

The Attitudes of EFL Students towards Extensive Reading Program in Digital Library in Private Primary School (A Case of Erbil)

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Doi: 10.23918/ijsses.v9i1p383

Abstract: Extensive Reading (ER) is described as an individual's voluntary and unrestricted reading of huge amounts of material or long texts for the sake of general comprehension and pleasure from the content. Digital libraries offer rich content and ample digital aids that student may get benefit while reading independently. These aids can help, encourage, and motivate children because of the digital additions that traditional books lack. They may be able to make reading books more entertaining for children by using bright animations and introducing them to print and pictures in an enjoyable way. Accordingly, the present research aims to examine the attitudes of private primary schools' students towards an extensive reading program in digital library. A qualitative research methodology was selected to reveal the perceptions and preferences of the students. The collected data analysed through thematic analysis. The research participants are 10 students from grade 5 and 6 in a private primary school. This study might be useful for instructors to see how students react extensive reading program in digital library and technological features embedded to it, as well as curriculum designers to think about the impact of digital libraries on students' reading habit development.

Keywords: Extensive Reading, Digital Library, Foreign Language Classrooms, Reading Attitudes, Reading Motivation

1. Introduction

According to Susser and Rob (1990), ER is defined as “reading big amounts of materials or long texts for general or universal understanding with the purpose of getting enjoyment from the text. Additionally, reading is personalized, and readers choose what they want to read, and classroom discussions is not essential. Even though ER offers a lengthy list of benefits, according to research (Arnold, 2009; Collins, 2018; Fujita & Noro, 2009), it is still underappreciated. Watkins (2018) compiled a list of reasons why ER is currently underutilized. In many circumstances, he added, teacher-led classrooms are favoured over more independent learning designs, which are necessary in ER, thus formal instruction of grammar and vocabulary is frequently stressed rather than learning them intuitively via reading. Another element influencing teachers' and principals' decisions is time limits in the curriculum. As instructors are likely to

Received: February 16, 2022

Accepted: March 18, 2022

Bala, A. (2022). The Attitudes of EFL Students towards Extensive Reading Program in Digital Library in Private Primary School (A Case of Erbil). *International Journal of Social Sciences and Educational Studies*, 9(1), 383-392.

have other critical topics to cover, some head of departments or program coordinators may be hesitant to allocate curricular time for ER (Davis, 1995). Program designers and instructors believe that there is no capacity in the already overburdened curriculum for extensive periods of reading (Benson, 1989).

As an inventive solution to this practical challenge, digital reading platforms are on the horizon. Online e-book libraries allow instant access to a large choice of graded, mixed-genre materials. Users may access them at any time and from any location; instructional tools, such as comprehension check assignments and quizzes, are available to enhance or replace direct teacher interaction. They allow students, parents, and instructors more control over their choices, goal setting, and reading engagement, as well as immediate, actionable statistics on reading progress. In a word, digital reading platforms make independent reading a more desirable part of the language arts curriculum for both instructors and students.

1.2 Research Problem, Objectives and Questions

Numerous research (Arnold, 2009; Koby, 2017; Cote & Milliner, 2015) have been performed to investigate the effect of digital reading platforms on students' reading motivation, with the majority of these studies agreeing that digital platforms have a positive effect on reading motivation for a variety of reasons. The kids' positive attitude toward reading resulted in increased reading engagement and increased interest in reading. Implementing ER program in is an emerging concept and only very limited number of private schools have embedded it to their language teaching curriculum as a supplementary resource however, the perceptions of the students towards reading from digital library is still needs to be investigated. Therefore, the researcher aims to unveil the insights of the students about this innovative design to provide a projection for teachers, program coordinators and other decision makers.

In the light of this problem, the objective of this study is:

- To reveal the students' attitudes towards reading in digital library.

Based on this objective, the formulated research question is:

- What are students' insights concerning traditional and digital libraries?

