

## The Role of Reading in Enhancing EFL Learners' Language Proficiency

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### ABSTRACT

Recent literature has shown a noticeable concern about the impact of reading as an effective skill in language learning. In fact, considerable EFL research has confirmed the existence of strong links between reading and language learning achievements. This study investigates the contribution of reading on EFL learners' language proficiency level, as it explores the language learning benefits of the reading skill and demonstrates its role in developing the communicative competence, writing skill, listening ability, vocabulary amount, and grammatical knowledge. Moreover, it explores the factors that affect students' reading skills and attempts to examine the difficulties and problems that cause reading deficits. The study also tries to illustrate the factors that help teachers offer a successful reading programme and tends to suggest the steps and the procedures necessary for providing an effective reading instruction.

To accomplish this research, a case study was conducted at the Department of English in Paitaxt Institute in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq-Erbil. The informants were first year EFL students and teachers. The research was accomplished in the form of a case study and used both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. Three main research instruments were used: Teachers' questionnaire, students' questionnaire, and classroom observation. The results obtained from the three instruments revealed that reading plays important roles in improving and enhancing language skills. Both classroom and extensive reading have abundant language learning benefits. Moreover, the results showed that the lack of motivation and language competence are the main obstacles that cause poor reading.



## **1. Introduction**

Reading has been viewed mainly as an interactive process between the reader and the text. In fact, the reader interacts dynamically with the text in order to elicit meaning. In other words, it is the skill of word recognition, phonemic decoding, and text comprehension. Meaning is constructed through a process which includes productive interactions which involves the reader's background knowledge, the information in the text, and the reading situation context. In other words, it is the process of creating meaning through the dynamic interaction between the reader's existing knowledge, the text information, the author, and the context of the reading situation. It includes the integration of various skills which lead to good text comprehension. In fact, readers implement reading strategies, pick out information from the text, and use their background knowledge in order to achieve their reading purpose. For advanced learners, reading should be taught at higher levels. Actually, students should know how to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words, understand the sequence of events, find out the main ideas, evaluate content, discover the author's purpose, and give personal judgments (Dutcher, 1990; Grabe & Stoller, 2002).

The complex nature of reading includes the correlations of language elements with meaning. The failure to recognize particular lexical items could lead to false understandings and wrong text interpretations. Therefore, students need to understand the relationships between words and the semantic patterns of lexical items. Moreover, in order to be efficient readers, learners should have a good understanding of the grammatical devices and the lexical patterns so as to grasp meaning in particular contexts. Furthermore, the process of reading includes students' ability to acquire the skills of gathering information from the lexical and the grammatical signals in order to detect the architecture of sentences and paragraphs and derive adequate comprehension of the text. Skilled readers are able to discover the link between the text and its author and are aware of the writer's attitudes, goals, and intentions. For example, the author could intend to describe an experience, inculcate an ideology, narrate a story, or to develop an argument or a scientific theory. Another relationship that concerns the reading process is that which exists between the reader and the text. Obviously, the reader's reaction to the text builds a



particular point of view and leads to conclusions and judgements about the text (Goodman,1970; Geoffrey et al., 1980).

As far as English Language Teaching, (ELT) is concerned, reading is one of the chief purposes of the teaching-learning process. Indeed, it is a valuable source of foreign language learning as it involves several tasks that provide students with various chances to improve their language knowledge and practice reading for language learning purposes. The reading instruction is a particular challenge to language teachers as they need to acquire a sound knowledge of theories, methods, and materials. In fact, they are required to apply appropriate and useful strategies in order to reach higher achievements. Certainly, high quality reading instruction involves an integration of many processes and approaches which are imposed by students' levels and interests. In this respect, researchers have argued that effective teaching of reading includes devoting sufficient time to the reading task in order to accomplish copious goals as time determines the choice of methodology and materials adopted (Nuttal, 2005; Mahmood,2011,2017).

### **1.1 Types of Reading**

Reading can be divided into two major types that may differ in terms of purpose, level, and length. These types are described in accordance to ELT.

#### **1.1.1 Extensive Reading**

Extensive reading has been interpreted in various ways throughout the literature. Some educators use this term to refer to the skimming and scanning activities, while some others relate it to the quantity of the reading material. Certainly, extensive reading has an essential role in language education. It represents practical choice for reading pedagogy in foreign language teaching. Research has revealed that extensive reading impacts oral production and enhances students' interactive skills when it entails dialogues, plays, idioms, and collocations. This helps learners make connections between spoken and written language. Moreover, this kind of reading enables students to develop their writing skills as they become more able to command the grammatical structures and the textual features of the written language in addition to its significant role in improving language proficiency and helps



learners develop comprehensive awareness of grammatical structures (Hafiz&Tudor,1989; Miriam et al., 2003).

Extensive reading varies according to students' motivation and attitudes. Indeed, it helps learners develop their reading comprehension abilities and achieve autonomy in reading. Moreover, they become able to practice specific strategies such as skimming and scanning. In general, extensive reading gives learners the opportunity to improve their language proficiency in comfortable environment and non-classroom contexts. In other words, learners are encouraged to increase their learning capabilities without the pressure of text analyses and reading activities which usually occur in the classroom academic studies. In this respect, Carrel and Eisterhold (1983: 567) state " Students select their own reading texts with respect to content, level of difficulty, and length". Actually, students feel the autonomy in choosing their favorite texts according to their wills and wants. In addition, extensive reading is a type of reading that helps learners to choose from a variety of non- academic texts such as fiction series, detective stories, and biographies. Certainly, students are given the opportunity to read texts at lower and higher levels. Through this process, they can develop a comprehensive database and increase their background knowledge as they are exposed to a variety of subjects.

