

Effects of Extensive Reading on Students' Writing Ability in an EFL Class

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Theoretical rationale and research evidence from L1, ESL and EFL supports the relationships between reading and writing as well as the advantages of encouraging students to read as much as possible to enhance their writing ability. This paper gives details of a 15 week reading experiment with a group of Thai EFL learners who were encouraged to read and, by the end, were then sub-divided for statistical analysis on the basis of their reading amounts. Designated 'high' and 'low' groups, this represented the volume of their exposure to comprehensible input. All subjects had their essay writing abilities measured every five weeks throughout the entire engagement with simplified reading books. Research results along with a discussion of the results provide theoretical as well as unique characteristics of low-ability learners and reasons why their writing abilities did not improve despite additional reading involvement over the four months.

Key words: extensive reading, reading comprehension, writing ability, reading amount, EFL, low proficiency, reading-writing connection

INTRODUCTION

If any structured comparison is to be made reading and writing must have several aspects in common. Olsen in her book, for example, contends that features such as the cognitive strategies underlying the procedures of the two

skills require “planning and setting goals, tapping prior knowledge, asking questions and making connections, constructing the gist, monitoring, revising meaning, reflecting and relating and evaluating” (Olson, 2003, p. 17). With regard to meaning construction, the reading and writing also share similar processes such as drafting, redrafting and negotiation with each other and so both the reader and writer should be keeping each other in mind (Olson, 2003). Apart from that, the proficient reader and writer automatically use their skill, which means they should both read and write actively and strategically. Similarly, Tierney and Shanahan (1991, cited in Olson, 2003) believe that both the reader and writer need to make sense either of or with print through activating their prior knowledge of the topic and genre, experience, expectations of the reader, writer and culture, and contextual frames of reference. Overall, it seems that the reader and writer adopt similar processes while performing tasks including having confidence and motivation in order to read and write effectively.

As for the pedagogical context, a reader will instinctively pick up vocabulary and language structures while reading and should be able to make use of them in their writing work. Consequently, apart from teaching writing skills separately, a number of teachers make use of reading as a means to enhance the writing ability of students. For that reason, they create various strategies to combine the two skills in order to simultaneously achieve their goals of producing not only a skilful reader but also a capable writer. This is apparent as a wide range of combined techniques are available in countless commercial books and in particular on the Internet. The underlying practice is obvious, use reading as a resource to elaborate on ideas to enhance writing tasks while at the same time use writing as a learning tool in teaching reading strategies.

Reading widely and in large quantities or so called “extensive reading” (ER) is frequently recommended by well known reading experts such as Grabe (2002), Eskey (2002), Nuttall (1996), Day and Bamford (1998) as well as ER researchers as an easy but powerful means to enhance quite a few language skills. Existing evidence relative to improvements in writing by

means of ER have been reported both in surveys and experimental research with various age groups of learners in the L1, ESL, and EFL contexts. From surveys, for example, many studies have reported a positive relationship between the amount of reading students had made and their writing abilities. Among these, Janopoulos (1986) reported that writing proficiency was positively correlated with the quantity of time students studying at a U.S. university spent on pleasure reading but not on L1 pleasure reading. Likewise, numerous studies such as those by, to name the more prominent ones Kaplan and Palhinda (1981), Janopoulos (1986), Salyer (1987), Polak and Krashen (1988), Tudor and Hafiz (1989), Hafiz and Tudor (1990), Constantino (1995) and Al-Rajhi (2004) have also identified similar findings. However, a number of studies particularly in the EFL contexts, found no relationships between reading and writing, *e.g.* Lai (1993b), Caruso (1994) and Krashen (1996).

