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Effects of Extensive Reading on EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension and Attitudes

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Abstract

This research aimed at reporting two consecutive studies on the effects of extensive reading on reading comprehension and attitudes of Ethiopian second cycle primary school students**.** An intervention and a control group, selected from two intact grade 8 sections, were included in each study. The intervention group was exposed to extensive reading for 6 weeks and 12 weeks in the first and second study respectively. To collect data, reading comprehension tests and attitude questionnaires were used. The results revealed that there was no significant difference between the intervention and the control group in reading comprehension and attitudes toward reading when the time was restricted and only reading was used in the intervention. However, the intervention group scored significantly better than the control group in reading comprehension and attitudes toward reading when the time for reading was extended and motivating activities were included. Implications are deduced for time allocation and the use of motivating activities in the implementation of an extensive reading programme in input-poor EFL settings like Ethiopia.

Keywords: extensive reading, reading attitude, reading comprehension, second cycle primary school

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1. Introduction

Firm reading literacy is significant for most of the students as it is a prerequisite for successful performance in any school subject (Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker, 2012). Reading is essential, mainly for foreign language learners, as it provides opportunities for them to be exposed to English in input-poor circumstances (Wu, 2012) like Ethiopia. The main goal of reading is comprehension (Duke & Pearson, 2011; Grabe, 2009), and decoding without comprehension is simply word barking (Duke & Pearson, 2011). This shows that meaningful reading cannot be said to have taken place without comprehension. Comprehension is crucial to students, particularly in the later elementary levels (Sweet & Snow, 2002) as it is the basis for further education in secondary schools and beyond.

Despite its importance, most of the learners' reading comprehension ability seems unsatisfactory in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. It may be because comprehension is a very complicated process that encompasses various interactions between the reader, text, purpose, and context (Snow, 2002). This indicates that during reading process, readers are not passive but continuously construct meaning and they will likely respond differently depending on the reader, text, purpose, and context.

In order to engage in the complex and transactional process of reading comprehension successfully, students should be engaged in extensive reading (ER), as "the more text L2 learners read, the more input they obtain" (Yamashita, 2013, p.249). According to Nuttall (1982), the best way to improve one's knowledge of a foreign language is to go and live among its speakers the next best way is to read extensively in it. Extensive reading is reading for leisure, in contrary with prescribed reading for education (Day & Bamford, 1998). The aim of the ER approach is "to help the student become better at the skill of reading rather than reading to study the language itself" (Extensive Reading Guide, 2011, p.1). Extensive reading supports learners to practice their skill of reading they learn in the classroom, which is called intensive reading (IR). While IR is similar with learning driving lessons at a school, ER with really driving on the street. Extensive reading, "is intended to develop good reading habits, to build up knowledge of vocabulary and structure, and to encourage a liking for reading" (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, pp.193-194). Day and Bamford (2002) have also recommended some features that define an effective implementation of an extensive reading programme (ERP) in diverse L2 situations: availability of easy and enjoyable books on a variety of topics; students select the books based on their needs; they read as much as they can; they read for enjoyment or information; they mostly read fast; reading is viewed as its own reward; reading is private and silent and teachers are model readers and guide the students.

Over the last few decades, various studies (Al-Nafisah, 2015; Bell, 2001; Elley & Mangubhai, 1983; Hafiz & Tudor, 1989; Jeon & Day, 2015; Lituanas, Jacobs, & Renandya, 1999; Nakanishi, 2015; Richards & Schmidt, 2002; Sheu, 2003) have provided positive evidences for the effectiveness of ER for overall language proficiency including reading comprehension at different levels and in diverse ESL/EFL situations. On the other hand, ER did not affect reading comprehension positively in fewer studies (Al-Homoud & Schmitt, 2009; Morgedo, 2009; Robb & Susser, 1989). Besides, although plenty of studies have been conducted on ER's effects on cognitive aspects of reading, there is scarcity of studies on the affective aspects (attitude) of reading (Yamashita, 2013). Moreover, as far as the reading of the researcher is concerned, little research has been conducted on ER effectiveness in Ethiopia.

