ER approach. A better finding could have been achieved if the nature of the study had been experimental or quasi-experimental. A small number of participants were involved in the study. A larger sample size would have been selected for more robust findings.

In future studies, the teachers’ perceptions may also be explored regarding the role of ER in developing the writing proficiency of the learners. A mixed methods study is required in future studies, in which some writing tests may also be conducted and focus group interviews may also be used for more reliable and valid findings.

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