My interest was to learn, in a context where a learners' proficiency, motivation, social group and culture does not help their ability to produce effective written work, whether the writers' ability can be enhanced through exposure to different volumes of language input. In particular, such surroundings had neither instruction nor practice at writing performed on a regular basis. The purpose of this study is to examine whether the writing ability of non-English major EFL learners can be improved through reading a large number of understandable material. The focus of the investigation was on the influences of amounts of language input on the participants' writing ability. To reach the conclusion four aspects of reading and writing abilities are to be addressed: reading amounts, improvement of reading comprehension, development patterns, and relations between reading amounts and writing scores. The research findings should shed light on the extent of the contribution ER makes towards improving the writing ability of low proficiency EFL learners in this specific context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The combined knowledge of theoretical grounds and research evidence provides useful insight into the complex relation between reading and writing performance. On a theoretical basis, factors of conditioning by readers as well as the society and culture in which they reside may have contributed and shaped their language competence, particularly their writing ability, to a greater degree. According to Brown (2001, p. 334), writing is “culturally specific, learned behaviours” whereas, for Canale and Swain (1980), writing should be viewed as a manifestation of, as well as the process of manifesting, sociolinguistic, strategic, and grammatical competences, mediated by the use of orthographic systems. The implication here is that predicting and estimating writing ability is a much more complex phenomenon than just depending exclusively on exposure to language input. Accordingly, at least the writer's nature and motivation, their sociolinguistic and culture, and the volume of exposure to language input all play important parts in assisting them to formulate a piece of written work. The fundamental *schemata* could possibly cause the writer to choose specific rhetorical elements appropriate to the target readers as well as the text genres to make the message understandable in a particular context. The writer's experience is thus essential and beneficial as, according to Silva and Matsuda (2002), writing is always embedded in a rhetorical situation, *i.e.* the combined elements in the context of writing. The fundamental factors adhered to each writer would then possibly affect their written products and could eventually help justify the case when the reading and writing relation was found to breakdown.

In terms of research evidence, the majority of ER research concentrated more on the quantities and length of time readers were exposed to language input and so the two factors are mainly used as a basis to compare the effects of ER on a reader's writing ability. Different contextual ESL and EFL studies have reported inconsistent results regarding the influences of reading on writing abilities of learners across different age groups. With regard to the extent or volume of exposure to the target language of learners, among the

studies that found positive relationships between reading amounts and writing scores there was reported a wide range of quantities and durations of exposure to input. Given that more emphasis had been placed on quantities of reading engagement alone, the writing abilities were reported to have been increased based on various ranges of exposure to the target input. The following studies are examples of this and are ordered from the least amount of reading upwards. Hong Kong students who read 14.2 graded readers over four weeks and had score gains of only 1.1 in a reading comprehension test did show an increase in their writing scores (Lai, 1993a). In Japan, 100 second year university students who read for a total of 90 minutes per week and read an average of 759 pages outside the class were found to have improved their writing ability (Hayashi, 1999). Mason and Krashen (1997) also report similar findings from 104 English major students reading an average of 1,500 pages of graded readers and gaining scores in writing with impressionistic measures. In another case, Japanese college students who read an average of 2,300 pages over three semesters without any practice or additional instruction in writing showed an improvement in their writing ability over the groups with only writing practice (Mason, 2004).

With regards to the length of time spent reading, empirical evidence drawn from experiments, particularly with ESL learners, reports an improvement in writing as a result of engaging in wide reading, even of a relatively short duration. In an as short as a ninety-hour study, for example, Hafiz and Tudor (1990) found that there were significant gains in both the fluency and accuracy of the use of expressions by the subjects, though not in the range of structures used. Advice drawn from the research is that ER can provide learners with a set of linguistic models, which may then by a process of over-learning, be assimilated and incorporated into the learners' active L2 repertoire. In their other study, Tudor and Hafiz (1989) set up a three-month ER programme using 'graded reading books' to improve the learners' language competency. Results demonstrated an improvement in the learners' reading and writing skills and a simpler but more correct use of syntax in the L2. Similarly, in a one-semester reading class of adult lower intermediate

students in the U.S. Constantino (1995) reported that as the course progressed, more and more students not only wrote journal entries but the length of these entries increased.