1.1 The Problem

The significance of being proficient in reading comprehension for success in school and life-long learning is undeniable. Yet despite 8 years of instruction in reading, most of the grade 8 students of Ethiopia lack the required competence in reading comprehension (Ambachew, 2003; Teshome, 2014; Tiruneh, 2014). This has been confirmed with the results of the national learning assessments: the result in the 2008 Third National Learning Assessments showed that grade 8 learners' reading comprehension scores declined (mean=43.9) in relation to both the 2004 Second National Learning Assessments (mean=64.5) and the 2000 Baseline National Learning Assessments (mean=64.3). These reports reveal that most of the students lack the reading comprehension abilities. Difficulty with reading comprehension negatively affects achievement in all areas of the curriculum (Hassell & Rodge, 2007). Students who are poor in reading often develop a negative attitude to reading, particularly extensive reading and invariably the development of poor reading habits (Tunde-Awe, 2014). An investigation of a survey result also confirmed that second cycle primary (grades 7 and 8) school students' habits and attitudes toward extensive reading were poor (Endris, in press).

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Considering the reading comprehension and attitude problems, the present researcher observed the actual classroom practice of reading lessons in three second cycle primary schools in Woldia Town, Ethiopia. The teachers appeared to focus mainly on intensive reading. That is, the students were asked to do some comprehension activities after reading texts from their textbook. According to Tadesse (1999), reading is mostly used as a means to teach language (such as grammar) in Ethiopian primary and secondary schools. Such an intensive reading instruction affects the students' reading comprehension and their attitudes towards reading (Nuttall, 1982). Therefore, an alternative approach of teaching reading that could help students improve their reading comprehension, attitudes, and habits is required. Based on various research findings, Renandya (2007) recommends that when IR is not effective, the ER approach may be the correct treatment for learners' problems.

2. Review of the Literature

Extensive reading (ER) is "reading in quantity in order to gain a general understanding of what is read, to develop good reading habits, to build knowledge of vocabulary and structure, and to encourage a liking for reading" (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p.193-194). According to the Extensive Reading Foundation Guide (2011), extensive reading is an approach of teaching that helps students become better at the skill of reading rather than reading to study the language itself. This shows that the immediate focus of ER is on the content being read, rather than on language skills. ER is supported by Krashen's (1982) input hypothesis and affective filter hypothesis.

In his input hypothesis, Krashen (1982) stresses the importance of providing learners a large amount of comprehensible input for acquiring language. Waring (2006) further suggests that ER helps learners to read massive amounts of language at a comfortable level to gain input, build fluency and consolidate language that was previously learned discretely through textbooks. In addition to the comprehensible input (reading materials), the environment for reading is equally essential. As Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis, language is acquired in low-anxiety situations. In the affective filter hypothesis, learners' attitude is used as the intervening factor to successful second language acquisition in an extensive reading programme (Krashen, 1993a). Learners with more positive attitudes to learning English will seek more input and will acquire the second language more rapidly and effectively than unmotivated readers will. As students read texts based on their needs and linguistic level, extensive reading makes the tension-free environment. Extensive reading hence fulfills both criteria, as it provides both a vast quantity of input, and a low-anxiety situation.

Numerous studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of ER on reading comprehension and attitudes to reading in EFL contexts. Sheu (2003), for instance, conducted a study to examine the effects of extensive reading on reading achievements and attitudes toward reading of EFL Taiwanese grade 8 students for a year. The result showed that the ERP groups significantly increased from pretest to posttest in comprehension and attitudes to reading, but the control group did not. The finding also indicated that the learners' attitude to reading and the extensive reading programme was positive.

Bell (2001) also carried out his research for two semesters on elementary school students in Yemen to compare the effectiveness of ER and IR on reading speed and reading comprehension. The researcher allocated students into an intervention and a control group. The intervention group received an ER programme and read graded readers. In contrast, the control group received the IR programme. The results of the reading comprehension test showed that the students in the ER group received greater results than students in the IR group.

Similarly, Al-Nafisah, (2015) conducted a study on the effect of an extensive reading programme on the reading comprehension of Saudi EFL university students. Hence, 54 students, who were randomly selected from King Saud University, were involved in the study. They were assigned to an experimental and a control group (27 students each). Pretest and posttest data were collected within a three months period. The findings of the study showed that the experiment group outperformed the control group in reading comprehension achievement.

On the other hand, a few studies show inconsistent findings regarding ER effectiveness on reading comprehension. Al-Homoud and Schmitt (2009), for instance, investigated the effects of extensive reading on reading abilities, vocabulary development, and attitudes toward L2 reading with 70 male EFL university students in Saudi Arabia over a 10-week course. The students were randomly assigned to one of two groups: an intensive reading group (n = 23) and an extensive reading group (n = 47). Both the intensive and extensive reading groups showed improvements in reading comprehension but there was no significant difference between the groups. Nevertheless, the extensive reading

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participants reported much more positive attitudes toward reading, their class, and their learning than the participants in the intensive reading group.

