Examining the Utilisation of Extensive Reading from the Perspective of ESL Students' Reader Response

Thangam Raja Gopal[1], Mahendran Maniam[1], Shereen Shamala Benjamin Jeyaraja[1], Charanjit Kaur Swaran Singh[1], Revathi Gopal[1], Marina Melissa Ng[1]

[1] Faculty of Languages and Communication, Sultan Idris Education University, Malaysia

Correspondence: Mahendran Maniam, Faculty of Languages and Communication, Sultan Idris Education University, Malaysia.

Abstract

This qualitative experimental study examines the utilization of an Extensive Reading Programme from the perspective of ESL students' reader responses. It seeks to examine the kind of written responses produced by the mediocre and low proficiency ESL students based on the Reader Response Approach, the outcome of using Reader Response Approach in the Extensive Reading Programme, and the ESL students' experiences towards the Extensive Reading Programme. The study was conducted for a duration of three months in a secondary school. The participants of this study included an ESL teacher and six Form 4 students, comprising three females and three males. The researcher documented data through four sources: classroom observations, interviews with the teacher and students, response journals, and examination marks. Findings indicated that the Extensive Reading Programme and the use of the Reader Response Approach enabled the students to come up with various statements and benefited their language development. The findings of the study suggest that the Extensive Reading Programme and Reader Response Approach should be a part of the curriculum in secondary schools as they help in improving students' language proficiency. The study proposes a guideline for implementing an Extensive Reading Programme and Reader Response Approach in the language classroom, which ESL educators can adopt.

Keywords: extensive reading programme, reading interest, reader response approach, reader response, motivation, response journals

1. Introduction

Reading has always been regarded as a desirable activity for people of all ages, be it a child or an adult. It is part of literacy and essential for everybody, especially in the 21st century. One has to read messages and news from social media, such as Telegram, WhatsApp, WeChat, emails and online newspapers. Grabe and Stoller (2020) contended that reading ability is only likely to develop gradually when L2 learners are continually exposed to abundant, meaningful input within their linguistic competence or extensive reading. In addition, students also develop broader and more profound knowledge about the world, which is essential in relating and connecting texts and people (Renandya, 2016). However, the sad truth is that many students do not engage in extensive reading. Technological advancement and the media have made students read fewer books (Baba & Affendi, 2020; Florence, Adesola, Alaba & Adewumi, 2017). Zahrah Yunos (2020) lamented that the average Malaysian only allocates three hours a week for reading. In contrast, people in other countries spend an average of 10 hours a week reading. It is an arduous task getting more Malaysians to read for pleasure and gain knowledge, despite the government and various individuals doing their part to boost the reading habit.

The Education Ministry implemented a reading programme NILAM (Nadi Ilmu Amalan Membaca), or The Pulse of Knowledge in 1998 to nurture the reading habit among school children. The programme has been in effect till now. Although the programme is indeed an excellent platform to motivate students to read extensively, the library record, which is a testimony, shows otherwise as only a limited number of students borrow books for this purpose. It is also difficult to verify whether students had actually read the books because their summaries could have been fabricated or copied from other sources (Navinder Kaur, 2015). Many researchers perceive NILAM as unsuccessful as students' involvement is still at a minimum level (Ghazali & Habil, 2020; Navinder Kaur, 2015; Zainol Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi & Low, 2011). In a survey carried out by Bahagian Teknologi Pendidikan (2017), 260 respondents

from secondary schools cited many reasons for the lack of interest in reading: no time, reading is boring, uninteresting books, non-conducive or noisy environment, cannot afford to buy books, not enough books, a lot of housework/homework, not interested in reading since young and no encouragement from parents/teachers. All these studies and reports conclude that students do not take the NILAM programme seriously and do not read extensively. Something needs to be done to rekindle students' interest in reading.