While positive gains in writing scores resulting from reading a lot of books have been reported more often with ESL learners, for EFL learners more negative results have been revealed both from short- and long-term reading engagements in several contexts. For example, Lee and Krashen (1996) found that a group of 318 high school students in Taiwan had a positive but very modest relationship between measures of free voluntary reading and their writing ability. In a nine-week experiment by Caruso (1994) eight classes of 'Spanish 4' students read and summarised a variety of interesting material during the first 15 minutes of each class while the control groups spent the first 15 minutes of class practicing productive skills involving speaking or writing. After the experiment the writing complexity of the texts produced by the students was evaluated comparing pre- and post-test mean T-unit lengths. Statistics showed that there was no significant difference in the writing scores of students in any of the groups. Also, Lai (1993b) reported that four out of eight groups of 345 Hong Kong secondary students who read extensively for one year gained vocabulary recognition, listening comprehension, and reading speed; however, they did not outperform the control groups in the areas of reading comprehension and writing ability. Over a two lesson period the experimental groups were taught intensive reading for one lesson, and the second was spent reading on their own in a low-filtered environment, whereas those in the control groups were taught intensive reading for both lessons. Measures of sentence writings showed that two of the ER groups significantly outperformed the control groups but two did worse. Based on this evidence it is not clear whether repeatedly encountering numerous words and grammatical structures through ER does contribute to the improvement of writing ability in specific groups of learners.

Previous findings report both positive and negative relationships depending on the quantity of reading and length of exposure to the language. Nevertheless, inconsistent results taken from just a part of the empirical evidence on what

is known about the relationship between reading comprehensible texts and writing competency seem to suggest that there is no systematic correlation between the two variables. This seems applicable particularly among EFL learners and, as a result, leads to verification of the phenomenon through this study with the aim to scrutinise the relation of reading and writing in the context where much less supporting factors are contributed.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Study Sample

The experiment was conducted on 34 second year non-English major undergraduates from a random selection made among those students who had registered for the 'Fundamental Reading' course at Nakhon Pathom Rajabhat University in Thailand in the academic year 2007. The participants were not taking any other English-related courses during the experimental period. Most students were post-beginners of English but five were considered slightly stronger. These students came from middle-to low-income families so their chance of exposure to English outside the classroom such as through satellite TV, English material and media was rare and also their motivation to become proficient readers and writers was also relatively low.

Instruments

The instruments utilised for data collection relating to reading ability were a researcher constructed reading comprehension test and a reading log for recording details of reading. A semi-structured interview script was also adopted to verify the information recorded by the participants' reading engagement. As for measurement of writing ability, four writing prompts were used. All instruments were initially verified by language experts in the field and tried out with students of similar backgrounds.

Research Procedures

Orientation Stage: Prior to the experiment all participants were given an orientation, covering such areas as how to choose an appropriate book, how to read for pleasure, how to record their reading, the teacher expectations, and purposes of the interview.

Reading Engagement Tasks: ER tasks were integrated into a normal weekly three-consecutive fifty-minute period reading course taught by the researcher. The reading material participants in the study used consisted of a reading textbook developed by English teachers from the English Programme and their own choice from an appropriate range of simplified fiction and non-fiction books available. In detail, the first part which was used for reading strategy instruction, the second and sometimes third for motivating activities, *e.g.* sharing what they had read, exchanging views on characters, plots, genre, lessons from the stories and collecting some new words. The remaining time was used for silent reading of simplified materials of interest. The readers were also required to read as much as possible out of class and to keep a record of the amount of reading they had undertaken.

Data Collection

The effects of ER activities, on both the reading and writing abilities of the participants, were collected concurrently and analysed quantitatively. Data for the reading abilities was composed of the combined reading amounts and scores derived from the reading comprehension ability tests, with the former having greater emphasis as they were used to identify the extent to which each participant was exposed to the language input. The reading amount of each participant was totalled at the end of each five week period of the reading engagement. This gave three sets of data that were then used for further comparison with their own writing scores which had also been collected concurrently. In addition, the final reading amounts of individual participants were used to create two individual reader groups, designated as

either 'high' and 'low' reading groups. Data representing the writing ability of the participants consisted of four sets of writing scores collected in the same sessions as those of the reading amounts. Scores of each piece of written work were assigned and averaged by two trained raters analytically using the same system to eliminate bias. The inter-rater reliability values of the two sets of scores from the Cronbach correlation coefficient was 0.99.