Morgado (2009) also conducted his research on the impacts of ER on Venezuelan university learners' comprehension performance and perception of the extensive reading strategy. Findings suggested that although the intervention group students' perception of the ERP was positive, they did not show a significant difference from the control group either on the pretest or on the posttest. This suggests that reading comprehension performance remains the same whether or not ERP is implemented.

Likewise, in Ethiopia, Ambachew (2003) conducted a study to examine the influences of donated supplementary readers on grade 8 EFL learners' reading ability in Addis Ababa. The result of the study was inconsistent with most of the findings in other countries. That is, there was no significant difference in the learners' reading abilities after the intervention.

Despite the abundance of research on the effectiveness of ER, a few studies show inconsistent findings as discussed in the above paragraphs. Besides, little research has been carried out in Ethiopia in general and with second cycle primary schools in particular; even if there was one (Ambachew, 2003), its findings were inconsistent. Moreover, although there are plenty of studies on ER's effects on cognitive aspects of reading, there is scarcity of studies on the affective aspects (attitude) of reading (Yamashita, 2013). The current study fills these gaps by investigating the impacts of ER on reading comprehension and attitudes.

2.1 The Pilot Study (Study One)

Considering the above gaps, the current researcher was motivated to conduct this study aimed at investigating how ER may influence EFL students' reading comprehension and their attitudes to reading and the extensive reading programme. To achieve these objectives, this study made an attempt to answer the following research questions:

1) Does extensive reading affect learners' reading comprehension?
2) What are the learners' attitudes toward reading?
3) What are the learners' attitudes toward the extensive reading programme?

3. Methodology

3.1 Design of the Study

This study employed a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design to determine the effect of ER on learners' reading comprehension and attitudes toward reading. That is, the researcher used intact, already established groups of participants, provided pretests, administered the treatment condition to one group, and gave posttests.

3.2 Participants

This study investigated the effect of an ER programme on EFL Ethiopian students' reading comprehension and attitudes to reading, and the ERP. Hence, 92 eighth graders were selected from two intact sections, and the learners were assigned in an experimental and a control group. The experimental group consisted of 46 students, with 19 males and 27 females, while the control group included 46 students, with 22 males and 24 females. Students' average age was about 14.5.

3.3 Instruments

3.3.1 Reading Comprehension Test

As standardized tests that can measure reading comprehension of primary school students in Ethiopia were not available, the researcher constructed two equivalent versions of reading comprehension tests, one as a pretest and the other as a posttest. The tests were prepared based on the grade 8 curricula materials. Each test included four passages (fiction and nonfiction) followed by 32 questions. The questions involved both lower- and higher-order skills. The tests were reviewed by English language experts and teachers for appropriateness, level, accuracy and content validity. Pearson correlation coefficient between the two equivalent forms of the reading comprehension tests was calculated as 0.79, which indicated a high reliability between the two versions of the test.

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3.3.2 Reading Attitude Survey

To assess the participants' attitude toward reading, a reading attitude survey, adapted from Conradi, Jang, Bryant, Craft, and McKenna's (2013, p.569), "Survey of Adolescent Reading Attitude (SARA)" was used. Each of the items start with the expression "How do you feel," and participants were asked to score each item on a 4-point Likert scale from 'very good' to 'very bad.' The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's α) of the attitude toward recreational reading items was 0.86. The survey was converted into Amharic, the learners' L1 and given to the researcher's advisors and EFL teachers for validation (content and face validity), and some revisions were made based on the comments. The reliability of the reading attitude survey of the Amharic version was checked using Cronbach's Alpha. Internal consistency coefficients of 0.81 which is reliable.

3.3.3 Attitudes toward the Extensive Reading Programme

After the intervention, participants in the intervention group were also asked to complete the attitude questionnaire. It contained five items designed to investigate the participants' attitude toward the extensive reading programme after the intervention. The questionnaire was adapted from (Sheu, 2003). The items included participants' attitudes toward the features of the ERP (self-selection, reading different books, silent reading, teacher participation, lack of homework, and tests). Each item was fixed to a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from 'like it very much' (1) to 'dislike it very much' (4). Then the survey was converted to the learners' mother tongue (Amharic) and was given to the researcher's advisors and EFL teachers for validation. Based on the comments, necessary modifications were made. The reliability of the post-questionnaire on attitude toward the ERP was also checked using Cronbach's Alpha. Internal consistency coefficients of 0.61, which is reliable.

