The Effectiveness of Extensive Reading in Improving EFL Academic Writing

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Abstract

This study attempts to answer the question of to what extend extensive reading (ER) could enhance the English of Foreign language (EFL) learners' academic writing. This quasi-experimental study compared two English classes in terms of academic writing improvement after six weeks. This sample of the study was 64 students in a private university in the academic years of 2020-2021. In a traditional English class, thestudents primarily focused on grammar instruction and writing practice. On the other hand, the students in an ER class engaged in an ER program in and out of class involving the reading-related writing practice. The pretest and posttest were administered to measure students' writing improvement. The results indicate that students in ER group with more exposure to comprehensible input show statistically significant progress on their posttest, whereas students in a traditional class show a moderate increase.

Keywords: *Effectiveness*, *Extensive Reading, Academic Writing, EFL Learner*

1. INTRODUCTION

Extensive Reading (ER) refers to the various terms, including reading for pleasure, self-chosen reading, independent reading, and wide reading (Ng, et al. 2019). The purpose of ER program is to increase learners' target language exposure by allowing them to read wide verities of accessible and interesting materials. One week one book is considered extensive enough to support language improvement and buildthe reading habits (Day & Bamford, 1998). ER offers linguistic benefits and helps students to acquire a broad understanding of the world, which is important for relating

to and communicating with the text and other people. (Renandya, 2016). In 2015, Day and Barformd conducted a survey that revealed five ER principles that were widely used in EFL classrooms. The essence of the principles is that reading material is easy, there is a wide variety of reading material on a wide range of topics, learners decide their own reading and read as much as they want, and reading is silent and individual. The principles make ER valid as an approach to learning to read.

There have been numerous studies reported the existing evidence of the language development utilizing ER from reading comprehension (Ruzi, 2019; Hidayat & Rohati, 2020), vocabulary and spelling (Soltani, 2011, Liu & Zang, 2018)), and learners' positive attitude towards learning (Ferdila, 2014). Nevertheless, in an EFL context, onlya few studies have looked into the relationship betwee ER and writing improvement. Inone of them, ER was proven to effectively enhance the eleventh-graders' writing ability of explanation text in English teaching and learning process (Aida & Widiyati, 2020). Inline with the research results, EFL teachers also stated that Junior High School students' pronunciation and writing ability have better developed after the ER program wascarried out (Sari, et al. 2019).

While ER has been preferred in primary and secondary levels, the studies of ER approach in higher education, especially in academic writing, are still under-explored. Some researchers have suggested applying ER to higher educational settings, claiming that the light reading could act as a bridge to help learners for acquiring academic language competence (Krashen, 2004). Reading a self-chosen material fixed to learners'' linguistic skills may assist them in preparing to deal with denser and more challenging texts. Likewise, Grabe (2001) stated that effectiveness of ER in advanced academic English settings should be explored further. Thus, this research aims to find towhat extent university students practice the ER program to improve their academic writing.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Academic Writing

Writing is an ability that is useful in a variety of circumstances. Academic writing, on the other hand, does a lot of things that personal writing does not really: it has its own system of rules and procedures. To present ideas and ensure that author citations in the literature follow ideas, these rules and practices can be structured into a formal orderor structure. Academic writing differs from personal writing because it examines the fundamental theories and causes that influence processes and practices in daily life, as well as potential explanations for these phenomena. Academic writing has a distinct "tone" and follows standardized punctuation, grammar, and spelling

According to Oshima & Hogue (2006), academic writing is the type of writing needed in college or university, as the name suggests. It is distinct from other forms of writing such as personal, literary, journalistic, and business writing. Its differences can

be explained in part by its particular audience, tone, and purpose. Academic writing considers a specific audience such as professors or instructors. The tones and styles of the writing are also considered in academic writing. It is discovered by choice of words and grammatical structures and even the length of sentences. The tone of a piece of writing can be, for example, serious, amusing, personal, or impersonal. Academic writing is formal and serious in tone. Finally, the purpose of a piece of writing determines its organizational pattern. It means that each types of writing in term of the purpose has its own structure or organization.