2. Literature Review

ER has numerous distinguishing characteristics that set it apart from the other types of reading used in ELT programs. Day & Bamford (2002) manifested the major principals of ER defining general characteristics of ER. Accordingly,

- The reading content should be simple enough for the reader to enjoy.
- A wide choice of reading materials on a variety of topics should be available.
- Students have complete freedom to choose what they want to read.
- Students read as much as they can.
- Reading is often done for pleasure, knowledge, or general comprehension.
- Reading is done for the purpose of reading.
- Reading speed should be sufficient to experience the pleasure of reading.

- Individual reading takes place in silence and at one's own pace.
- Teachers direct and guide students in their reading.
- Teachers are excellent readers' role models.

At the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the broad availability of electronic reader apps boosted the reading of digital books, increasing the ubiquity of downloaded e-books. This is owing to the widespread availability of portable reader computers, since one of the most common concerns regarding wireless reading was a loss of mobility, or the user's reliance on the laptop computer (Sehn & Fragaso, 2015).

Although there are various obstacles to incorporating a traditional ER program into a language curriculum, digital library systems can offer greater options for program authors, teachers, and students. A digital library, according to Brueck, Lenhart, and Roskos (2019), is an online platform that provides mass electronic reading resources via cloud-based software to learners, schools, and parents for a fee. Based on a cursory review, they claim that most people would properly identify educational tools like Storia, Raz-Kids, Epic! MyOn Reader, Tumble Tracker, and other similar apps as children's e-book collections. However, a closer examination indicates that the children's e-book collection is only a minor fraction of the digital reading platforms' services and capabilities. Digital reading platforms allow children and adults to read, write, communicate, and interact with electronic text. Furthermore, these systems provide a comprehensive online and mobile interface for licensing and distributing content to districts, schools, instructors, parents, and students at any time and from any location.

According to Anderson-Inman and Horney (1997), an electronic book resembles a traditional storybook in certain ways. It has a table of contents, chapters, and pages, and it is organized for communication purposes around a theme or topic. It is, however, fundamentally different from the "storybook" we know and love in one crucial way: it uses multimedia to complement or improve the text on the screen. The inclusion of visual elements such as special effects, aural components like as music and rhymes, and animation to an e-book changes it into a more film-like experience than traditional adult-child book-reading, with important implications for what constitutes early reading experience. The capabilities contained in electronic books hold a lot of potential for improving student comprehension and facilitating in-depth learning.

Additionally, the majority of digital libraries provide a catalog search option that allows you to search by title, author, genre, subject, and reading level. In addition, several programs use evaluation tools such as quizzes and diagnostic exams to determine students' reading levels and propose appropriate books for their development (Brueck et al., 2019).

Prior research about the effect of digital library on students' reading attitudes showed positive findings, for example, Chou (2014) used Taiwanese students in L1 and L2 to research how students choose e-books and their reading attitudes in an e-book environment. The findings suggested that students in L2 had a somewhat more positive attitude about e-book reading than students in L1. In addition, both one's L1 e-book reading attitude and L2 hardcopy-book reading attitude were significant predictors of one's L2 e-book reading attitude. EFL students' perceptions of reading e-books were investigated by Islami and Warni (2020). They examined the purpose of e-books, comparison of printed and e-books, and pros and cons of

e-books. The findings revealed that while most participants were happy with e-books in general, Jones and Brown (2011) used 22 third-grade children in their study to perform a satisfaction survey and comprehension tests to determine the impact of e-books on kids' reading engagement and, as a result, reading comprehension and enjoyment. Students' identification with the book's location, characters, and theme was found to be more important than the reading medium (on-paper or digital). Students, on the other hand, expressed a preference for e-books when given a vast selection of titles and the option to choose their own e-book.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Methodology

deMarraais and Lapan (2003) assert that qualitative interviews are utilized when researchers wish to learn more about a certain phenomenon, event, or combination of experiences from participants. The purpose is to develop as full a picture as possible from the participant's words and experiences using interview questions and follow-up inquiries, or probes, depending on what the participant has previously detailed. This is only possible if the qualitative interview is sufficiently open-ended for the participant to provide a breadth of expertise about the study issue. The goal is to learn about that person's perspective on a particular experience or phenomena under investigation. (p.52) Therefore, this research was planned based on qualitative research methodology applying an interview to disclose the attitudes of EFL students towards ER program in digital library.