3.4 Reading Materials

As ER is new in Ethiopia, extensive reading materials and graded readers are not available. Therefore, the researcher used his own personal collection, including stories, narratives and folk stories from different sources, such as stories from the British Council Ethiopia collection by Ambachew Sargent and Elizabeth Laird available at www.ethiopianenglishreaders.com/.

3.5 Procedure

After getting an approval from the school principal and the English teacher, the researcher provided training for the experimenter teacher on the theory, benefits, and implementation of extensive reading for a week. After that, the students took the reading comprehension test and Reading Attitude Survey (RAS) as pretest to assess their level. Next the ER programme was implemented as the following procedures: first, the concept of ER was introduced to the students: what it is, its benefits, and how to implement it. Second, a handout of photocopies of one story from the collected stories was given to all the experimental students for shared reading: the teacher first explained the topic and told the story to the students in simple English for the first class. Fourth, books were set out on tables in the classroom, and students were encouraged to select books on their own choice. The students participated in ER for six weeks, and they met once a week for 40 minutes: 5 minutes for book selection, 30 minutes for reading and 5 minutes for keeping reading logs. The logs were to include date, title, level (easy vs. difficult), time spent, number of pages, and a short comment about the books. The researcher also read the reading logs and provided suggestions. Meanwhile, the researcher observed the extensive reading programme in the classroom to check the extent to which ER was implemented properly. There were also made discussions with the experimenter teacher before and after each of the classroom observations. After six weeks, the reading comprehension posttest, reading attitude survey, and post-attitude questionnaire were administered.

3.6 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed through t-tests, independent and paired samples, to compare the inter-group and intra-group differences and descriptive statistics via the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0 for Windows. The independent sample t-test and the paired sample t-test were used to analyze the inter-group and intra-group comparisons respectively.

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4. Results

4.1 Reading Comprehension Test

To compare the two groups before the intervention, an independent sample t-test was carried out, and the result indicated that there was no significant difference between the intervention and the control group participants on the pretest (t = 0.04, p = .96). This indicates that the two groups had similar levels in reading comprehension before the treatment. The pretest and posttest results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Pretest and posttest comprehension scores

	Mean		t	Sig.(2-tailed)
Groups	Pretest	Posttest		
Control (n=46)	15.35 (6.25)	13.72 (9.48)	-.90	.36
Experimental (n=46)	15.28 (6.58)	15.30 (7.71)		

Note: Standard deviations appear in parentheses next to the means

As shown in Table 1, the experimental group's mean for the pretest and posttest were 15.28 and 15.30, respectively, which was an increase of 0.02. However, the t-test result (t = -.90, p = .36) indicated that there was no significant difference between the participants of the control and the intervention group in the posttest reading comprehension scores.

4.2 Attitudes toward Reading

Regarding students' attitudes toward reading, an independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the two groups before the intervention. The scores indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups on the pretest (t = .35, p = .72). This reveals that the participants in the two groups had similar levels in attitudes toward reading. The mean scores of students' result in attitudes toward reading on the pretest and posttest are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Pretest and posttest attitude scores

	Mean			
Groups	Pretest	Posttest	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Control (n=46)	16.15 (2.59)	16.39 (3.31)	-1.62	.10
Experimental (n=46)	16.37 3.12	17.50 (3.23)		

Note: Standard Deviations appear in parentheses next to the means

As shown in Table 2, the intervention group's mean score for the pretest and posttest were 16.37 and 17.50, respectively, which was a gain of 1.13 on the reading attitude measure. The control group had a pretest score of 16.15 and a posttest score of 16.39, which was a gain of 0.24 on the same measure. The posttest result (t = -1.62, p = .10) revealed that there was no significant difference in the gain scores. This shows that there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups in attitude scores.

4.3 Attitudes toward the Extensive Reading Programme

After the ERP, the intervention group students were also asked their attitudes toward the extensive reading programme using a 4-point scale (*like it much* to *dislike like it much*).