The writing tests were administered as time series, each at five weeks apart, while the reading comprehension tests were administered only twice, as a pre-test and post-test. This was to avoid the effects any skills the test takers might adopt when they experienced typical repeated questions regarding the reading tests and as such obtained reading scores might not reflect the true abilities of the test takers. With the narrative writing tests, the fact that there was neither instruction nor practice and the contents of the four prompts, though similar in terms of genre, were different in each testing situation meant the time-series collection of writing scores was seen as not interfering with the writing capability of the participants in this study.

Data Analysis

The participants created their own reading records by keeping a written log of the number of pages they had covered. The total of the three reading amounts of an individual participant were used for the comparison with their simultaneously collected writing scores. The Repeated Measures Analysis of Covariance or RMANCOVA (Johnson & Wichern, 1998) was adopted to determine the developmental patterns from the data while the correlation coefficient (Dowdy & Wearde, 1985) was for measurement of degree of association of the relationship between reading amounts and writing scores. The pre and post-tests reading comprehension scores were also divided according to the reading group that the participants had been placed in and finally analysed through a t-test to measure their statistical differences. Overall, four sets of data were analysed through different statistics to address their corresponding research questions. In all the cases of the findings of

reading amounts; differences between pre and post reading comprehension tests; developmental patterns and relationships between reading amounts and writing scores, the data was classified into the two reading sub-groups of 'high' and 'low.'

RESULTS

Reading Amount

At the end of the 15 weeks, all recorded sheets of the individual reading amounts were totaled. Calculation of data revealed that the lowest and highest quantities of reading were 79 and 481 pages. Based on an appropriate value of 250 pages the readers were subsequently separated into two equal groups of 17 readers labeled as 'high' and 'low' readers. The 'high' group read an average of 364 pages or around three to four pages a day. The second group of readers, 'low,' read 147 pages or around one and a half pages a day. Details of reading done at the three and five week time points are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Reading Amounts of the High and Low Group

Data Collection Series	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	S.D.	
High	Time 1	17	23	149	68.18	34.417
	Time 2	17	54	306	172.59	69.507
	Time 3	17	252	481	364.35	52.817
Low	Time 1	17	19	60	34.88	12.155
	Time 2	17	46	141	82.59	26.975
	Time 3	17	79	247	147.41	49.223

Reading Comprehension Ability

The subsequent division of the participants into the 'high' and 'low'

groups was based on their reading amounts so the independent t-test statistics were performed to ensure the two groups were not different in their reading comprehension at the start of the 15 week study. As shown in Table 2, the t-test p-value of 0.123 of the pre-tests indicated that the high and low groups were not different in their reading comprehension ability from the beginning whereas in the post-tests (0.003), they were ($p < 0.05$).

TABLE 2
Comparison of Pre and Post-test of Reading Comprehension

Test Type	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances			t-test for Equality of Means				
	Variance	F	Sig.	t	df.	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Pre-tests (High & Low group)	Equal variances assumed	2.191	0.149	-1.584	32	0.123	-1.94	1.226
Post-tests (High & Low group)	Equal variances assumed	1.118	0.298	0.298	32	0.003*	0.298	0.298

* $p < 0.05$

Further analysis of dependent t-test to compare the pre and post-test scores of the participants in each group revealed that the compared scores of the high group were significantly different at a statistical level of 0.05 whereas those of the low group were not. It can be seen, therefore, that low and high quantities of exposure to language input does have a different affect on the reading comprehension of the reader. Although the results of the participants' reading comprehension are not the focus of this study they provide useful evidence for further analysis: the high group improved their understanding statistically whereas the low group did not. The rather strong (1.10) effect size of the practicality significance signifies the effectiveness of the research results.

Writing Ability

According to Table 3, writing scores of the participants in both groups showed an increasing pattern. However, for the high group, the range of writing scores was narrower than that of the low group although their reading amounts at three series were much higher, *i.e.* 68, 172, and 364 pages compared to 34, 82, 147 pages of the low group.

