

## Using Extensive Reading to Develop Student Autonomy in Learning the English Language

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### Abstract

Extensive reading as a technique of learning is suggested by many education researchers. It assists English language learners to overcome learning English as a foreign language. Second language learners tackle various challenges. They come to the classroom, learn new vocabulary, expressions, and conversation up to the end of the school day, but when they leave the classroom, they stop thinking in English. Extensive reading is a learning technique that increases learner autonomy. Therefore, selecting reading material suitably is a must in conducting extensive reading program. Keeping this in mind, this paper aims to use extensive reading technique to find out its effect on learners' autonomy development in learning the English Language. In order to find whether extensive reading promotes learners' autonomy, the technique was implemented across the course curriculum. This paper would report learners' and teachers' perceptions regarding reading extensively. A semi-structured interview was conducted to present the results of qualitative

approach and it came up with a descriptive result. Data came from semi-structured interview records and notes. The participants were randomly selected among second semester of the medicine faculty, English language classes and English teachers at Kabul University of Medical Sciences. Outcomes and results were discussed in detail.

**Keywords:** Extensive reading, Learners' autonomy, Pedagogical approach, Semi-structure interview, Kabul.

## **Introduction**

A pedagogical approach that encourages students to learn a second language rapidly is extensive reading. This means reading vast amounts of passages and obtaining a general comprehension of what is read; of course, it constructs autonomy. In addition, extensive reading helps students improve both general knowledge and gain support in promoting second language acquisition. Using intensive reading to develop students' autonomy in English Language learning is the point that this research paper attempts to discuss. Extensive reading is very significant for learners to improve their learning habits, promote vocabulary learning and develop knowledge of learning sentences and paragraph structures, and raise encouragement for reading.

Reading is the most significant factor of enhancing learning autonomy; so, the more text students of English language read, the more information they gain, and their confidence is built undoubtedly. The concept of extensive reading comes from theories that rank the importance of input in second language leaning. Using extensive reading for teaching reading techniques is helpful for learners. It is argued that extensive reading has positive influences on the affective areas of reading, such as attitude and motivation (Grabe, 2009).

Numerous studies have documented the happiness and enjoyment experienced by second language learners participating in extensive reading programs. However, while there is a wealth of research in how extensive reading affects skills and abilities, there is surprisingly little investigation into how different teaching methods can impact this effect. This study aims to fill in this gap by exploring how learner autonomy in extensive reading influences attitudes toward

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**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 23:4 April 2023

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second-language reading. Specifically, learner's autonomy is defined as the ability and willingness to learn in a self-directed manner (W. Pongsatornpiat, 2021).

According to Brown (2012), extensive reading involves the independent selection and reading of large quantities of material at a comfortable level. Al-Mansour (2014) advocates for the inclusion of extensive reading materials in curricula as a means of improving reading and writing performance. Judge (2011) asserts that personalized reading experiences can cultivate learner autonomy, which in turn promotes learning achievement and increased motivation.

Nation (2009) emphasizes that reading should be the primary focus of a reading program, with minimal time spent on other activities. Therefore, extensive reading programs typically do not require learners to complete comprehension tests or exercises related to the books they read. Instead, learners are asked to complete a brief record form that includes the book title, level, date, time taken to read, and a brief evaluation of the book. In foreign language reading programs, oral book reporting is one possible activity that can be incorporated.

Extensive reading is closely connected with learner autonomy, as noted by (Brown, 2012). The significance of learner autonomy is particularly evident in the realm of foreign language education, and it is unsurprising that English language instruction has placed great emphasis on this concept. Nonetheless, there are relatively few studies exploring the correlation between extensive reading and learner autonomy. This study seeks to address this research gap.

## **Objective**

This research aims to discuss the opinions of foreign language students and teachers on oral book reports, as well as encourage self-directed learning in extensive reading courses. The study also includes a case analysis where learners picked a graded reader and presented an oral report to their classmates. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with both learners and instructors of an English language program at Kabul Medical University of Sciences.

## **Significance of the Study**

Extensive Reading can provide numerous advantages for those learning a language. These benefits encompass improvements in reading and writing abilities, listening and speaking proficiency, expansion of vocabulary, as well as boosts in motivation, self-confidence, and empathy. Moreover, individuals who engage in extensive reading tend to become more independent learners, skilled communicators, exceptional writers, and overall exceptional learners. (Maley, A 2008).

## **Research Questions**

This investigation suggests answers to the research questions:

1. What are the students' perceptions in relation to extensive reading effects?
2. What are the teachers' perceptions in relation to oral book reporting with specific attention to learner autonomy?

## **Literature Review**

Extensive reading is beneficial for language learners as it offers understandable input and supports the acquisition of a second language. It creates a relaxed and unrestricted learning environment that facilitates language acquisition.

According to Shaffer (2012), language learners are typically exposed to the second language in a controlled and gradual manner. However, extensive reading can improve overall language ability and promote learning autonomy by providing additional information for conversation.

Erfanpour, M.A. (2013) believed that extensive reading is important for language learners as it helps them to develop automaticity in recognizing words. By providing more exposure to the language, learners are able to improve their ability to acquire new forms from the input. This emphasizes the significance of the quality of language exposure that learners receive.