### **1.1.2 Intensive Reading**

Intensive reading includes the deep understanding of words, sentences, and paragraphs. Its concern is for detailed comprehension of the text. The goal of this type of reading is to achieve full understanding of the arguments, the rhetorical arrangements, and the structural patterns of the text. Besides, it includes the understanding of the symbolic and emotional tones, the purposes and the attitudes of the writer, and the linguistic tools which are deployed in the text. Intensive reading is also called a creative process in which learners try to grasp every meaning including the arguments and details. Moreover, it involves the learning of complex grammatical structures and discourse analyses techniques which are considered as necessary elements for the whole reading process. In other words, intensive reading is used to refer to short texts that students can be asked to read, to find out the main ideas, and to build their understanding of the text (Paran,2003; Nuttal, 2005).



An intensive reading approach is crucial and important in the teaching of reading as an essential language skill. In fact, it includes an explicit instruction and deals with more detailed comprehension strategies. Its practice focuses on vocabulary knowledge, patterns of text organization, and texts genres and types. Instruction of intensive reading is necessary as it helps learners comprehend written texts, use and monitor reading strategies, and develop general literacy skills. Furthermore, intensive reading serves to deepen the cognitive process through practicing particular reading skills in effective and useful ways. Indeed, it provides the bases for explaining text structures and developing knowledge of vocabulary and idioms. It occurs generally through extracting short texts and articles and focusing on vocabulary, sentence structure, and cultural insights (Smith,2004; Mahmood, 2012,2014).

## **1.2 Reading as a Teaching-Learning Process**

One of the objectives of the reading instruction is to elicit meaning from text, improve comprehension, and develop reading proficiency. However, it is important to move to greater objectives in order to make a shift from learning to read to reading to learn. Schleppegrell and Bowman (1986), mention specific objectives of teaching reading including recognizing the main ideas of the text, detecting the writer's opinion, the ability to scan a text rapidly to catch specific information to understand and use a large amount of vocabulary in the subject area(p.30). According to Mahmood (2014), learners who read continuously and successfully are better able to develop their literacy, gather learning experiences, and prosper in their academic career. Definitely, reading can have several benefits in improving students' language learning as it affords access to a variety of authentic materials in the foreign language. It engages students in higher cognitive thinking levels, and builds their world knowledge (p.9). The basic objective of a reading programme is to enable students to" enjoy or, at least, feel comfortable with reading in the foreign language, and to read without help unfamiliar authentic texts, at appropriate speed, silently and with adequate understanding" (Nutall, 2005:31). Definitely, teachers can enhance their students' abilities to read and understand different types of texts through offering adequate reading instruction and efficient techniques that help them enhance independent reading.

### **1.3 Language proficiency**

Language proficiency is often referred to as the ability to use language skills successfully and accurately and to master its arts and functions. It is described in terms of language functions that are required in specific contexts (Hawkins, 2004). Gaining proficiency in language includes developing a huge linguistic repertoire by which students are able to discuss various cultural and contextual situations. In fact, learners need to vary their language use according to purpose and context using various strategies and genres. Sterns (1983: 341) defines proficiency as: “the actual performance of given individual learners or groups of learners”. Moreover, he argues that language proficiency includes the intuitive mastery of language including linguistic, cognitive, affective and sociocultural meanings in addition to the capacity to use the language with maximum attention to communication and minimum attention to forms.

Language Proficiency has been usually represented, in various studies, as a criterion of measuring the foreign language teaching and learning that is viewed from two perspectives; one relates to the different levels of proficiency, while the second perspective focuses on the identification of the constituents of language proficiency. As for the first perspective, it is concerned with the degrees of the actual or the required mastery of the foreign language, while the second is theoretically a complex and controversial perspective since it views proficiency as several separate components (Stern ,1983; Peregoy & Boyle,2008).

### **1.4 Language Proficiency Domains**

Language proficiency relates to learners’ ability to read, speak, write, and listen accurately in different contexts and situations. Further, it refers to an individual’s general knowledge of a given language including vocabulary, grammar, and discourse conventions which may be called upon during any instance of oral or written language use. Researchers, concerned with EFL contexts, have revealed that language proficiency involves all language areas including communicative competence which is composed of linguistic, strategic, pragmatic, intercultural, and discourse competence in addition to Listening, Reading, Grammatical, and Lexical Proficiency (Betty & Boris, 2004; Alderson, 2005).



## **2. Literature Review**

Throughout the previous years, linguists and educators have discussed the nature of reading and its impact on language proficiency with reference to various factors and phases. According to Goodman, Reading is a selective process which involves partial use of available minimal language cues selected from perceptual input on the basis of the reader's expectation. As this partial information is processed, tentative decisions are made to be "confirmed, rejected or refined as reading progresses" (1970: 260). Looking at reading as a process is different from looking at it as a product. Reading is viewed as a process that relates not only to what the reader has gained from the text, but also to how the reader can make particular text's interpretation. Experts in foreign language reading have contended against the point that texts are self-contained objects and have suggested a dynamic connection between the text and the reader. This view means that texts do not really involve meaning but they have potential for meaning. That is to say that meaning is produced in the course of reading as the reader draws both on linguistic and schematic knowledge (Wallace, 1992).

Smith (2004) was one of the first scholars who described reading as a process by charting the reader's path through a text rather than making decisions of comprehension based on reading outcomes. That is to say, as readers progress through a text, their choices of what to choose are confined by both features within the text itself and those external to it. Certainly, good readers, pick up information, make predictions, and select the information consistent with their expectations. Selectivity, ability and willingness to reflect are the key to effective reading. This selective approach of the reading process has pushed researchers to focus on reading strategies rather than skills. In fact, operative readers draw selectively on a number of reading strategies that are determined by purpose, texts genres and type, and context.

The complex nature of reading includes the correlations of language elements with meaning. The failure to recognize particular lexical items could lead to false understandings and wrong text interpretations. Therefore, students need to understand the relationships between words and the semantic patterns of lexical



items. Moreover, in order to be efficient readers, learners should have a good understanding of the grammatical devices and the lexical patterns so as to grasp meaning in particular contexts. Furthermore, the process of reading includes students' ability to acquire the skills of gathering information from the lexical and the grammatical signals in order to detect the architecture of sentences and paragraphs and derive adequate comprehension of the text(Hedge,2000).