Academic writing is considered impersonal. While the viewpoint of author might be stated, arguments are developed with evidence from books and experiments. Academic writing often uses the passive voice, uncontracted verb forms, subordination rather, impersonal, and formal language. Based on the purpose, there are four types of academic writing: descriptive, expository, narrative, argumentative, or persuasive. Descriptive writing gives a clear and vivid description of something or an event. Explaining or interpreting something is the aim of expository writing. Narrative writing offers an account, telling of something, or detailing something persuasive writing uses persuasive or rational arguments to persuade the reader to consider the author's ideas.

2.2 Extensive Reading

Day and Bamford (2002) established ten concepts that are commonly regarded as core components of an ER program and motivate teachers to implement them. The ten principles were easy reading material, a wide range availability of topic and reading, self-chosen material, plenty of time to read, pleasure reading to get information, self- rewarded reading, a quick reading, silent and individual reading, students-oriented, and the teacher models being a reader.

ER is a procedure of language teaching where students have to read large quantities of materials for general understanding, and the primary goal of it is obtaining pleasure form the text. ER is an excellent strategy to enhance reading proficiency and build linguistics competence, such as reading skills, vocabulary, writing, and spelling skills (Day & Bamford, 2004). It is supported by Nuttal (2005), stated that improving students' speaking ability by integrating ER in class is the most effective solution. Learning in a favorable climate makes it easier for students to read better. In ER classrooms, students get a lot of opportunities to read simple texts. Thus they can read smoothly and pleasurably (Waringin & Takashi, 2000). There have been many studies demonstrating the effectiveness of ER. It also supports the use of ER both in ESL and EFL contexts. (Krashen, 1993) stated that ER promotes students' confidence and motivation and develops students' positive attitude in reading and studying English. Anandari and Suwandari (2019) reported their study that ER activities supported the success of Gerakan Literasi Nasional (GLN) through the implementation of extensive reading programs both within and outside the curriculum at Indonesian school. In

addition, a study by Aida and Widiyati in 2020 revealed that ER was considered to be effective to increase the quality of students' writing ability of explanation text. This is in line with Day and Bamford (2004) mentioned that one of the benefits of ER identified by is improving writing skills because ER increases English vocabulary and discourse exposure.

3. METHOD

This research is a quasi-experimental study with pretest – posttest design in which the entire classrooms are chosen for treatments, not the individuals (Gay, Mills, and Airasian, 2009). The design used in this research was a posttest only design with two intact classrooms. The posttest scores from both of the groups were compared to determine the ER approach's effectiveness and determine students' perception of the teaching approach.

This study's participants are 68 students in a private university in their academic years of 2020-2021. They are taking an English class as a general subject. The students consist of two classes, one class consists of 34, and the other class consists of 34 studen The writer took the intact classes (English A and English B) while English A was an experimental group and English B as a control group.

In this research the instrument used was a writing test. The timed writing task required the subjects to write an essay based on the given topics. The subjects were free to create contexts that were relevant to the topic. The topics were taken from ETS (Educational Testing Service) computer-based writing topics, which could also be found in http://www.ets.org. Within 30 minutes, the subjects were free to plan, write 300 – 350 words, and revise their writing. They should choose one topic out of four available topics.

This study applied the procedures in order; they re pretest, treatment, and posttest. Pre essay test was administered in both groups, the control and experimental one. It aimed to measuring the academic writing quality in these two groups. Students inboth classes attended a six-week writing class. The only different treatment between the ER comparing to traditional class is in the inclusion ER program. The ER class students freely picked one book on the ER library website, www.erfoundation.org, which suited their interests and reading ability. The students were assigned to report their reading weekly in the form of an essay summarizing or describing their favorite characters or parts of the story. While in the traditional class, the students practiced intensive reading by doing exercises related to the text, such as multiple-choice questions and open-endedquestions to evaluate their reading comprehension. After a six-week treatment, the post essay test was conducted to examine the improvement made by both ER nd traditional classes. Then, to analyze the data collected, the writing posttest scores between the control and experimental class were compared using an independent t-test. The calculation of the independent t-test was supported by SPPS 18 to find out whether the

writing scores between control and experimental groups are significantly different. The paired samples t-test was also conducted in each group to see the significant difference from pretest and posttest in both different groups.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Statistical Analysis between Pretest and Posttest in Control Group

This statistical analysis aims to examine whether pretest and posttest of writing are significantly increased in control where learning writing without ER approach.