TABLE 3
Descriptive Statistics of Writing Ability Tests

Group	Test	N	Mean	S.D.	Std. Error Mean
High	Pre	17	47.59	6.246	1.515
	1 st	17	50.94	6.129	1.486
	2 nd	17	51.97	7.821	1.897
	3 rd	17	52.32	7.506	1.821
Low	Pre	17	41.71	7.726	1.874
	1 st	17	42.09	7.523	1.825
	2 nd	17	46.21	8.378	2.032
	3 rd	17	45.44	10.247	2.485

Further computation of *post hoc* RMANCOVA analysis to examine the mean difference of writing tasks performed by readers in both groups at the three time points indicated that, for the high group, all the immediate pairs of writing scores were not significantly different. However, for the low group, scores of the first writing task were significantly different from those of the second and third tasks.

Based on the findings, it should be noted here that while reading approximately 100 pages could statistically increase the writing scores of the low group this was not observed in the high group. In addition, the mean scores of writing of those in the high group who read twice as many pages as the low group did not show any significant difference. As a result, it seems that the findings do not appear to support any positive connection between reading input and writing production.

Developmental Patterns of Reading Amounts and Writing Scores

Using SPSS version 16 for the trend analysis among all the categorised data of the reading amounts and writing scores collected over the treatment period, there is no apparent systematic pattern of development. That is, the plotted graphs representing both groups of readers' data showed that at any reading amount completed by the two groups of readers over time their writing scores could be inconsistently high or low (as shown in Figures 1 & 2). In addition, the r square levels of regression indicated that reading amounts only predicted writing scores 3% of the time for the low group and 8% for the high group. This is similar to the results revealed by the *post hoc* analysis of RMANCOVA and correlation coefficients (to be subsequently described).

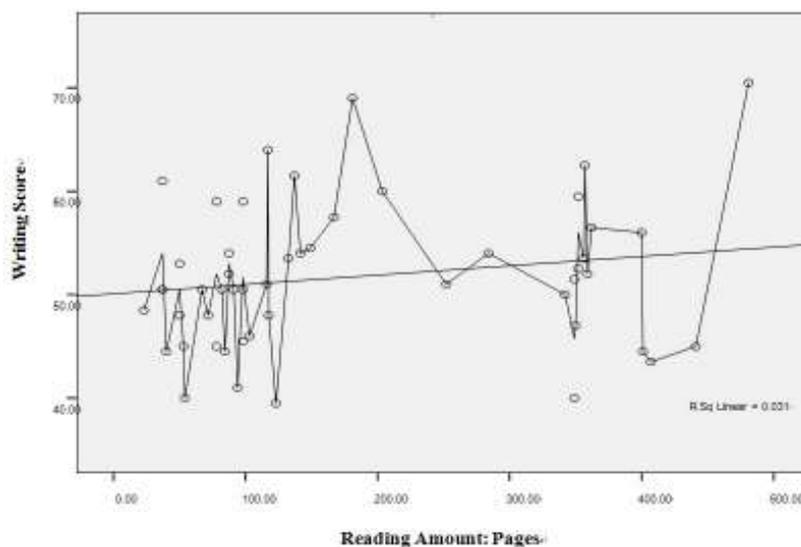


FIGURE 1
Developmental Pattern of Reading Amounts and Writing Scores in the High Group

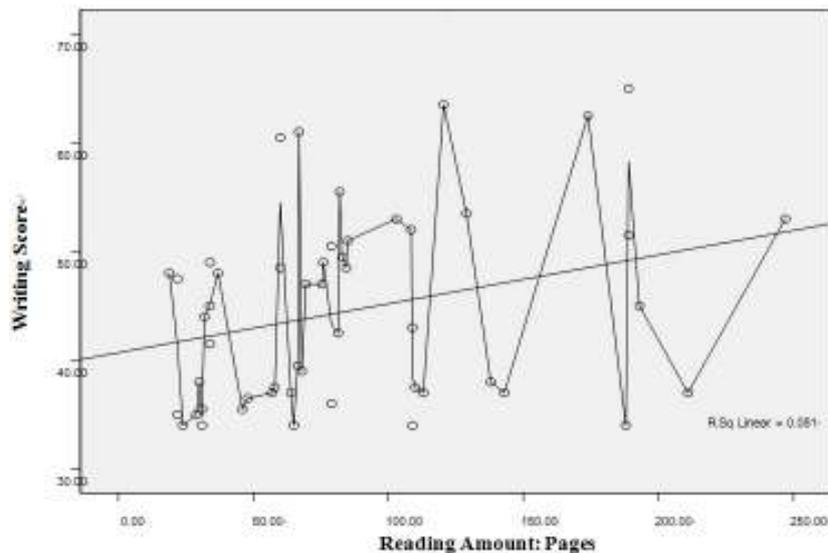


FIGURE 2
Developmental Pattern of Reading Amounts and Writing Scores in the Low Group