3.2 Instrumentation

Taking into consideration the research methodology, the researcher designed 9 semi structured interview questions. The interview was verbatim transcribed, and the transcription was used to extract themes. The next stage was to group the topics together into more generic categories. Themes were used to guide the analysis and interpretation.

The researcher drafted the interview questions and had them reviewed by three separate experts for content validity.

3.3 Setting

The study was conducted at Erbil's private elementary schools. In private institutions, pupils begin learning English as a foreign language as early as kindergarten. They receive 5 hours of English lessons every week and use well-known publishers' ELT materials as course books. These schools' core subjects are also taught in English. Furthermore, the Raz- Kids Digital Library serves as a comprehensive reading platform in school ELT curricula. This platform has over 1600 books in various levels and genres, as well as additional features like as audio, drawings, and highlighting. In addition, this program contains incentives and prizes elements, such as: star system, avatar builder, badges, raz-rockets, and certificates. Stars systems allow students to receive stars when they read books. Students can collect more stars by recording their voice while reading aloud, listening to a book, or answering comprehension questions at the end of each book. Avatar Builder and Raz rockets are a system providing students various avatars and figures which students can customize them and personalize their character or design their rocket. Students might shop in virtual

store to decorate their avatars and rocket by spending the stars that they earned from their reading efforts mentioned above. Additionally, students might win badges for attaining certain milestones. Each badge appears on students' screen, and when they reach to certain level, the gray badges turn into color. Teachers can also print out and give it to the students to encourage them. Moreover, the system offers some award and certificates for students. Teachers can download and distribute many sorts of awards to their students, such as reading star, teachergram, bookworm, going forward, and so on. ("Student incentives and awards", n.d. Retrieved from <https://www.raz-plus.com/technology/student-incentive-awards/>)

3.4 Participants

The research sample includes 47 private primary school students from grade 5 and grade 6 students in Erbil. The convenient sample selection method was employed by the researcher because there are limited number of schools that use digital library system in the city, so the researcher used personal contacts to carry out the study and random selection method utilized 10 students were appointed for interview out of volunteer students.

Table 1: illustrates that 51% of the participants are females (n=24), and 49% are males (n=23).

	Group 1 (5th Grade)		Group 2 (6th Grade)	
Number of Students	25		22	
Gender	15 F	10 M	9 F	13 M
Level of English Reading Skills	A2		A2+	

3.5 Procedure

In the last week of July 2021, the researcher asked permission from the school administration to conduct research in the school and after having the necessary permissions the researcher identified 2 teachers who would voluntarily conduct the research in their class each from grade 5 and 6. In October, the researcher had an orientation meeting with teachers and students and distributed the access codes to Raz-kids digital library, after sending consent forms to parents all students in these two classes accepted to take part in the research and students started to read from digital library. The ER programme from digital library continued till May 2021 and the researcher had an interview with 10 volunteer students (5 students from each grade) in the first week of May 2021. The voice of the students was recorded after getting their approval later they transcribed and categorised by the researcher.

3.6 Research Ethics

By blinding the identities of the schools and students and utilizing codes instead of names, the interviewer students were ensured of anonymity and confidentiality of information. It was also promised that the information gathered would be utilized just for the purposes of this study and would not be shared with

anyone else. This was also highlighted in the pre-interview explanation section to give the respondents confidence in answering the questions.

3.7 Data Analysis

Initially, the voice of the students was recorded after getting their approval then they transcribed and categorised by the researcher. The interview was verbatim transcribed, and themes were extracted from the transcription. The next step was to organize the themes into more general groups. The analysis and interpretation were guided by themes.