Table 1: Statistical analysis between pretest and posttest in control group

Writing Scores	Pretest		Posttest		t(33)	p	Cohen's D
	M	SD	M	SD			
Control Group	71.41	2.62	75.97	2.32	-14.82	0.000	0.06

The results present that the significant difference between students' writing scores from pretest (M = 71.41, SD = 2.62) to posttest (M = 75.97, SD = 2.32), t (33) = -14.82, p <0005 (two-tailed). The mean increase in writing scores was -10.35 with 95 % confidence interval ranging from -11.77 to -9.91. The eta squared statistic (.06) indicated a moderate effect size.

An analytic scoring rubric of ESL Composition Profile developed by Jacob et al (1981) was applied to show the quality of five writing aspects: content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanic. The results showed an increase in each aspect of students' composition in the traditional class. The most significant gain made by traditional class was in their scores for content (8.97), followed by language use (8.63) and vocabulary (7.24). The gains score for organization and mechanics are considered moderate. The following figure presents the gain made by students in control group.

Figure 1: The Gain Scores of Pretest and Posttest in Control Group

4.2. Statistical Analysis between Pretest and Posttest on Experimental Group

This step determines whether there is a significant different between pretest and posttest in experimental group. The experimental group is a class with the ER approach. The table of result of SPPS output can be seen as follows:

Table 2: Statistical analysis between pretest and posttest in experimental group

Writing Scores	Pretest		Posttest		t(33)	P	Cohen's D
	M	SD	M	SD			
Experimental Group	72.16	2.78	81.76	2.82	-24.03	0.000	0.94

A paired-simple t-test was conducted to evaluate the impact of ER approach on students' scores of academic writing. The results show that there was a statistically increase in students' writing scores from pretest (M = 72.16, SD = 2.78) to posttest (M = 81.76, SD = 2.82), t (33) = -24.03, p < .0005 (two-tailed). The mean increase in writing scores was 4.56 with 95% confidence interval ranging from -4.94 to -4.17. The eta squared statistic (.94) indicated a large effect size.

Additionally, the results of analytical scores of students writing in five aspects, namely content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanic present an increase in each aspect of the students' writing. The most significant gain made by the ER class was in their scores for content (13.87) and organization (13.58), with smaller gains for vocabulary (10.35) language use (8.64) followed by mechanic (4.7%).

Figure 1: The Gain Scores of Pretest and Posttest in Experimental Group

4.3 Statistical Analysis between Posttest in Control and Experimental Group

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the writing scores for experimental and control group. The results can be seen in the table below.

Table 3: Statistical Analysis between Posttest in Control and Experimental Group

Writing Scores	Control Group		Experimental Group		t(66)	p	Cohen's D
	M	SD	M	SD			
Posttest	75.97	2.32	81.76	2.82	20.62	0.000	0.83

There was a significant different in writing scores for control group (M = 75.97, SD = 2.32) and experimental group (M = 81.76, SD = 2.82; t (68) = 20.62, p = .000, two tailed). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = 11.32, 95% Confidence Interval: 10.2 to 12.4) was large (eta squared = .83).

5. DISCUSSION

This study found that the ER approach is more effective than the traditional approach in learning writing. It supports the study stating that extensive reading contributes to English competency (Delfi & Yamat, 2017). In this study, two professional EFL teachers assessed analytically 132 essays from 68 students' pre and posttests. The teachers used an analytic scoring rubric developed by Jacob et al (1981). The rubrics break down essays into five aspects of writing: content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanic. A paired sample t-test with the analytical scores of pre and post essay tests was conducted twice to examine ER and traditional approach effectiveness. The result showed that there was a significant difference between pretest and posttest in both classes. However, the effect size in the ER classwas larger, indicating that the gain in the mean score made by the ER class surpassed the traditional class. An independent-samples t-test and the analytical posttest essay scores indicated a significant difference between the ER and the traditional classes. It showed that the students who participated in the ER program had better performance on their post-essay test. In addition, the other studies also presented that ER is an effective teaching technique to improve other types of writing, such as writing explanation text (Aida & Widiyati, 2020), narrative writing text (Kirin, 2010) and descriptive writing (Septiana, 2018).