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a worldwide recognised study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The reading component in PISA assesses students' ability to read and apply their knowledge in real-world settings by engaging in higher-order thinking skills. However, when we examine the PISA results, it is evident that Malaysian students have not fully developed the skills mentioned above. This denotes that Malaysian secondary school students are lacking in terms of displaying higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) even though HOTS has been given prominence in the Malaysia Education

Blueprint (MEB) 2013-2025 (MEB, 2013). Students need exposure to be able to answer HOTS questions effectively. One way to encourage them is to give them an avenue to write based on their reading. Teachers can implement this through extensive reading. When students read the materials, they are expected to argue, criticise or come up with their own views and perspective and not take everything at face value. English language teachers can integrate these skills during their reading lessons.

1.1 Problem Statement

Extensive Reading (ER) practices in Malaysia and other countries have been declining among young adults, labelled as 'reluctant readers' (Bennett, 2016), in the past few decades. These secondary school students who are burdened with a hefty homework load or pressure to do well in public examinations, have a preconceived mindset that they do not really need to read in English except for academic purposes (Muhamad et al., 2020; Mustafa, 2018; Ahmed, 2016). It is unfortunate that despite the numerous benefits that ER in English can offer, in terms of improving word knowledge and overall language proficiency, it remains unpopular in the Malaysian secondary education as the students fail to envisage that ER is an exciting endevour that can fill in their free time and widen their knowledge. This negative attitude must be conquered to create a scholarly society which would ascertain the aspirations of MEB 2013 – 2025 (MEB, 2013).

1.2 Research Objectives

The main purpose of this study is to observe the use of an Extensive Reading Programme (ERP) in engaging ESL students to read and examining their responses to the short stories as in the Reader Response Approach (RRA). It is hoped that this programme would encourage the learners to be independent and resourceful in their reading in the target language and develop their reading skills in order to empower themselves. The objectives of this study are as listed below:

1. To examine the types of written responses produced by the mediocre and low proficiency students when they are engaged in the reading of short stories based on the RRA.
2. To ascertain the outcome of using RRA in the ERP.
3. To find out the ESL mediocre and low proficiency students' experiences towards the ERP.

1.3 Research Questions

In order to achieve its objectives, three research questions were formulated to guide this research:

1. What types of written responses are produced by the mediocre and low proficiency students when they are engaged in the reading of short stories based on the RRA?
2. What is the outcome of using the RRA in the ERP?
3. What are the experiences of the ESL mediocre and low proficiency students towards the ERP?

1.4 Significance of the Research

The significance of this study is to examine how ERP and RRA can motivate students to read materials in the target language as well as improve their proficiency level. It can be a stepping-stone to improve their reading skills. Students will not be afraid of reading comprehension passages. They will be able to comprehend the passages and answer questions about them. On top of that, they will also be able to answer questions of higher- order thinking skills which is part of the English Language Syllabus, as well as the aspiration of the MEB 2013 – 2025 (MEB, 2013).

Moreover, when these students embark on their tertiary education, they will be able to read extensively as constant reading will help students to be prepared to deal with academic texts at higher learning institutions. First, the findings of this research will benefit ESL learners in general as they will understand that conducting ER and recording responses in response journals will enable them to improve their language proficiency. The findings will also provide educators and researchers insights into issues that should be considered to ensure students' involvement in the reading process. The insights derived from this study have the potential of informing practitioners in the ESL context about instructional practices and procedures involved when using an ERP and RRA to motivate ESL learners to read. These insights have the potential for underpinning pedagogical practices that engage learners in a meaningful reading environment.

1.5 Limitations of the Research

This study examines the use of an ERP and RRA in the ESL context. This programme emphasises the benefits of the ERP and RRA as input for learners' English Language learning and skills development. The researcher could only carry out the research for three months due to the students' busy schedule, examinations, and various extra-curricular activities. Nevertheless, exciting reading materials downloaded from the internet were used to motivate the students to read. The materials were given to the students, and the sampling from only one school, that is, a vernacular school was chosen. The scope of this study was only limited to six students. As only six students were involved in this research, the findings cannot be generalised for the whole population.