Regarding ELT, most studies about the role of schematic knowledge in reading have focused on the reading methodology, the reading material, and the reading activities which help learners activate different types of prior knowledge. Some words and phrases in the text can activate the prior knowledge of some kind in the minds of readers. For example, readers can predict possible contents from the title by using both their knowledge of the world and the topic knowledge. There is a strong link between reading and thinking as readers become massively strategic and metacognitive when they read. Learner's use thinking as part of decision making in order to construct the meaning and reach a successful comprehension and understanding of the whole text (Griffith & Ruan, 2005; Pressley, 2009).

### **3. Research Aims**

This research aims at investigating the role of Reading in improving and enhancing EFL learners' language proficiency. In this respect, it tries to provide answers to the following research question:

- 1.What are the language learning benefits of reading?
- 2.What are the obstacles and the difficulties that cause student' poor reading?
3. How can reading be exploited to develop the English language skills?
4. How can effective reading instruction be provided to EFL students?

These research questions are explored on the bases of the following hypotheses:

1. Reading has ample learning benefits which leads to the development of language proficiency.
2. Lack of motivation, guidance, and language knowledge could be the main reasons of students' reading difficulties.





3. Reading can be used to develop the language skills through the use of multiple activities.
4. A successful reading instruction combines classroom intensive reading and extensive reading programs.

#### **4. Research Design and Methodology**

The study was conducted at Paitaxt Institute-Erbil in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, addressing first year students and teachers of the Department of English. It is accomplished in the form of a case study using both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. Three main research instruments were used: Teacher' questionnaire, student' questionnaire, and the classroom observation

##### **4.1 Instruments**

A combination of research methods and instruments has been used: two questionnaires and classroom observation.

###### **4.1.1 Students' Questionnaire**

This questionnaire was designed for first year EFL students at ELT departments. It includes three sections and the questions entailed aims at gathering students' answers, worries, and views concerning reading. The first section tends to elicit students' needs, preferences, and opinions about the classroom reading instruction. The second is designed to gain information about how students can learn the language from reading. It deals with the use of texts and reading passages by teachers of writing, oral comprehension, listening, grammar, and phonetics. As for the third section, it intends to collect data about the practice of extensive reading by EFL students and its importance in enhancing the use of language skills.

###### **4.1.2 Teachers' Questionnaire**

This questionnaire was designed for EFL teachers in different ELT departments. It aims to investigate teachers' methodologies, practices, attitudes, and problems concerning the teaching of Reading. The questions also deal with the role of classroom reading in improving the language proficiency and the usefulness of reading as a classroom strategy in teaching and developing vocabulary, grammar,



speaking, writing, and listening. As for the last part, it is concerned with the importance of extensive reading in developing students' language learning.

#### **4.1.3 Classroom Observation Procedures.**

During the observation sessions, the researcher tried to observe several elements related to reading. The first period was devoted to observe the reading instruction including teaching the reading skills and strategies. In fact, during the first three weeks, the researcher focused on both teachers and learner' practices and the reading obstacles in the classroom. The remaining sessions aimed to observe the reading activities that can improve other language skills including speaking, listening, writing, vocabulary, and grammar.

#### **4.2 Sample Population**

The study addressed two groups of participants: EFL teachers and EFL students. The first group of informants entails 8 EFL teachers who teach in ELT departments in different institutes and universities. As for the second group, it involved 40 first year students at the Department of English at Baitaxt Institute –Erbil in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, 25 of them were females and 15 males with ages between 18 and 22.

### **5.Data Analysis**

#### **5.1 Students' Questionnaire Analyses**

This part gives detailed analyses of the students' questionnaire and brings a brief summary of its results. The questions of the student' questionnaire is interpreted as follows:

##### **Question 1: Do you like the reading course? Why?**

According to student' responses to this question, 55% showed their liking of reading and focused on the role of reading in learning vocabulary. Some justified their answers by revealing the language learning benefits of the Reading course including improving pronunciation, developing writing, and acquiring the reading and comprehension strategies. Two students said that their preference for reading is due to having good teachers of reading. In contrast, 45% of the informants showed their dislike of reading. Some of them believe that the reading lectures are sometimes

complicated and boring due to their learning weaknesses and the teaching instruction methods. Some others said that they do not have the opportunities to practice real reading in the classroom and their teachers rarely raise the After-reading discussions. One student said that reading is always done at the individual level, and no group work strategies are introduced in the classroom.

**Question 2: Are you satisfied with the reading instruction and material in the classroom? Why?**

Learner' answers reveal that 60% of them are satisfied with the reading material. Some of them argue that they need to deal with simple short texts which are consistent with their level. Few students think that the material used in the classroom should provide real- life situations so as to learn a lot from it. Some informants think that the given texts and activities help them practice the reading strategies and acquire comprehension skills. On the other hand, 40% are reluctant to the type of instruction and texts used in the classroom reading. They say that their teachers use the same type of texts with the same type of activities and some topics are not interesting nor motivating. Traditional topics with complicated comprehension questions make the reading lesson boring. Students revealed their preference to texts like poems, newspaper articles, and factual texts that are taught through new strategies and methods instead of the classical ones.

**Question 3: Have you ever learnt or practiced the reading skills and strategies?**

The answers show that the majority of the students have learnt and practiced the reading skills and strategies. Indeed, 90% of them know about skimming, scanning, decoding, predicting, guessing meaning from context, and evaluating. Only 10% lack efficient knowledge teaching- learning as a result of some deficits.

**Question 4: What kind of reading difficulties do you generally face in the classroom?**

- |  |                       |
|--|-----------------------|
| A. Inadequate instruction and material knowledge | B. Lack of vocabulary |
| C. lack of reading strategies                    | D. Lack of practice   |



Students' answers to this question illustrate that the majority of them have vocabulary deficits. Surely, this hinders their comprehension and causes their reading failure. A considerable number of participants believe that the lack of practice is the cause of their reading problems. Insufficient time is another issue that should be considered. Besides, 20% of the students relate their failure to the reading material while 10% of them say that they are incapable of using reading strategies that help them reach successful reading.