The analytical scores presented that the ER class performed better than the traditional class in term of five writing aspects. The greatest gain made by the ER class was in their scores for content (13.87) and organization (13.58), with smaller gains for vocabulary (10.35) and language use (8.64). The traditional class showed that a slightly similar pattern but with similar gains. The most significant gain made by traditional class was in their scores for content (8.97), followed by language use (8.63) andvocabulary (7.24). Both classes increased the least in mechanics. Based on each sub- skill's gained scores in writing, students in the ER and traditional classes made significant improvements in content and organization. This is in line with the primary purpose of learning writing to help students improve in these two aspects. However, the ER class made more progress than the traditional class. It is challenging to pinpoint which features of ER in generating this considerable improvement. Nevertheless, astudy conducted by Mikeladze (2014) revealed that ER assisted their students to produce sentences that are semantically accepted, it indicated that in this present study, ER might have aided the students to use appropriate words and expressions that are in

line with context. Thus they were able to produce more natural-sounding sentences, avoid ambiguity, and present successful communication.

In term of the gain in language use showed by ER class, there were some students who made basic language errors, such as articles, prepositions, tenses, subject-verb agreement, were frequently made by the students in their pre essay test. This error led to the difficulty to convey the ideas expressed in the essays. Tsang (1996) argued that students exposed to comprehensible language input through constant reading helped them learn new grammatical knowledge. In the sense of greater gain in vocabulary made by ER class, ER was said to be means which enabled the students to acquire their vocabulary knowledge both the form and the meaning. This is in line with the study's findings conducted by Pigada and Schmitt (2006), which revealed that ER supports grammatical knowledge of words. Therefore, constant exposure to comprehensible input and the writing practice made ER possible to contribute the gains across all aspects of writing.

While in the ER class, students were suggested to read accessible books and then write short responses to summarize and describe. As a result, students were able to practice their academic writing skills. Additionally, reading texts at a comfortable level, highlighted by ER, seems to bring a positive effect on the students' attitude towards learning writing. This contrasts with their experience while reading academic text which complex in terms of both linguistic components and content. During the ER program, the students did not have to struggle to comprehend the texts as the books matched their linguistic level. The uncomplicated comprehension directed the students to the experience of writing practice which is less demanding and more pleasurable, thus improving the students' writing ability. Aligning with this issue, a pedagogical implication emerging from this study is that integrating ER into writing classroom can construct writing opportunities that further facilitate EFL writing improvement. This current study revealed that incorporated reading and writing activities could improve one another. The constant practice of combining reading and writing can take a fundamental role in building a basis for students' academic literacy. In this respect, Grabe and Zhang (2013) stated that one of the difficulties students face in producing academic written work is that they lack experience in combining reading and writing skills. Moreover, students need to have an opportunity to read extensively and the writing practice to shape the fluency. The successful implementation of ER and writing discussed in this study can provide insight into how to integrate ER into the curriculum.

6. CONCLUSION

This study investigates whether the students' writing quality between the students incorporated with ER and those who are not is significantly different. This study found a significant difference between students' writing quality in the ER class and the traditional class. It is also found that the ER approach is more effective in improving

students' writing than the traditional approach. There are several factors that led the incorporation of ER in writing class to be successful are worth underlining. First, the way that ER was incorporated with writing practice drove the students' enthusiasm for the books. Second, the students used more appropriate target language in their academic writing. Last, the students acknowledged the value of ER incorporating with writing practices, they participated actively in ER class which probably as one of the factors resulting positive outcome of the study.

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