2. Literature Review

Research suggests that ER is an effective and promising way of developing foreign language abilities (Birketveit et al., 2018; Yamashita, 2015). Over the years, a plethora of studies have revealed that ER enables students to reap numerous linguistic benefits, including improved reading fluency (McLean & Rouault, 2017, Nakanishi, 2015), vocabulary acquisition (Ghazali & Habil, 2020; Suk, 2016; Webb & Chang, 2015), reading comprehension (Aka, 2019; Bahmani & Farvadin, 2017; Nakano, 2018; Shih et al., 2018; Suk, 2017) and better writing skills (Mermelstein, 2015; Park, 2016). Besides linguistic benefits, students also develop broader and more profound knowledge about the world, which is essential in relating and connecting with the text and other people (Renandya, 2016). Assaiqeli et al (2021) highlighted the importance of human factor in the functioning of language and emphasised the need to break away from grammar-based teaching (traditional grammar) to discourse-based language teaching (communicative grammar), where languaging rather than language should be the focus of language teaching and learning.

Information acquired through reading can also be reutilised in spoken or written communication when a reader-writer connection occurs during the reading process (Akin et al., 2015). ER provides opportunities for both English as a second language (ESL) and English as foreign language (EFL) students to engage in bountiful English reading materials in and out of the classroom. In addition, students who read extensively are likely to develop higher confidence and increased motivation for reading (Huang, 2015; Renandya & Jacobs, 2016). This will lead to foreign reading's motivation and attitude over time (Day, 2018). Bearing this in mind, the researcher used a variety of interesting short stories, which the students can use without much difficulty, as she wanted them to get into the reading habit.

Teachers' role is crucial as they can play the part of being models of enthusiastic reading of materials. As Nuttall (2005, p. 192) aptly puts it, "Reading is like an infectious disease: it is caught, not taught." ESL learners should be initiated into the ER world to get them to enjoy the pleasure of reading which indirectly will help enhance their language acquisition. After completing the reading, teachers should provide follow-up tasks and activities to monitor students' reading progress and engage them in further reading (Robb, 2015). Irvin, Meltzer, and Dukes (2015) asserted that students should learn to generate good questions in reference to their extensive reading endeavors. Questioning is effective because it provides students with a purpose for reading. It enables them to focus on reading and reviewing content, helps develop active thinking while reading, and relates new knowledge to what is already known. This practice is crucial in the English Language classrooms in Malaysia as many teachers and students scarcely engage in ER and meaningful follow-up activities. According to Paul Nation, teachers need to start ER in the classroom so that the learners do it and the teachers can ensure that it is being done. When they get motivated in reading, it can be conducted outside the classroom (Paul Nation, 2019, as cited in Iswandari & Paradita, 2019). It is important to nurture and develop inferential responses among students as it will aid in attaining critical and creative thinking skills which is the aspiration of MEB 2013 – 2025 (MEB, 2013). In view of this, it is necessary to conduct a study by incorporating ER and Reader Response Approach in the reading classrooms to see the outcome of such combination. In this study, the researcher is incorporating Reader Response Approach in her Extensive Reading Programme to get her students to read and engage in critical and creative thinking skills, which they will be doing

when they give their responses in the Response Journals.

The concept of ER in second language context is primarily supported by the Reading Hypothesis by Krashen (1982). This hypothesis states that the more we read in a second language, the better our progress in the language will be. The notion here is that we acquire language by understanding it. It is, therefore, essential to involve reading in the second language classroom not only to increase the understanding and knowledge of it but also to know how it is used in real-life situations. Besides that, the focus of ER is more on input rather than output. The success or failure of ER depends highly on the quantity and level of the input. In other words, the success and failure of ER depend on the selection of materials or texts. This is related to the Input Hypothesis, another hypothesis of Krashen's (1981) Second Language Acquisition Theory. In addition, Krashen (1985) asserts that the affective filter is a barrier towards the acquisition of a second language. Affective variables such as fear, nervousness, boredom, and resistance to change can prevent the acquisition of a second language by blocking the input from reaching the part of the brain responsible for second language acquisition (Krashen, 1982). In any aspect of education, it is always essential to create a safe, welcoming environment in which students can learn. In language learning and teaching, this may be especially important since, to take in and produce language, learners need to feel that they can make mistakes and take risks. This relates directly to Krashen's hypothesis of the affective filter.