**Question 5: Do you think that reading has positive effects on improving your language learning achievements? Why?**

Responses to this question display that all students are aware of the significant importance of reading in developing their language achievements. Even those who do not like reading, think that it is a tool to develop their general language knowledge because it exposes them to the foreign culture and develops their language skills. Some of them argued that reading leads them to better writing and expands their vocabulary bulk. Many of them believe that, through reading, they can learn grammar, improve their pronunciation when they read aloud, and acquire language figures and styles. One female student argued that reading helps her work on all language skills. Collected answers show that all students are aware of the importance of reading in developing their language achievements and its significant role in leading to better writing, correct grammar, accurate pronunciation and vocabulary knowledge.

**Question 6: What kinds of reading materials help you better improve your language knowledge?**

Results showed that 40% of the informants believe that short stories and novels are the most effective elements that develop their language learning. Students refer to the fact that literary books are distinctive from others in that they contain rhetoric expressions and figurative language. They also include stories that are full of delight and entertainment. Cultural books, on the other hand, are preferred by 30% of the participant as they entail factual information about people' cultures, traditions, and history. Some students preferred research papers as they provide information about different subjects and questions in addition to facts. 10% of the participants chose



newspapers and magazines because they provide information about current trends and events.

**Question 7: Do you think that extensive reading can develop your proficiency in the English language skills? Justify.**

Most students assert that extensive reading improves their skills in reading as it offers opportunities for a better comprehension and language competence. Strategies such as; decoding, inferring, predicting, and scanning can be best practiced through extensive reading. As for vocabulary and grammar, students believe that this kind of reading expose them to new vocabulary and teach them grammar in context. Regarding writing, extensive reading seems to contribute positively on students' performance as they gain ideas and knowledge of language styles.

**Question 8: Do your teachers of the following modules: (Written expression, grammar, listening, oral expression, phonetics) use reading as a teaching strategy?**

Answers to this question show that teachers of written expression do not include reading tasks for a writing course. As for teachers of oral expression, although they can use texts for reading in order to raise discussions about the author's opinion or the topic of the text, yet they don't. Likewise, teachers of grammar in contexts focus on language rules and regulations without connecting them to interactive contexts. Regarding courses of Listening and Pronunciation, reading is rarely used as a teaching technique.

## **6. Discussion of the Results**

Results obtained from the students' questionnaire indicate that most of first EFL students are aware of the significance of reading though they encounter certain difficulties in reading such as insufficient knowledge of topics, incompetent skills, demotivation and rare reading practice. The basic barrier that leads to inadequate reading is mainly the lack of vocabulary knowledge. Student' answers reveal that reading can contribute to their language improvement in various ways. They argue that reading provides them with opportunities to enhance their reading fluency and enrich their vocabulary knowledge. Through classroom reading, students practice using reading strategies, develop listening skills, and improve oral competence. The

results also show that most students find literary texts as the most entertaining reading material due to their educational benefits.

The analysis also indicates that first year EFL students rarely do extensive reading and this results in reading deficits. As for the reasons behind poor reading, they are limited to: lack of language knowledge, lack of motivation, absence of an extensive reading program, and the lack of teacher's help and guidance. Besides, free reading is not taken into account in grading and assessment procedures. It is worth mentioning that all students are well aware of the importance of this type of reading in their language learning.

## **7. Teachers' Questionnaire Analysis**

The questions of the teachers' questionnaire are interpreted as follows:

### **Question 1: Do you think that reading is an important skill for language teaching? Why?**

The analysis reveals that all the participant teachers believe that reading is an essential skill to language teaching. Some of them say that reading contributes positively to learners' linguistic and communicative competence. In fact, it brings learners closer to language and put them in a continuous exposure to it. Lots of participants view reading as a very useful means that improves other language learning skills. They believe that it enlarges vocabulary blog, helps avoid spelling mistakes, elicit new notions and ideas for writing, increases reading fluency, and enhances oral abilities. It allows learners to sound out letters, words, sentences, and paragraphs, and thus, it helps them ameliorate their pronunciation, spelling, and grammar. In other words, full language proficiency cannot be achieved without this skill.

### **Question 2: What techniques and strategies do you use in teaching reading?**

The techniques most teachers use were; Selecting entertaining and modern topics which meet students' interests, different types of texts, focusing on vocabulary, emphasizing reading comprehension skills and strategies, critical reading and reading activities related to assessment and evaluation. Most teachers say that they focus on the implementation of the reading strategies or skills such as scanning and skimming.



Text variation is another strategy which is shared by all the participants because students should be exposed to different types of texts. Few teachers focus on developing students' critical reading.

**Question 3: What kind of difficulties do teachers of reading face?**

Teachers referred to; Lack of Students' motivation, Text and topic selection, Students' lack of language and reading comprehension competence, and Students' vocabulary shortage.

**Question 4: How does reading relate to the following areas of language: vocabulary, grammar, speaking, writing, and listening?**

Almost all teachers shared the same responses which mention the link between classroom reading and language areas. Concerning vocabulary, it is clear that reading is the most effective means that exposes them to new words and expressions. For first year students, texts are rich of unfamiliar items and the use of dictionary while reading helps them a lot to learn about the multiple meanings and the roots of each difficult word. As for grammar, students can learn about the forms, uses, and functions of tenses, adjectives, adverbs, articles, prepositions, and all other elements in context. Writing is another skill which can be best developed through reading activities. Teachers believe that reading makes students minimize spelling mistakes and vocabulary is another gain for writing production. Besides, summarizing is considered as a post-reading activity that truly link reading to writing. Still, speaking and listening have received the same answers as teachers think that classroom reading-aloud activities are effective techniques to improve pronunciation and listening. Some participants revealed that post-reading discussions are important to develop the speaking skills.