4. Findings and Discussions

Question 1: ‘Do you like reading in general? Why or why not?’ and All of the students confirmed that they like reading, however, they stated different reasons: ‘to improve English/reading (N=7)’, ‘to have fun and entertain themselves (N=4)’, ‘to learn new things’ (N=4), ‘to satisfy one’s interest’ (N=1), ‘to improve imagination’ (N=1). Below see some typical answers.

S3: “Yes, I like reading because it is fun, and it entertains me, and it helps me read better.”

S6:” Yes, I like reading because it improves my English and I learn new things.’

The findings reveal that while all kids have a good attitude about reading, the reasons for their opinions varied. Students read mostly to improve their English skills and learn new topics, but they also read for enjoyment and to spend good time.

Question 2: ‘What kinds of books do you read?’ The distribution of the responses was as follows: ‘fiction and science fiction (N=4), comics and funny books (N=4), adventure / action books (N=2), fairy tales (N=1), fantasy books (N=1), scary books (N=1), diaries (N=1), stories about real people (N=1). This demonstrates that students' preferences are various, but the majority of them enjoy fiction and literature, as well as books that entertain them.

Question 3: ‘When do you usually read and how often/much time do you spend on reading?’ The responses were as follows: ‘When I finish my homework and there's nobody to talk to’ (N=4), ‘after I finish my homework before sleep’ (N=3), ‘some days in a week, not every day’ (N=2), ‘every day and whenever I get bored’ (N=1), ‘when there is no homework’ (N=1). As for duration: ‘20-40 minutes’ (N=3), ‘until I get bored/tired’ (N=2), ‘1 hour per day (N= 2), ‘15-minute reading time at school’ (N= 2), ‘1.5 hour’ (N=1).

The interesting answers were as follows:

S 5: “When I finish my homework and there's nobody to talk to, I go to pick a book to read and probably read around 1 hour per day.”

S2: “I read in 15-minute reading times at school every day and whenever I get bored, mostly at home. I read till I truly get tired.”

Students read novels when they finish their assignments and when they are bored, as evidenced by the replies. They read for varying lengths of time, indicating that they are reading freely and willingly, and that they are enjoying themselves since the given period is sufficient.

Question 4: “How many pages a day can you read in your native language and in English? Most of the students answered that they read less in their native language ‘1-20 pages (N=7), 50 pages (N=1), 70-80 pages (N=1), none (N=1). On the other hand, the students claimed that they read more in English; up to 200 pages (N=4), around 100 pages (N=2), around 40 pages (N=1) and around 20-30 pages (N= 3). The most common responses are shown below.

S7: “I don’t like stories in Kurdish, that is why I read only two or three pages, but I read approximately 25 pages in English every day.

S3:” I read around 50 pages in Kurdish, but I read 2-3 books in English on holidays and at the weekends and each of them is around 50-80 pages. I read approximately 10 books a week”.

The findings show that students prefer to read in English over their native language, and that they can read more pages and for longer periods of time in English. This might be due to the pupils' native language, especially in Kurdish, where it is difficult to obtain books appropriate for their age and ability or if there is no such option as there is in English literature. Furthermore, the children attend an English-medium school, and some pupils' Kurdish or Arabic levels may be insufficient to comprehend literature published in their original tongue.

Question 5: “Do you prefer reading digital books from Raz-Kids or printed (paper) books? Why?” Six students preferred digital library for different reasons: they think that digital library is colorful and fun (N=2), they can find different books (N=1), they can read books over and over again wherever they are in (N=1), it helps them in pronunciation (N=2), it helps them to learn lots of new things (N=2), they like spending time in it/ it lets design their avatars and they get some points (N=2). Two students equally liked printed and digital books. On the other hand, two students preferred printed books. Below find some answers:

S9: “I like reading paper books because I like touching them and it is good for my eyes, but I like Raz-Kids too. It’s fun. It lets you not only design your avatar, but also dress it. We can imagine hoe characters look. And after we finish, we get some points.”