Reader response emphasizes the role of the readers in interpreting texts. The theory rejects the idea that there is a single, fixed meaning ingrained in every literary text. On the contrary, this theory posits that each individual creates his or her own meaning through a "transaction" with the text based on personal experiences. Different individuals' interpretation of each text is subjective and unique as they bring their own emotions, concerns, life experiences, and knowledge to their reading. Thus, according to the Reader-Response Theory (RRT), the act of constructing meaning is a personal literary experience and a significant characteristic that connects the reader and the text. When people read for aesthetic purposes, they assume the identity of a book character by bringing in their meaning, personal histories, and feelings. This is referred to as reading for enjoyment or entertainment (Chou, 2015). In this study, the researcher is interested in examining the students' aesthetic reading of the stories, which entails an active imagination plus the desire to experience a relationship with the stories. Moreover, encouraging the reading of literary texts in ER allow students to immerse themselves in enjoying a text, learning empathy, cultivating creativity, and contributing to language improvement (Ee, 2016).

Response Journals allow students to respond and interpret their reading personally, as they have the opportunity to construct their own meaning and formulate their own thoughts as they write. It is essential to allow students to ask and answer questions about their own reading and writing. According to Fulps and Young (1991), "Reading response journals enable students to grow as readers and writers by requiring them to use their own background knowledge to construct personal meaning and by encouraging, in writing, the integration of new experiences with past ones" (p. 110). Encouraging students to put what they read in their own words allows them to take ownership of what they had read. Hyland (2018) refers to this as expressive activity as students are encouraged to relish the experience of reading for an original purpose by recording their thoughts about a text—what they like about it, what they do not like about it, how the story's elements connect with them on a personal level if they would recommend it to a friend, etc. (Woodruff and Griffin, 2017). Thus, the employment of RRT in ER classroom enriches and strengthens the reading and writing connections.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative experimental method. Qualitative experiments are a recommended research approach for qualitative research aiming to explore and identify patterns, processes or behaviours (Steils, 2021). Qualitative experiment is the intervention in a social/psychological situation for exploratory purposes. In this study, the intervention executed was the ERP during the reading lessons. The researcher used qualitative techniques (interviews, non-participant observation and text analysis) to examine how the participants in this study who have been executed the treatment will behave and/or think. The researcher embraced this study method to observe the use of an ERP in engaging ESL students to read and examine their responses to the short stories as in the RRA. It was also the researcher's aim to get a better understanding of ESL learners' experiences of ERP and find out the outcome of using RRA. The researcher wanted to investigate further whether such programme can help to improve students' language proficiency and motivation.

3.1 Sample

The study was conducted for a duration of three months in a secondary school. The participants of this study included an ESL teacher and six Form 4 students, comprising three females and three males.

3.2 Instruments

The researcher documented data through four sources: classroom observations, interviews with the teacher and students, response journals and examination marks.

4. Results

4.1 Types of Written Responses Produced by the Mediocre and Low Proficiency Students When They Are Engaged in the Reading of Short Stories Based on the RRA

The data to answer RQ 1 came solely from the written responses in the participants Response Journals. Each participant chose six stories, and read it as part of their ERP task and wrote responses for all the six based on the guidelines given. In order to trace the kind of written responses the students came up with, the researcher referred to the category of literary response developed by Purves and Rippere (1968), modified by Marshall (1987) and again modified by Newell et al. (1989). Though Newell et al. (1989) had one more category, which is Miscellaneous, the researcher did not include this category, as the participants did not come up with such statements. Table 4.1 depicts the distribution of entries in the students' response journals.