**Question 5.A. Do you think that classroom reading can be used to teach and improve the language skills? B. If yes, what reading activities do you suggest to develop proficiency in following language areas: (writing, speaking, and listening)?**

All teachers believe that reading activities can be useful in developing the language skills. As for the activities that can be used to foster each skill, they were as follows:



- Writing: -Summarizing. -Gap filling. -Sentence and paragraph completion. - Topic-based editing. -Commenting in a written form.
- Speaking - Using texts in the form of dialogues, interviews, and plays. -The reading aloud procedure. -Discussing and debating the content. -Asking students opinions about the author. -Read and comment activities.
- Listening - Reading aloud -Pre-reading activities. -Colloquial and idiomatic texts. -Media-realized texts. -Reading-while-listening activities.

For developing speaking and communication skills, many teachers proposed the use of texts in the form of dialogues and plays. Still, discussing the authors' ideas in the classroom and asking students opinions can be useful to improve the oral abilities. To develop listening proficiency, the reading aloud procedure was suggested by all the informants. One teacher recommended the use of texts written in colloquial language and media-realized texts. Surely, these texts should be introduced in audio and printed forms in order to practice the listening- while- reading activities. As for writing, most of teachers see summarization activities as the best reading tasks to practice writing. One teacher recommended the use of sentence and paragraph completion according to the text meaning. Others suggested composition-writings, dialogue completion, and writing ends to stories as post-reading activities.

**Question 6.A: Do you advise your learners to do extensive reading? B: If yes, what type of material do you recommend?**

Regarding this question, all teachers advise their students to do extensive reading. Thus, one can say that teachers are aware of the importance of this type of reading. Indeed, extensive reading is the starting point to develop all language proficiency domains. With regard to the reading material, most of the informants say that they usually recommend short stories. Surely, short stories are rich of learning benefits as they involve language, culture, and knowledge. Unlike novels and books, short stories are considered as motivating reading material as they involve simple short plots and entertaining trends. Similarly, few teachers advise for magazines and newspapers despite the fact that they involve different language modes including politics, science, culture, and sport. Definitely, this would enrich student' knowledge in different domains and bring them to different vocabularies and expressions.



**Question 7: What are the language learning benefits of extensive reading?**

Teachers' answers to this question included the following:

- Installing reading habits & Improving reading speed and fluency
- Developing language literacy & Broadening vocabulary bulk
- Improving reading skills & Deductive learning of grammar
- Frequent exposure to vocabulary and grammar structures & developing critical thinking
- Exposing students to infinite language styles, and foreign culture
- Extension of background knowledge & developing communicative competence
- Lexical enrichment & Developing writing abilities

**Question 8: How can extensive reading be used to develop writing and communicative competence?**

Teachers' answers were as follows:

- Regarding Writing, the activities recommended were:
  - The use of portfolios & Realizing projects.
  - Asking learners to write summaries and comments about what they have read.
- Regarding Communicative Competence, the activities recommended were:
  - Selecting authentic materials for communicative purposes.
  - Asking learners to read about different topics and discussing them in the classroom.

**8. Discussion of the Results**

The results reveal that the reading instruction faces some obstacles which could lead to reading deficits. Teachers reports that motivation represents a great concern for them as the majority of students are not motivated to read. Teachers are not only required to teach the curriculum, but also to motivate their students to read by using different strategies and styles. Further, the lack of language knowledge is another problem for teachers of reading. Certainly, most of first year students lack the decoding skills, the syntactic knowledge, the reading strategies, and the vocabulary knowledge. These elements are necessary for a successful reading. According to teacher' answers, an effective reading instruction should involve classroom intensive reading and extensive reading. In the classroom, teachers focus on the reading skills



and strategies and provide practice and drills. For free reading, teachers can help their students select the reading material and organize their reading through a set of procedures.

Results also show that reading has a positive impact on developing language learning. In fact, it improves oral fluency, broadens general information, and expands vocabulary. Besides, it improves students' syntactic knowledge, develops reading skills, enhances writing abilities, increases motivation, enlarges world knowledge, and fosters language. For example, reading can affect oral language production. Students who are engaged in extensive reading of texts that entail dialogues or communicative situations are better able to improve their communicative proficiency. In fact, they become acquainted with idioms, collocations, and other basics of conversation. Exposing learners to texts that are similar to oral language, such as plays and comics, help them bridge the gap between written and spoken language, and thus, improve their oral language proficiency.

Moreover, reading can help students develop writing and reading proficiency. Indeed, there is a firm relationship between reading and writing. In fact, by reading extensively, learners become better able to master the textual and grammatical structures which they can later use in their own writing. Further, extensive reading helps students to improve their reading skills, enlarge their vocabulary storage, and develop general language proficiency. In addition, teachers view that classroom reading can be used a strategy to teach and improve the language skills. For example, texts that take the forms of dialogues could develop the communicative competence in different situations. Pre-reading and the reading aloud can be useful to develop listening. Post reading activities are useful to develop writing and speaking.

## **9. Classroom Observation Analysis**

Four observational weeks at different times were carried out. The observed elements and collected data were:

- Teachers and learners' practices
- The reading difficulties

### **9.1 Teachers and Learners' Practices**

In the classroom, the teacher emphasized different elements including definitions of the reading skills and strategies such as previewing, skimming, scanning, and guessing meaning from context. The teacher gave his students handouts including clarifications of these strategies. The following sessions were devoted to the practice of these strategies. Definitely, the teacher used texts with reading activities. In fact, she used different texts with different activities. The questions, the activities, and the instructions took the following forms:

- Scan and skim over the text to answer the following questions (scanning and skimming).
- Read carefully the sentences below and guess the appropriate meaning. (guessing).
- Give another word or phrase to replace the following words as they are used in the text. (scanning).
- Use the dictionary and give the appropriate synonyms to the following words.
- Supply the missing words.
- Read and supply the appropriate definitions to following words
- Read and answer the following questions using your own words.
- Read the text and select five verbs and five adjective that refer to the author's stands.
- Do you agree with authors views?
- Summarize the text.
- Imagine another end to the story.