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Table 3. Posttest attitude scores

Item Descriptions	The experimental group (n = 46)	
	Mean	SD
1. Silent reading programme	3.59	0.53
2. Self-selection of books	3.71	0.58
3. Reading different stories	3.67	0.51
4. Lack of homework	2.23	1.07
5. Lack of tests and scores	2.04	1.11
6. Teacher participation	3.57	0.84
Grand mean	3.13	0.77

As indicated in Table 3, the results revealed that the students' attitudes toward the ERP were positive, with the average mean of 3.13, an above satisfactory level to all the features of the ERP. Among the features, self-selection of books was given the highest rating (mean = 3.71), followed by reading different stories (mean = 3.67), and silent reading programme (mean = 3.59). Lack of tests and scores (mean = 2.04) and lack of homework (mean = 2.23) was given the lowest rating.

4.4 Discussion and Implications

The results of the study indicated that the intervention group participants' attitudes toward the ERP were positive (see Table 3). The results were consistent with previous studies (Morgado, 2009; Sheu, 2003), which reported that ER programme has resulted in a positive attitude toward the ERP. It could be because they liked the pressure-free atmosphere of the ER programme, particularly the self-selection and accessibility of various reading materials.

However, the results showed that there was no statistically significant variation in reading comprehension and attitudes toward reading between the intervention and control group. The failure to achieve statistically significant difference might be because of the short instructional period (a 40-minute lesson per week for 6 weeks). In other words, engaging students in a 40-minute ER lesson per week for 6 weeks may not be adequate to improve the learners' comprehension performance and attitude toward reading. In line with this, some researchers such as Davis (1995) also argue that the benefits and results of ER do not appear in short-duration programmes.

The pilot study offers some implications for study 2, in employing ER in input-poor EFL settings, particularly the positive attitudes toward the extensive reading programme shown by the experimental group students. That is, the pressure-free circumstance can encourage students to participate passionately in the ER programme. However, their positive perceptions toward the ERP did not improve the students' reading comprehension ability and attitudes toward reading. It might be because of the following limitations of the study.

The first limitation was that, as this was the first (pilot) study, it was implemented for a short instructional time (a 40-minute lesson per week for 6 weeks). The other limitation was that the study lacked some motivating activities that encourage students to read more, as Sheu, (2003) has recommended that encouraging reading activities can stimulate learners' attitudes. Therefore, the second study was conducted for a longer time (12 weeks) and duration (twice a week) by employing some motivating activities, (such as book discussion and reading marathon competition) to see if there was a greater impact on learners' reading comprehension performance and attitudes toward reading.

5. Extensive Reading with Motivating Activities (Study Two)

Based on the results of the first study (pilot), the extensive reading programme was revised and conducted in a second cycle primary school in Woldia Town, Ethiopia, from March to June in 2017. For the experimental group, the revisions were that: motivating activities such as learners' group discussions (to share what they read), and reading marathon

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competition were included. There were also some modifications in the experimental group: two 40-minute classes per week were assigned for the intervention group over 12 weeks, and six additional reading books (12 books in total) were employed.

The second study was conducted to determine whether the revised ERP (as discussed before) could enhance learners' reading comprehension and attitudes. The research questions remained the same in investigating students' reading comprehension performance and attitude changes as in the first study, except the third one. Nevertheless, the emphasis was transformed to the difference between the first and the second study so as to investigate the reasons.

6. Results

6.1 Reading Comprehension Test

An independent sample t-test result confirmed that significant difference was not observed between the intervention and control group on the pretest (t = -1.59, p = .11) before the intervention. The mean scores of students' performance in reading comprehension on the pretest and posttest is shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Pretest and posttest comprehension scores

Group	Mean		t	p (2 tailed)
	Pretest	Posttest		
Control (N = 44)	10.32 (6.19)	10.70 (6.86)	-2.50	.01
Experimental (N = 46)	12.52 (6.86)	14.96 (8.58)		

Note: Standard deviations appear in parentheses next to the means

As shown in Table 4, the experimental group learners' mean for the pretest and posttest were 12.52 and 14.96, respectively, which was an increase of 2.3. The learners' scores in the experimental group were greater on the posttest than the pretest; the gain score (t = -2.50, df = 88 p = .01) was statistically significant, while the control group did not.