Table 4.1. Distribution of Entries in Response Journals

Participant	DS	PRS	RS	IS	ES
Student 1	6	6	6	6	6
Student 2	6	6	6	6	6
Student 3	6	6	6	6	6
Student 4	6	6	6	6	6
Student 5	6	6	6	6	6
Student 6	6	6	6	6	6

DS – Descriptive Statements   IS – Interpretative Statements

PRS – Personal Reactions Statements   ES – Evaluative Statements

RS – Reflexive Statements   * 6 – Depicted in all the six stories read

The findings for Research Question 1 revealed that both the mediocre and low proficiency students could write responses to the stories they had read using the RRA. All the participants came up with Descriptive, Personal Reaction, Reflexive, Interpretative and Evaluative Statements in their Response Journals, though three students only made short remarks on the author's method, which comes under Evaluative Statements due to their low linguistic ability. The participants were able to come up with the various statements as they adopted the aesthetic stance when they were recording their responses. They could narrate how the stories made them feel and relate them to their own life experiences. The responses exhibited by the participants revealed that they were able to think critically and creatively as they were reflecting on the writer's piece of work. This opportunity arose as they were given the task of writing their journal entries in the form of reader response as advocated by Rosenblatt (1995). Their positive responses to the journal writing activity stresses the expressive paradigm of the writing activity (Hyland, 2018). When writing is treated as a communicative act rather than a completed product, students engage more and develop a more positive attitude towards academic writing. Apart from that, the guidelines on how to write their Response Journals after reading the stories of their choice served as a platform for them to delve deep into the stories and make connections. Another factor that enabled them to read the stories was the appropriate readability level, that is, the stories were within their linguistic capacity. As such, they did not have to struggle with their reading and could read the stories with ease. Moreover, they were not demotivated which could have happened if the stories were way above their readability level.

4.2 The Outcome of Using the RRA in the ERP

Students who participate in reader response and journal writing activities are actually embarking on a journey of self-discovery. They will be able to ponder on their take on certain issues and share their ideas. Brownlie (2019) believes that as educators we all need to encourage our students to personalise the stories that they are reading by gaining insights about the characters as well as help them see the world in a different perspective. After analysing the kind of responses the participants came up after reading the stories, it is important to find out whether the use of reader response approach was indeed effective or otherwise in their product, that is, the Response Journals. For the purpose of answering the second research question, the written responses or Response Journals, which are, the products, were used as the basis to find out the impact of using the reader response approach in the ERP. In addition, data was also gathered from students' and English teacher's semi-structured interview as well as the researcher's own field notes. The data from the teacher served to verify the data obtained from the students of this study. Table 4.2 reveals the

outcome of using RRA in the ERP.

Table 4.2. The Outcome of ER and Reader Response

Category	Description	Sub-category
Personal Experience	Own Life Experience	Making Connections
		Construction of Meaning
		Through Emotion or Empathy
Self-Development	Development in Affective Area	Improve Self Confidence
		Become Active Learners
		Reduced Anxiety, Increased Productivity
		Reading and Writing Connection
Enhanced Thinking	Enhancement in Students'	Engagement in HOTS
Skills	Higher Order Thinking Skills	Understanding Links
Teacher's Validation	Teacher's Comments of the	Improvement in Reading, Writing and HOTS
	Students Achievements	Involvement in the Tasks

The usage of RRA not only encouraged the participants to use their personal experience when responding to the stories but also aided them in developing their affective domain as well as higher order thinking skills. Personal experience relates to the emotions the students experienced during their reading, which is, actually what Rosenblatt (1978) terms as aesthetic reading. Each student is actually "living through his/her relationship with that particular text" (Rosenblatt, 1978:25). Emotions play a major role in revealing our thoughts and feelings. The participants articulated their emotions after reading the stories in their Response Journals as they could identify with the emotions and thoughts running through the characters' mind.