These activities shows that the teacher intended to assess his students' abilities to practice the reading strategies. With respect to the development of the reading abilities, students can improve their comprehension through answering the comprehension questions as they are asked to read, skim, and scan the text many times. Indeed, these questions lead them to practice different reading strategies such as guessing and making inferences. In addition, most of the reading tasks involved activities that target comprehension skills, vocabulary knowledge, and writing abilities.

## **9.2 The Language learning Benefits of Classroom Reading**

When the students are asked to find synonyms, definitions, and antonyms for words or phrases from the text, they are learning vocabulary from reading. Skills of guessing and inferring are important for students to know how to give the appropriate meaning to the appropriate word in specific contexts. Certainly, all the classroom reading lectures were rich of new words and the learners were interested not only in the words given in the activity, but also the difficult words included in the text. In fact, most of them were underlining the unfamiliar words and using the dictionaries to get their meanings. Undoubtedly, this practice, which is imposed by the text, broadens learners' vocabulary storage. As for the reading-to-write activities, students were asked to answer comprehension questions in full sentences and using their own words. Sometimes, they were demanded to evaluate the authors' ideas and to give their own views in full paragraphs. Besides, most of the time, they were required to summarize the text or write essays about their own experiences which are related to the text's topic.

Definitely, these activities lead the students to practice writing. In fact, they get information from text, link it to their own knowledge, and produce their own piece of writing. Further, they learn a lot about capitalization, punctuation, spelling, vocabulary, and grammar while they practice the reading to-write activities. Seemingly, summarizing, commenting, and producing topicbound essays can be considered as effective reading activities that truly improve writing. Furthermore, the reading course has speaking gains as the students get inside the reading practice. Generally, the teacher asks some questions that needed oral answers and put some activities that required oral answers. Still, most of the time the teacher discussed with his learners the use of the reading strategies where the students got into oral interaction with their teacher and their peers.

Sometimes, the teacher raises topic-bound discussions and give time for oral questions and comments. As for the reading practice or activities that can be seen as useful in developing the listening skill, one can cite the teacher and the students' reading aloud. Surely, the reading aloud procedure makes the students listen attentively in order to get full comprehension. Besides, the teacher's pre-reading explanation can be also seen as more a listening practice than a reading activity.



Teacher-learner and learner-learner interaction are other elements which are subsumed in the reading sessions and which lead to the development of listening.

In short, one can say that the reading aloud strategy can develop significantly student' listening abilities. Moreover, Grammar is learned deductively from the reading lectures as the students are generally exposed to infinite grammar structures. When they read, they develop a learning curiosity in order to discover how words are linked, how nouns and pronouns function, how tenses are used, how adjectives are placed, and many other grammatical trends. Indeed, the reading sessions are an opportunity for them to see and detect the grammar rules and functions in different contexts.

## **10. Discussion and Interpretation of the Main Results**

The results obtained from the two questionnaires and the classroom observation sessions lead us to say that reading is an important skill that have countless advantages as it incorporates the various language domains and skills. Both teachers and learners believe that reading provides constant language exposure and can be considered as a source of inspiration. Actually, the students and the teachers' questionnaires provide significant data about reading and its role in improving students' language learning. In fact, learners showed different preferences and needs with respect to the reading instruction and the reading material Concerning the difficulties that lead to major reading problems, the classroom observation and the questionnaires' data reveal that vocabulary shortage is the main obstacles that faces first year students.

The evidence gathered from the research instruments illustrate that teacher of reading deal with first year students who lack grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, listening, reading and writing skills. Certainly, these obstacles cause demotivation and reluctance to reading. Therefore, both teachers and learners should supply extra efforts to overcome these problems by practice. Teachers should set assessment plans so as to offer constructive feedback. Furthermore, text' selection and instructional methods are other challenges that face teachers. Surely, the text' types and contents play important roles in increasing student' motivation and reaching higher learning outcomes. The teachers of reading should clarify the reading skills, provide sufficient practice, apply the suitable teaching methods, and select the



appropriate texts. Moreover, they should be facilitators and motivators in the classroom. Concerning the student' attitudes towards the reading instruction, the results indicate that most of them know about the reading skills and strategies. Surely, teachers of study skills deal with these skills in theoretical and practical ways.

As for learner' preferences, the data show that the majority prefer literary texts, and especially narratives and modern short stories. Indeed, this type of reading material provides them with both language and culture. Undoubtedly, they can be seen as a source of motivation as they include both excitement and entertainment. However, teachers should use different text' types and genres including scientific texts, factual reports, newspaper and magazine articles, poems, and dialogues in order to satisfy the learners' different gusts. This strategy would offer the students different language styles, different language knowledge, and different vocabularies.

The evidences obtained from the three research instruments induce that classroom reading has positive effects on students' language learning. In fact, the reading lectures provide them with parallel language gains in the areas of speaking, listening, writing, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. For example, the reading course offer infinite opportunities for students to learn about vocabulary. Indeed, different text' types provide different vocabularies. Certainly, first year students need to increase their vocabulary package and reading seems to be the most effective way to do so. When the learners are asked to find synonyms and antonyms, they need to make use of the decoding, guessing and inferring reading skills. These strategies help develop their abilities to give the appropriate definitions according to the context.

During the while reading phase, many teachers ask their learners to underline the unfamiliar words and check their meanings in the dictionary in order to build up adequate text's comprehension. Surely, this reading activity increases student' vocabulary volume. Further, the reading aloud procedure can serve to develop listening and pronunciation while guessing and inferring lead to develop vocabulary and cognitive thinking. Certainly, the pre-reading activities or the post reading discussions are other element that improve student' listening abilities. Still, reading proficiency is improved through silent and loud reading followed by comprehension questions that require the application of the substantial reading skills including predicting, scanning, skimming, and evaluating. Furthermore, the speaking skill is



involved in the reading course at different parts. Actually, the speaking proficiency can be increased through the oral communication that take place between the teacher and the learners. The post reading discussions about different text' topics provide multiple communicative contexts where the students develop their oral competence when they are engaged in such activities.