Relationships between Reading Amount and Writing Score

The correlation coefficient was adopted to calculate the relationships between the amounts of reading and the writing scores. According to the coefficient values relationships between the two variables rarely existed. Among the six corresponding pairs of reading amounts and writing mean scores, only one pair, *i.e.* the second series of reading amounts and writing mean scores correlated at a moderate level ($r = 0.543$). The other two series had no statistical correlation sign and the values tended to show more of a reverse sign between the two variables such that while the reading amounts did increase in relation to longer periods of reading engagement, nonetheless, the correlation values kept decreasing, *e.g.* from 0.417, 0.534, to 0.246, for the high group, and from 0.356, 0.273, to 0.187, for the low group, respectively as shown in Tables 4 and 5.

TABLE 4
Correlation Matrix of Reading Amounts and Writing Scores of the High Group

	1 st Reading Amounts	2 nd Reading Amounts	3 rd Reading Amounts
1 st Writing	0.356		
2 nd Writing	0.530*	0.273	
3 rd Writing	0.432	0.050	0.187

* p < 0.05

TABLE 5
Correlation Matrix of Reading Amounts and Writing Scores of the Low Group

	1 st Reading Amounts	2 nd Reading Amounts	3 rd Reading Amounts
1 st Writing	0.417		
2 nd Writing	0.426	0.543*	
3 rd Writing	0.134	0.395	0.246

* p < 0.05

The findings derived from quantitative investigation through test of means equality, trend analysis, and correlation coefficients suggest that reading amounts and writing ability generally neither increase nor decrease concurrently. In the case of the correlation, for example, only one pair, out of six reading and writing data collected at the same time point correlated at a moderate level. Such a relationship occurred when reading was done at 82 pages on average. The time series analysis also confirmed inconsequential relationships between reading and writing as no systematic pattern of these two sets of variables was apparent and furthermore, the *post hoc* analysis from RMANCOVA has provided some additional evidence that among all the immediate pairs of writing mean scores only two sets of writing tasks produced when the reading was less than 100 pages were found to be significantly different but reading at a higher extent was not.

The suggestion from this study is that although some small degree of relationship has been found between reading amounts and writing scores the overall findings from the three statistical computations do not support the assertion that a higher exposure to language input leads to an improvement in writing ability of EFL readers. It is impossible, therefore, to estimate statistically the exact amount of reading that will affect the readers' writing

ability. It is only safe to surmise that the reading amount may possibly be one indicator that can be used to predict the writing ability of low proficiency EFL readers. There could be other factors that contribute more effectively to the writing competency of these learners.

DISCUSSION

Justifications for the inconsistent connection between reading and writing abilities of low proficiency EFL learners are unquestionably not simply due to the language input to which they have been exposed but rather to other underlying theory-related dimensions. Factors which will be elaborated below as possible influences on the progress of the participants' writing competence include language input, language production, conscious language learning, language proficiency and principles of ER.

With reference to language input, although the findings revealed by this study do not seem congruent with the present beliefs of the connections between reading and writing, particularly that of Krashen (1987) in his Input Hypothesis, it is worth reconsidering whether or not the theory's fundamental conditions have been met. According to Krashen, (1984), the most influential theorist who supports ER as a way to improve writing competence, "writing ability is not learned but is acquired *via* extensive reading in which the focus of the reader is on the message, *i.e.* reading for genuine interest and/or pleasure" (p. 23). In addition, he asserts that the acquisition of language will be most effective when the readers' filters are down so that input can be acquired unconsciously. Most importantly, the language to be exposed to must be at the $i + 1$ level, *i.e.* just a little above the readers' language ability. If Krashen's criteria need to be achieved to successfully increase the readers' writing ability then this study has provided almost the entire necessary environment appropriate to the context. For instance, the environment encompassed various strategies to reduce the participants' anxiety including allowing them to choose appropriate books on their own, not testing what

was read and focusing on general comprehension only. In addition, evidence from the perception surveys showed that readers from both groups rated enjoyment and pleasure from reading at moderate to high degrees of magnitude across the 15 weeks, with the higher amount of engagement corresponding with the higher degrees of enjoyment.