Development in the affective area could be seen in the students as they were less anxious writing their response journals, which enabled them to write credible responses. They were free from the usual comprehension kind of question-and-answer session, which focused on mere comprehension of the texts they were reading. Besides that, they took active participation in the tasks because they had faith in completing the tasks, as the tasks were not beyond their capability. They were free to reveal their feelings, thoughts, views on the stories read in their written responses and this made them become active participants. Students surpassed the literal level of just engaging themselves in the reading as they went a step ahead by giving their own interpretations, inferences and judgements of the stories. As such, ER Programmes should incorporate RRA to engage the students in their readings.

Indulging in ER and applying the RRA in their Response Journals enabled the participants to develop their thinking skills, especially their critical and creative thinking skills. Students applied their thinking skills while they were making meaning of the stories they were reading. They engaged in both lower order thinking skills (LOTS) and higher order thinking skills (HOTS). They raised questions, made inferences, applied their prior knowledge, made generalisations, reflected on the author's work as well as understood links. It was apparent that using the RRA indeed enabled them to think and come up with responses, which exhibited higher order thinking skills without any restrictions.

One exception was Student D (low proficiency student) who still found reading and writing in English uncomfortable due to his poor command of the language. He also professed that his level of anxiety in reading materials in English had not reduced completely even after the ERP during the follow up interview. Student D's exam results reflected his sentiments, as though there was some improvement in his English examination result after the ERP, he did not manage to pass the paper. In addition, the ESL teacher too acknowledged that the usage of RRA had substantial impact in the outcome of responses in the students' Response Journals. Not only that, there was also some improvement in their reading and writing as they made attempts to answer questions that involved higher order thinking skills. The ESL teacher also revealed that their final term English Language examination results highlighted some improvement. The ESL teacher acknowledged that only Student D was unable to pass the English Paper, as he still could not overcome his apprehension in reading English materials.

4.3 The Experiences of the ESL Mediocre and Low Proficiency Students towards the ERP

Data to answer the third research question was obtained from the students' semi-structured interview after the completion of the study as well as classroom observations during the study. Based on the data gathered, the researcher managed to unearth the students' insights and perspectives on their extensive reading and Response Journals experiences. Based on the data gathered on the participants' experiences of the ERP, four major themes emerged when coding of the interview data was in progress. The themes include the participants' (i) motivation and attitude toward ER throughout the three months period, (ii) strategies adopted to handle reading-related difficulties, (iii) experiences of the effectiveness of the Response Journals and (iv) experiences of their English language

improvement due to the ERP.

Findings with regards to the third research question revealed that the participants developed positive motivation and attitudes towards the ERP and writing of Response Journals. They perceived the programme as beneficial to their language development. The ERP presented a good opportunity for the students to practice reading and writing. They indicated that reading and responding to the stories provided an avenue for them to enhance their reading and writing skills. The participants adopted two strategies to help them cope, which were, guessing the meaning of words from context and asking their peers or their teacher when they encountered problems while reading. They agreed that they like writing the Response Journals because their responses in the journals were of their own thoughts and feelings. In essence, they were involved in their reading. They were happy that the questions were not in similar nature of the usual comprehension questions that were given to them after reading a passage or literature text. Another area of concern was their thinking skills. It was evident that the participants were indirectly prodded to think and make connections to the stories and give their responses. In other words, reading the stories and writing the response journals not only enhanced the participants thinking capacity but also enabled them to improve their reading and writing skills. As such, they were also able to develop their thinking skills to answer HOTS questions during other tasks in class. To sum up, reading the stories and writing Response Journals improved the participants' thinking capacity and enabled them to improve their reading and writing skills.