In addition, writing activities are unavoidably involved in all reading activities. In fact, the students are generally asked to answer the question in written forms using full sentences and paragraphs. This practice requires and develops their writing skills. Besides, when the students are asked to read and summarize the text or to write an essay about the content, they are, in fact, practicing writing. Therefore, one can say that the classroom reading lectures impact positively the writing skills as the learners are demanded to write answers, give opinions, paraphrase author' ideas, and summarize the texts. Certainly, this would lead them to learn about spelling and word formation, coherence and cohesion, the use of topic sentences and paragraphs, and the use punctuation. Furthermore, grammar is learnt in many indirect ways through the classroom reading. Indeed, the texts entail unlimited grammar structures which are used in different contexts. In other words, the reading passages provide contextualized grammar rules and demonstrate the different functions of these rules with reference to meaning.

As for the use of reading as a technique in teaching and developing learner' proficiency in the other skills, the results reveal that most teachers of written expression, listening, phonetics, grammar, and speaking do not use constantly the reading-to-learn strategy. However, all the participating teachers argue that the use of texts is effective for the development of language proficiency domains. They advise but do not oblige their students to read. In this respect, student' unwillingness to reading is the result of the absence of an academic extensive reading program in their learning curriculum. Essentially, the findings of this study meet the presented hypotheses and provide sufficient answers to research questions.

Regarding the obstacles and difficulties that cause reading deficits, the results meet the hypothesis which indicates that the lack of language knowledge, guidance, and motivation are the most important factors that lead to poor reading achievement. Further, they answer the research questions about the language learning benefits of



both intensive and extensive reading. In fact, they consent the hypothesis which denotes that reading can play significant roles in improving student' language proficiency. Therefore, a successful reading instruction should involve both effective classroom reading and extensive reading programs. In fact, the hypothesis is endorsed by the fact that EFL learners and teachers assent the idea of integrating an Extensive Reading program in the learning syllabus. Indeed, the results match the research questions regarding the language learning gains of the reading and consent our hypothesis which indicates that reading offers multiple opportunities of the language use and practice.

Besides, the findings provide answers to the research questions concerning how intensive reading can be used as a teaching technique to teach and improve the language skills. These results prove the hypothesis which suggests the effectiveness of this strategy in developing student' language proficiency involving listening, communication, writing, vocabulary, grammar. In fact, multiple reading tasks and activities can be used according to the purpose of the instructor. This evidence proves the hypothesis which states that intensive reading is a useful technique that can be used by teachers to enhance the language skills.

## **11. Conclusion**

It is concluded that first year EFL students face a variety of difficulties which could hamper their reading and lead to poor achievements. The main obstacles are the lack of motivation and the lack of language knowledge including slow decoding of scripts, comprehension problems, topic unfamiliarity, insufficient vocabulary storage, and diminutive syntactic knowledge. Besides, some struggling learners devote much of their time to decoding and face major problems in monitoring their comprehension. These findings are convenient with the hypothesis which confirms that the lack of motivation and language competence are major obstacles that cause reading deficits. Therefore, the reading instruction should include effective techniques and plans in order to overcome student' weaknesses and obstacles. In fact, we recommend that a sound reading instruction should be based on two main brands: classroom reading and extensive reading.





As for the classroom instruction, teachers should deal with the reading strategies such as skimming, scanning, inferring, predicting, monitoring, annotation, and evaluating. For this reason, explicit strategy instruction can be given to learners where they can understand which strategy they use and why and how it can be applied. Moreover, teachers need to carefully select their reading material in order to respond to student' interests and increase their motivation. They should use simple authentic materials that help improve student' reading fluency and help them learn and practice the reading skills. Still, useful classroom reading activities should be included in any course. The focus in the classroom instruction should be on the improvement of comprehension abilities including the lower and the higher decoding skills, vocabulary emphasis, skill and strategy practice, and fluency building. Further, students should learn how to assess the content and to detect the author's attitudes and reasons. In other words, teaching critical reading is an important part of the reading instruction.

Regarding the use of reading as a means to develop the language skills, the findings reveal that a reading-based instruction can be useful for improving proficiency in speaking, writing, and even listening. According to the teacher' answers, texts are useful in the classroom for teaching all skills. For example, reading aloud can be useful for improving listening, summarizing is effective to develop writing, inferring is important to gain unfamiliar vocabulary, and debating content is useful to boost speaking. These results confirm the pre-set hypothesis of classroom reading as an effective tool used for teaching language skills through the use of multiple activities.

It also asserts that reading has abundant learning benefits and leads to the development of the English language proficiency in addition to the inclusion of both classroom reading and extensive reading within the reading instruction. Indeed, a successful instruction should be carefully planned and should include these two major types of reading as being central to language learning through helping learners gain vocabulary, recognize grammar use, acquire ideas, broaden world knowledge, improve reading fluency, enhance writing, and develop communicative competence. Therefore, teachers should provide adequate reading instruction and make every possible effort to motivate their students to be good readers.