In the study the one condition that was not easy to manage was having readers receive $i + 1$ input that was generally comprehensible to them. The main reasons for this incomplete provision stems from the relatively low English proficiency of most participants. Although all readers started their reading at the “beginner” level, many still found the books too difficult to read extensively. Thus, these readers only partially understood the stories causing diminished enjoyment. All readers from the low reading group and some from the high group revealed that they had reading problems, especially with vocabulary, which affected their understanding of the stories. Simply put, even though they chose books at the beginning level they were still finding more than ten unknown words in a page. Furthermore, the requirement of only needing to acquire a general understanding from the texts allowed readers to only superficially read stories. Such practice across the treatment period, even with some increased vocabulary, may not have been adequate to enable them to reach the programme expected threshold level of producing language at the sentence level. The two constraints might, therefore, explain the inadequacy of meeting Krashen’s assertion and a major justification for the lack of the relationship between reading and writing.

Language input alone may not be sufficient to explain the growth of the participants’ writing ability. Language output or the production of written work may be required to coordinate and confirm language learned from the reading engagement. According to Silva and Matsuda (2002) understanding some of the writing strategies through practice is helpful especially for less experienced writers. In fact, a number of ER studies; for example Mason (2004) and Caruso (1994), have proven that writing practice does partly contribute to the improvement in a readers’ writing ability. On the other hand studies by Mason and Krashen (2004) also claim writing progress despite any

formal instruction or practice.

The idea of writing practice is in line with the Output Hypothesis proposed by Swain (1999) in so far as the production of language is necessary because while creating a piece of work the writer can at the same time both hypothesize and take notice of the language they are using in their writing. Without the opportunity for decision making in selecting words to create longer sentences it is highly likely that the language is not adequately noticed and besides, the acquired knowledge a reader gains from comprehensible input could be easily lost. In this study, writing was neither taught formally nor practiced across the period of experiment and it was ensured that all participants did not have any writing exercises of their own. In fact, it was the intention of the researcher not to have the participants practice writing since the purpose was to examine whether or not reading alone could help enhance their writing skills. A consequence of such practice would cause several participants to get stuck while doing the writing test since the words needed may not spring to mind to adequately express their desired concept. Evidence from work by Yamazaki (1996) has demonstrated that nine weeks of engagement in reading 18 graded readers with a 26% gain in vocabulary did not greatly increase written competency because, according to results from a delayed post-test, there was a vocabulary loss, though not to pre-test levels. If such acquisition of language is so delicate, it could help explain why the readers did not significantly improve their writing ability.

While exposure to language input is believed to unconsciously contribute to language enhancement in general, awareness of what is being read also plays a crucial role in improving one's writing ability. Motivational ER activities which emphasised playing with and recycling words and sentences found in stories read are considered as conscious learning. However, according to Harmer (2001) the noticed language infers neither the acquisition of language nor the ability to use it immediately. The spontaneous production of the acquired or learned language takes a longer period since it needs sufficient processing time in the learners' memory through noticing and may be restructured before being available for use. In addition, according

to Batstone (1994) there are stages when the noticed language is structured and restructured before the learner finally adjusts it to their existing hypothesis of language. In this study, conscious learning of language was not intensely or regularly done over the 15 weeks of experiment as there was a wide range of activities to cover and as such the language students were learning formally in class might not have been able to reproduce the written form spontaneously or in a short period. As a result, such activities may have had very little impact on the written performance of the participants, if none at all. It is possible that, if the tasks were given greater emphasis, they might trigger the writers' repertoire to the point where they can produce language of their own. The time-consuming process of competency building does help to explain why the correlation between the reading amounts and writing scores of the participants in either group scarcely exists.