6.2 Attitudes toward Reading

As the independent sample t-test result showed, there was no statistically significant variation between the intervention and the control group on the pretest (t = -1.31, p = .19). That is, the learners had similar levels in their attitudes toward reading. The mean scores of students in attitudes toward reading on the pretest and posttest is shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Pretest and posttest attitude scores

	Mean		t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Groups	Pretest	Posttest		
Control (n=44)	16.33 (3.15)	14.56 (2.59)		
Experimental (n=46)	17.24 (3.65)	18.72 (2.31)	-8.00	.001

Note: Standard deviations appear in parentheses next to the means

The intervention group scored 17.24 and 18.72, for the pretest and posttest respectively, which was an increase of 1.48 on the reading attitude measure, and the improvement was significant. (t = -8.00, p = .001). On the other hand, the control group scored -16.33 and 14.56, for the pretest and posttest respectively, which was a decrease of -1.77 on the reading attitude measure, and a significant decrease was observed on the scores (t = 2.66, p = .01).

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6.3 Discussion and Implications

Although the majority of students fall with low scores, the experimental group performed significantly better scores than the control group on reading comprehension posttest. As indicated in Table 4, learners in the intervention group scored significantly higher on the posttest than the pretest, while the control group did not. The effect size, which is (d = 0.62), also indicated that the degree of the difference between the control and the experimental group is moderate. This suggests that the observed significance was due to the effects of the extensive reading treatment. The results were consistent with numerous studies (Al-Nafisah, 2015; Bell, 2001; Elley & Mangubhai, 1983; Nakanishi, 2015; Richards & Schmidt, 2002; Sheu, 2003), which indicated that the intervention with ER approach improved students' reading comprehension. This shows that ER had a positive effect on the learners' reading comprehension performance. The improvement of the mean score of the experimental group in the posttest is likely to be due to the influence of the features of ER activities. The self-selection based on their level and interest, for instance, is one of the factors that most likely to influence students to read more and improve their reading comprehension.

According to Meng (2009) and Stoller (2015), when students can choose books based on their level and interest, they have the opportunities for reading engagement and success. The other factor that most likely contributes to the effectiveness of the extensive reading programme on reading comprehension is the accessibility to various reading materials. This was supported by the experimental group students during the post-attitude survey that self-selection of reading materials and availability of various reading materials were the students' first and second choice respectively among the other features of the extensive reading programmeme as indicated in Table 3.

Regarding theory, the results of this study are consistent with the input Hypothesis. That is, extensive reading is a means of gaining convincing comprehensible input, and is therefore a powerful means of developing literacy. However, this finding is inconsistent with a few studies (Al-Homoud & Schmitt, 2009; Michael, 2003; Morgedo, 2009), which reported that ER did affect reading comprehension positively.

Similarly, the findings revealed that the intervention group scored significantly better than the control group in attitudes toward reading. Learners' scores in the intervention group were improved on the posttest than the pretest, while the control group did not (Table 5). The findings of this study were consistent with prior studies (Sheu, 2003; Yamashita, 2013). It might be because of the motivating activities and the instructional time of the ER programme (twice a week for 12 weeks). In line with the duration, Pilgreen and Krashen (1993 as cited in Rodrigo, Greenberg, & Segal, 2014) stated that while affective gains, such attitudes toward reading have been observed in short-duration programmes.

The results of the two studies provide some implications for teachers who are interested in implementing ER in input-poor EFL settings like Ethiopia. That is, in addition to exposure to large quantity of input, the stress-free situation of an ER programme, the amount of time allocated and use of motivating activities seem to be important features in the organization of an ER programme.

7. Conclusion

It is generally believed that exposure to large quantity of input and the stress-free atmosphere of an extensive reading programme, such as the freedom of choice of books, appears to have a positive influence on students' reading ability and attitudes toward reading. However, the results of this study indicated that simply giving learners the freedom to choose books to read was inadequate to make such an influence. In contrast, when motivating activities and more time for reading were used, there was an improvement in students' reading comprehension, and their attitudes toward reading were positive. Hence, due attention should be given to the use of an instructional time and motivating activities in the implementation of an ER programme.

There are, however, some limitations in this study. First, as this was a small-scale study with a small number of samples examined, it was not representative enough. Thus, conducting further research in larger population is needed to obtain data that are more accurate. Second, in the current study, participants had the opportunity to read only in the classroom and limited access to books (only 12 books). Future research needs to provide a big stock of books in the classroom and school library and ask participants to read more in and out of class to maximize the effects of ER. Third, future studies can focus on the effects of ER on other areas of language learning like vocabulary and grammar. Finally, the length and duration of time is important for ER to be rationally effective; this study lasted for 12 weeks, which may not be adequate for full benefits of ER. Future studies can gain better results if learners participate in ER programme for a longer time and duration.

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