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## رۆلی خویندنه وه له باشکردنی پاراوی زمان لای فیرخووانی زمانی ئینگلیزی وهک زمانی بیانی

پوخته:

له م ماوانه ی دواپیدا گرنگییه کی زۆر خراوه ته سه ر رۆلی خویندنه وه وهک هۆکاریکی به سوود له گه شه پیدانی فیربوونی زماندا. له راستیدا، ژماره یه کی به رچاو له توپژینه وه کانی بواری زمانی ئینگلیزی وهک زمانی بیانی جه خت له هه بوونی په یوه ندیبه کی به هیز له نیوان خویندنه وه و ده سته و تنه کانی فیربوونی زمان ده که نه وه. ئەم توپژینه وه یه، باس له یارمه تی خویندنه وه، له سه ر ئاستی پاراوی زمان

لای فیروخوانی زمانی ئینگلیزی وهک زمانی بیانی دهکات ،ئهویش به ئاشکراکردنی سوودهکانی فیروبوونی زمان له پئی کارامهیی خویندنهوهوه، ههروهه به پیشاندانی رۆلی خویندنهوه له گهشهپیدانی توانای ئاخوتن (گفتوگۆکردن)، کارامهیی نووسین، توانای گوئی گرتن، پری ووشهکان و زانیاری ریژمانی. زیاترلهوههش، توپژینهوههکه ههلهدهستیت به ئاشکراکردنی ئه و فاکتهرانهی کاریگهری دهخهه سه ر خویندنهوهی قوتابیان و ههول دههات ئه و زهحههتی و کیشانه بدۆزیتنهوه که دهبنه هۆی لاوازی خویندنهوه. ههروهه، توپژینهوههکه ههلهدهستیت به روونکردنهوهی ئه و کیشانهی یارمهتی مامۆستایان دههه بۆ پیشکهشکردنی پرۆگرامی خویندنهوهی سه رکههوتوو، وه به و ئاراستهیه دهروات پیشیاری ههنگاو و ریککارییه پیویستهکان بکات بۆ دابینکردنی فیروکردنی خویندنهوهیهکی کاریگه ر. بۆ ئه نجامدانی ئه م توپژینهوهیه، که یس ستهدی (=لیکۆلینهوه له دۆخیک) ئه نجامدراوه له به شی زمانی ئینگلیزی په یمانگای پایتهخت له هه ریمی کوردستان- هه ولێر. به شداربووان بریتین له قوتابیانی قۆناغی یه که م و مامۆستایانی زمانی ئینگلیزی وهک زمانی بیانی. توپژینهوههکه به شیوهی که یس ستهدی ئه نجامدراوه و هه ردوو شیوازی توپژینهوهی پری و جۆری به کارهاتوو. ئه و سئ ئامرازه سه رهکییهی له توپژینهوههکه دا به کارهاتوو بریتین له: راپرسی مامۆستایان، راپرسی قوتابیان له گه ل چاودپیریکردنی پۆل. ئه و ده رئه نجامانهی له دوو راپرسییه که و چاودپیریکردنی پۆله که وه به ده ست هاتوو ئاشکرای ده که ن، که خویندنهوه رۆلی گرنه ده بینیت له به هیزکردن و باشکردنی کارامه ییهکانی زمان. هه ردوو جۆر له خویندنهوهی ناو پۆل و خویندنهوهی چر سوودی زۆریان هه یه بۆ فیروبوونی زمان. زیاتر له وههش، ئه نجامهکان ئه وه یان نیشانداوه، که نه بوونی هاندان و لاوازی توانای زمان سه رهکیتترین رێگرن، به وهی ده بنه هۆی دروستبوونی خویندنهوهی خراپ. ئه مهش ئالنگاری و داواکاری زۆر ده خاته سه ر شانی مامۆستایان، چونکه داواکراوه لیبان ستراتیژهکانی پۆلی کاریگه ر به کاربه یین و هه لسن به دابینکردنی فیروکردنی خویندنهوهی پیویست بۆ قوتابیانی قۆناغی یه که می زمانی ئینگلیزی، ههروهه هه لسن به دانانی چه ندان پرۆگرامی خویندنهوهی چر.

## دور القراءة في تعزيز كفاءة اللغة لمتعلمي اللغة الانكليزية كلغة أجنبية

### المخلص

في الأونة الأخيرة ، كان هناك إهتمام لافت بشأن دور القراءة كوسيلة مفيدة لتطوير تعلم اللغة. في الواقع ، أكدت أبحاث كبيرة حول اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية وجود روابط قوية بين إنجازات القراءة وتعلم اللغة. تبحث هذه الدراسة في مساهمة القراءة في مستوى إتقان اللغة لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية ، حيث تستكشف

فوائد تعلم اللغة لمهارة القراءة وتوضح دورها في تطوير الكفاءة التواصلية ، ومهارات الكتابة ، والقدرة على الاستماع ، ومقدار المفردات ، والمعرفة النحوية. علاوة على ذلك ، يستكشف العوامل التي تؤثر على قراءة الطلاب ويحاول فحص الصعوبات والمشكلات التي تسبب عجز القراءة. تحاول الدراسة أيضاً توضيح المشكلات التي تساعد المعلمين على تقديم برنامج قراءة ناجح وتميل إلى اقتراح الخطوات والإجراءات اللازمة لتوفير تعليم قراءة فعال.

لإنجاز هذا البحث ، تم إجراء دراسة حالة في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية في معهد بايته خت في إقليم كردستان - أربيل. المشاركون هم طلاب السنة الأولى ومعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. تم إجراء البحث في شكل دراسة حالة واستخدمت منهجي البحث النوعي والكمي. تم استخدام ثلاث أدوات بحث رئيسية: استبيان المعلمين ، استبيان الطلاب ، ومراقبة الفصل الدراسي. أظهرت النتائج التي تم الحصول عليها من الاستبيانين والملاحظة الصفية أن القراءة تلعب أدواراً مهمة في تحسين المهارات اللغوية وتعزيزها. يتمتع كل من الفصل الدراسي والقراءة المكثفة بفوائد وفيرة في تعلم اللغة. كما أظهرت النتائج أن الانتقال إلى الحافز والكفاءة اللغوية من أهم المعوقات التي تؤدي إلى ضعف القراءة. وقد أدى ذلك إلى وضع تحديات ومطالب كبيرة على المعلمين حيث يتعين عليهم استخدام استراتيجيات الفصل الدراسي الفعالة ، وتوفير تعليم القراءة الكافي لطلاب السنة الأولى من اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية ، ووضع برامج قراءة مكثفة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: القراءة ، إتقان اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية ، التدريس القائم على القراءة