On the whole, the previously mentioned theoretical influences of language input (which was not strong enough due to insufficient volume and comprehension), language output (which was not performed on a regular basis) and conscious learning (which was not done intensely and regularly) did considerably affect the progress of the participants' writing ability. From the researcher's experience with EFL learners in this context, believably, the primary problem of such scarcity of language intake lies in the participants' low proficiency which subsequently distorted the influence of reading on writing. It was also apparent from the written work submitted that almost half the readers were not yet capable of constructing basic sentences in English. This is possible since previously most participants had neither been taught nor practiced writing in class, so they had no background on how a piece of written work could be organised or even how a sentence could be formulated. Thus, it would probably take them longer than a period of several months or maybe even years to acquire or learn how to put words into logical sentences. The findings confirm the remark made by Nuttall (1996) stating that "the improvement in writing of readers who read in large quantity may be noticeable in a year or two, not overnight."

The last source of scarceness for the reading/writing relationship is

believed to stem from the salient principles of ER. It appears that the pleasurable nature of engagement in stories with no comprehension check, the low-anxiety scheme applied and the choice of texts, all combined, may not contribute to growth in writing competence. It was apparent from the interviews that while reading, the reader focused more on plots and roles that characters play in the stories and not on the language. Most readers generally created pictures in their minds while their eyes went rapidly through sentence after sentence, particularly during the climax. Some participants continued reading but only with a general understanding, *i.e.* they focused mainly on key words and ignored grammatical structures so it was seen that in those cases, vocabulary or language structures found in the books were not taken in comprehensibly. Those who just passed their eyes over words without any genuine understanding certainly did not learn them to the point where they could make use of the vocabulary, although they found the words repeatedly. It is possible that these readers' incidental and fragile learning from comprehensible language may not be strong enough to enable the production of written language. Although acquisition may occur at any moment, this may not happen overnight. Otherwise, it is possible that there is a threshold level of reading input that facilitates the reproduction of language in written form. As a final point, the text genre could be counted as another aspect of simplified books that affected the writing ability of a reader. Most participants chose different genres of books to read each time they changed a book. Once they had finished a detective story and turned to a historical book they were encountering a different set of vocabulary although the overall structure may have remained the same. Generally students who have read texts of the same genre will find their reading much easier when on their second and third books.

In summary, inadequate volume, repetition and noticing of language input, and lack of language production, when combined with the low expectations from the programme due to the pleasurable nature of ER, are major sources of inconsistency in the reading and writing relationship. More studies should, therefore, be initiated, in particular the aspects being deteriorated in this study.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

It is apparent from the discussion that there were some conditions insufficiently fulfilled in the experiment particularly with regard to the participants' reading engagement plus the environment of EFL learners. Much of these if they could have been improved may affect the writing ability of the learners differently. More studies of similar research design should, therefore, be conducted so EFL teachers can be certain they can make use of the two skills more fruitfully. These are:

1. Students should read regularly so that the language subconsciously acquired is then encountered repeatedly and transferred systematically to both the short- and long-term memory.
2. Texts chosen by the readers themselves should be understandable, preferably up to 90% comprehension.
3. Students may have to stick to the same genre of text for up to three books before moving on to a higher level so that vocabulary of that particular genre are met repetitively and eventually learned.
4. Writing should be done both immediately, *e.g.* by writing a summary of the text, and regularly, *e.g.* through writing journals, so that the acquired language is sufficiently used and recycled.

CONCLUSION

Results from this research seem to have depreciated the theoretical and natural association between reading and writing ability as revealed by a number of studies of L1, ESL and EFL. For the high reading group the reading comprehension ability, which was proved to be statistically enhanced, did not facilitate writing skills whereas, for the low reading group, their inability to understand texts even at the beginning level over the 15 weeks of study, was only found to boost their written work to a certain level. Findings

of this study alone may only lead to a partial summary that the unmanageable low ability and low motivation of learners impede their understanding of language and thus causing infrequent and low volume of reading engagement. This, in turn, justifies why the belief in noticing of language and the unconscious acquisition of language do not seemingly take effect in enhancing the learners' writing ability as being theorized. To genuinely understand the power of reading on EFL learners' written work more studies with similar backgrounds but with participant being exposed to more volume of language input is profoundly demanded as the results are of great value particularly to EFL teachers.

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