Extensive reading is essential for language learners because it allows them to effortlessly recognize words and enhances their ability to understand new structures from the input. The quality of language exposure that learners receive is crucial for their development. According to Webb and Chang (2015), children in grades three to twelve can learn up to 3000 words a year through reading, with only a small percentage of direct vocabulary instruction. Furthermore, J. Lee (2015) found that extensive reading can improve writing skills, with students who read extensively before college becoming better writers when they enter college. These findings support the use of an input-based, acquisition-oriented reading program based on extensive reading to promote improvements in students' writing abilities.

Extensive reading programs can act as a catalyst for learners to engage in reading. To achieve this, it is important to select reading materials that align with students' preferences, interests, and needs. This approach was successfully implemented in Yemen by incorporating familiar and culturally relevant titles such as Aladdin and His Lamp. In a study conducted by Tamrackitkum (2010) in Southeast Asia, various strategies were presented to motivate learners to read, including the use of extensive reading and regular library usage to cultivate a reading habit.

According to Byun (2010), incorporating extensive reading can help reinforce previously learned language and provide high-interest materials for both children and adults. Graded readers, which have controlled grammatical and lexical complexity, offer regular repetition of new language forms, allowing for automatic reinforcement and retention of new input. This can lead to increased confidence and autonomy in learning, as well as improved reading skills and strategies. However, for students who require reading for academic purposes, additional training in study skills and strategies may be necessary to effectively read longer texts and books.

Al-Mansour (2014) emphasizes the significance of extensive reading in building students' self-assurance and aptitude in handling longer texts. It promotes the utilization of textual repetition. Findings from cognitive psychology have shaped our comprehension of how the brain operates

during reading, resulting in cognitive overload as only a portion of signals need to be processed for successful interpretation.

Kolb and Brunsmeyer (2017) also recognize redundancy as a crucial tool for comprehension, and extensive reading as a way to identify and manage redundant elements in texts. Al-Mansour (2014) also highlights the benefits of extensive reading in developing students' confidence and ability to tackle longer texts by utilizing textual redundancy. Our understanding of cognitive psychology has shown that the brain only needs to process a fraction of signals to interpret the message, leading to overload if all signals are processed.

Imrie (2007) implemented a delivery system library of graded readers in a Japan university, where students borrowed books to take home on a weekly or bi-weekly basis and kept a record of their reading. This approach resulted in a significant increase in the number of students reading graded readers and was found to be an effective way to foster learner autonomy.

The theory that reading more text can enhance a second language learner's understanding is backed by input-focused language acquisition theories, such as Krashen's reading hypothesis. This hypothesis asserts that comprehensible written input through reading is essential for acquiring various language skills like grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and others. Though this theory has faced criticism, providing sufficient input remains a fundamental principle in language education, and extensive reading is an effective method to create an input-rich learning environment. (Ellis, 2005).

According to Day and Bamford (1998) and Grabe (2009), extensive reading can have positive effects on learning autonomy and the emotional aspects of reading, such as attitude and motivation. Additionally, numerous studies have shown that second language learners derive pleasure and satisfaction from extensive reading. Despite these findings, there has been a lack of systematic research on the after effect of extensive reading approach. Reading attitude is defined as a learner's

emotional response to reading, which can either encourage or discourage them from engaging in reading activities (Yamashita J. 2004).

## **Methods and Materials**

**Research Design:** The research design of this study was qualitative, using semi-structured interviews to obtain descriptive results.

**Data Collection Tools:** Participants were randomly selected from second semester English language classes in the medicine faculty and English language teachers at Kabul University of Medical Sciences.

**Sampling Method:** The study aimed to explore the role of extensive reading in promoting student autonomy and their attitudes towards reading. Thematic analysis was used to categorize and analyze the data, which was reported thematically without bias.

**Sample Size:** This qualitative study included students in English language classes, and the English language teachers. Data analysis was based on the research questions. The study was conducted at Kabul University of Medical Sciences and followed APA citation rules. Data not related to the research questions were excluded.

## **Results**

The study aimed to gather opinions from English language learners and teachers about preparing oral book reports. The data was collected through notes taken by the interviewer and semi-structured interviews with first and second semester Medicine English language classes. The data was analyzed using Miles B, Huberman's (2009) pattern-coding framework. To ensure reliability, each researcher coded the transcriptions and agreed on the extracted codes. The researchers identified contextual themes by reading each participant's transcript and created a matrix of major themes under specific headings. Supporting quotes were listed and discussed under each heading.

The study was conducted using qualitative research methods and followed appropriate citation rules.

Themes and similar ideas from semi-structured interviews with second language learners and teachers in a medicine faculty were analyzed. The participants shared their perceptions on the effects of extensive reading reports on learner autonomy. Initially, the learners faced difficulties with preparing their oral book reports, but with guidance on identifying key points and supporting them, they overcame these challenges. This was also noted by the teachers, who observed that the learners became more autonomous and proficient in extensive reading. One student expressed feeling more comfortable and motivated to read additional books beyond the curriculum and course syllabus after being introduced to guidelines on how to read extensively.