S2: “I prefer printed books because I am getting tired of my phone during digital reading, I want to hold a book in my hand.”

S5: “It takes a while to finish, and it hurts your eyes, so I prefer printed books”.

The majority of students prefer reading in a digital library to reading printed books because digital library books are colorful and offer rich material, they are easy to access, they help students improve their pronunciation, and they inspire them by having fun.

Question 6: ‘What motivates you to read more?’ and students responded as: ‘collecting stars and having fun’ (N=4), ‘motivational talks of parents and teachers encourage me’ (N=3), ‘improving English/reading

(N=2)', 'I wonder what is going to happen next and in the end of the story' (N=2), 'I learn new things' (N=2), 'seeing other people reading motivates me' (N=1), 'attractive cover and pictures in the book' (N=1). It was discovered that while having fun and experiencing the joy of reading is important for students' curiosity about the characters, the plot of the story, and learning new things, social factors such as parental and teacher advice, as well as seeing other models for reading around them, also affect students' motivation.

Question 7: 'Do like the rewarding features in Raz-Kids? Do they motivate you?' the majority of the students confirmed that they like them, and these features motivate them. They like 'collecting stars' (N=5), 'getting certificates' (N=4), 'designing avatars and robot builders' (N=2), 'rocket rooms' (N=1), and 'having fun' (N=1). See some answers below:

S1: "I feel good when I get a star and win a certificate. Of course, they motivate me, sometimes I try to read more books and answer the questions at the end to collect more star."

S6: "I like them, but not so much."

S3: "I really like Raz-Kids, but the stars don't really matter for me. They are childish."

According to the students' responses, incentive and rewarding elements in digital libraries give additional motivation for the vast majority of pupils; yet, a few students may ignore them or consider them infantile.

Question 8: 'What helps you to understand a difficult text when you are reading digital books?' The students responded: 'the digital dictionary' (N=5), 'pictures' (N=4), 'read-aloud with a highlighter' (N=4), 'quizzes' (N=1). Some typical answers are given below.

S3: "You click the button for the vocabulary, and get a definition, that helps me to understand the word."

S10: "Pictures help me to understand the content, the read-aloud for pronunciation and dictionary is helpful for meaning".

This demonstrates that the digital library's added features benefit pupils in improving their reading comprehension and fluency.

Question 9: "What helps you to understand a difficult text when you are reading paper books?" And the students responded: 'asking teacher/parents/other adults' (N=6), 'searching on the internet' (N=2), 'the glossary at the end of the book' (N=1), 'guessing by myself based on general knowledge and context' (N=1). When kids are reading printed books, the replies demonstrate that they require a more competent person near them to answer their questions for scaffolding. However, in many circumstances, these more competent ones (who speak English) may not be available.

5. Limitations of the Study

Because the data came from only a private school and there were only ten interviewees, the study's findings cannot be applied to all other types and levels of schools and pupils. For deeper enquiry additional research

instrumentation might utilize to provide vibrant picture about the students' insights and attitudes of digital library.

6. Conclusion & Recommendation

Findings showed that students regarded the digital library to be a very interesting and enjoyable environment, the perceptions of the students were examined from many perspectives, including interest/curiosity, engagement, emotions, intrinsic/extrinsic motivation, Consequently, there is solid evidence in the interview data that the digital library has a favorable influence on students' reading motivation engagement and motivation with the help of extra features and incentive tools. Additionally, the responses of the students stressed the role of teachers from sociological point of view because teachers are major role models for primary school students any type of reward and praise really matters for them.

Accordingly, teachers should train themselves to use educational tools successfully as a prerequisite of a technology-oriented school setting and urge students and parents to take use of the advantages of digital content to ensure maximum benefit. This might be a nice study subject to look at the role of the instructor in students' use of digital libraries for further studies.

Furthermore, there is still a significant gap in the influence of digital library systems on student reading comprehension and habits in Kurdistan/Iraq. As a result, other researchers in the field should carry out more research to uncover the effectiveness of digital library as an ER programme.

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