The participants expressed a preference for extensive reading over written book reports, as it not only improved their reading, vocabulary, and speaking skills but also made them more reflective and active learners who could express and discuss their ideas with peers. The learners emphasized the importance of choosing their own books, which gave them a sense of responsibility and motivation for their learning. One participant mentioned that reading their favorite subjects and titles helped them gain extra information and enjoy the learning process. In addition, both teachers and learners agreed that extensive reading was beneficial for individual performance and motivation, as well as for becoming more reflective and autonomous learners.

According to the teacher interview, extensive reading has become more appealing to second language learners because it allows them to develop their autonomy and reflect on their learning by exchanging ideas with peers. The learners also emphasized the importance of selecting their own books, which gave them a sense of responsibility and motivation for their learning. One participant in the student interview noted that reading their favorite subjects and titles helped them gain additional information and enjoy the learning process while becoming a more autonomous learner.



The interview with the teachers revealed that extensive reading has become more appealing to second language learners as it allows them to develop their autonomy and reflect on their learning through exchanging ideas with peers. The learners emphasized the importance of choosing their own books, which gave them a sense of responsibility and motivation for their learning. The teacher agreed that allowing students to choose their own books had a positive effect on their learning autonomy and motivation as they were able to share the knowledge they gained and discuss ideas with classmates. The teachers and learners both believe that extensive reading is effective for improving learners' autonomy, speaking, and listening skills. Learners become effective readers and improve their comprehension through extensive reading, while also becoming better speakers and writers.

Based on the interview, the second language learners preferred reading individually as they were able to choose their own favorite books and take responsibility for their own learning. The teachers and learners agreed that extensive reading had a positive impact on learners' autonomy, speaking, and listening skills. Additionally, the teachers believed that extensive reading had long-term benefits for learners' vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. One teacher stated that through extensive reading, learners were able to study the usage and pronunciation of unfamiliar words in different contexts, which ultimately improved their pronunciation over time.

## **Discussion**

The interviews conducted with both students and instructors revealed that the most noteworthy outcome of utilizing the extensive reading approach was the consensus on its ability to increase motivation in learning, which is closely linked to learner independence. The result shows that extensive reading approach helps second language learners to become autonomous learners. The participants expressed their thoughts brilliantly. They stated that extensive reading is very helpful in all areas such as improving overall proficiency, vocabulary learning, speaking skills, writing skill and adding general knowledge. They also claimed that extensive reading assists them to comprehend the text easily. Extensive reading is an out-of-class activity, and its supportive approach helps students to improve overall skills in learning a second language.

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According to our interviews with both students and instructors, the extensive reading approach was found to have a significant impact on increasing motivation in learning, which is closely linked to learner independence. This aligns with Grabe's (2009) assertion that extensive reading positively impacts learning autonomy and effective domain of reading, such as attitude and motivation. In addition, Ellis (2005) highlights that extensive reading is an easy way to create an input-rich learning environment. The teachers we spoke with agreed that extensive reading is a simple way of learning that motivates students to enhance their learning autonomy. Imrie's (2007) study on the longitudinal project of extensive reading also suggests that extensive reading with graded readers is effective in fostering learning autonomy. The teachers in our research paper echoed this sentiment, stating that extensive reading has long-term effects on learners' reading achievement, particularly in vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, which further intensifies student learning autonomy.

Researchers reported that extensive reading causes joy and pleasure among second language learners. A student who interviewed shared his idea that reading his favorite books is joyful for him. Therefore, extensive reading increases learners' learning autonomy. This approach assists learners to learn language easily and construct learning autonomy. Besides it helps learners to become responsive readers. Learners are able to tap into their own motivation and take charge of their learning when they assume control and responsibility, which is a challenging feat for teachers to accomplish.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this research was to explore how extensive reading can promote learner autonomy in English language courses, and to understand the perceptions of both language learners and teachers towards this approach. The study conducted semi-structured interviews with selected students and English teachers, which revealed a strong positive impact of extensive reading on language learners' autonomy. Learners and teachers reported that extensive reading helped them take responsibility for their learning, improve their reading and speaking skills, and increase their motivation to learn the language. This study addresses a gap in the field of English language

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teaching and suggests that further research is needed to investigate the effects of extensive reading on language learning and autonomy. By promoting learner autonomy, extensive reading offers a promising approach for language teachers to increase their students' intrinsic motivation, which can be a difficult task.

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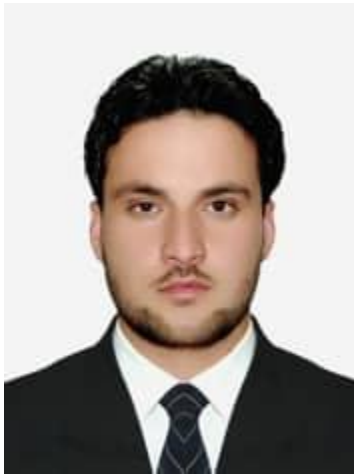
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**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 **23:4 April 2023**

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