5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the impact of extensive reading and reader response among ESL students and it indeed provided insights on students' participation in an ERP that focused on the use of RRA. When the reader's attention is focused on the experience of reading itself, an aesthetic stance is adopted, which results in the personal, experiential aspects of meaning (Rosenblatt, 1995). During and after an aesthetic transaction, the reader has a response to the event, which involves the organising of his or her thoughts and feeling about the text (Rosenblatt, 1985). The answer to research question one disclosed that the aesthetic transaction between the students and the stories they had read produced five categories of statements, which are, Descriptive Statements, Personal Reaction Statements, Reflexive Statements, Interpretive Statements and Evaluative Statements. The participants' responses in their Response Journals divulged that they were taking the aesthetic stance, as there is a lived-through experience of events, which is a more private aspect as it is a one-to-one correspondence (Mahzan Arshad, 1988). Each individual student's experience is unique as it is his or her life experience solely. An interesting discovery in this study was the students were able to freely write their thoughts and the meaning they made out of the stories rather than the efferent stance that is involved during normal reading activity in the language classrooms, which focuses more on acquisition of skills or information (Rosenblatt, 1995). Their attention was focused on what they lived through during their reading, that is, their direct relationship with the stories they were reading (Rosenblatt, 1982). In other words, the students used their background knowledge and experience to compose meaning from the stories and they were not only able to seek meaning but also develop their higher order thinking skills. They were more confident in sharing their thoughts and views, as there was no compulsion of a right or wrong answer. Their responses in the Response Journals were totally different from the ones they come up with in their *NILAM* notebook during the *NILAM* programme. The students engaged in an active, dynamic reading process in which they were in charge of exploration and development of meaning. This is in line with notions held by (Tyson, 2015) who believes that in such engagement, the readers come up with personal views, personal experiences and feelings, whereby the prime concern is not 'what they understand' but 'how they feel'. This opportunity arose as they were given the task of writing their journal entries in the form of Response Journals as advocated by Rosenblatt (1995).

The answer to the second research question revealed that the students indeed have benefited by using the RRA in their Response Journals. The employment of RRA renewed the students' interest in reading because the emphasis is balanced between the reader and the text and not solely focused on the text as a self-contained object (Woodruff & Griffin, 2017). Participants were challenged with the task of interpreting a text through the lens of their prior knowledge, diverse perspectives, and personal experiences. It aided in making them become critical readers and thinkers because they were not simply told how to think about a story but told to justify their multiple interpretations of the story using textual evidence and support. The utilisation of reader response had impact on the students in three main areas, namely, personal experience, self-development and enhanced thinking skills. This implies that an ERP will be successful if it is complemented with interesting and engaging post reading activities. The post reading activity adopted in this study was the utilisation of Response Journals using the RRA. Students managed to interact with the stories as they brought in their own personal experiences, which in turn, enabled them to write in-depth responses. They used their sentiments to construct and convey meaning. It supports Rosenblatt's (1978) RRT which emphasises on personal response associated with a lived through experience as it encourages students to take active

participation in meaning making process. Woodruff and Griffin (2017) emphasise that RRA strengthens the connection between reading and writing and this was observed in this study. In this study, the students could be seen engrossed and engaged in their reading and writing as the tasks were meaningful to them and this shows their reading engagement (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). In fact, according to Day and Bamford (2013), one of the characteristics of a successful reading programme is students' involvement with post-reading activities. This implies that an ERP will be successful if it is complemented with interesting and engaging post reading activities. The post reading activity adopted in this study was the utilisation of Response Journals using the RRA. Students managed to interact with the stories as they brought in their own personal experiences, which in turn, enabled them to write in-depth responses. They used their sentiments to construct and convey meaning. The students had an avenue to reflect on the stories and take a look at their own life as well as the things that were taking place around them. They learnt to construct meaning and make connections, analyse characters and situations as well as make moral judgements and raise questions. By asking questions about the character's intention and answering them, as well as making comparison with their own actions and reactions, they were actually engaging in critical thinking and this was evident in their written responses. The participants of this study had a chance to comment, critique and develop their analytical thinking, which Othman et al (2015) found missing in the Malaysian classrooms, as students assume the role of passive readers who only read to understand and decipher meanings as portrayed by the author. This study proves that utilising RRA is not only beneficial for EFL readers in the literature classroom Iskhak (2015) but also for ESL learners via ERP. It managed to improve the confidence of the students in expressing their ideas and writing as they could write about something that was connected to them.

Findings with regards to the third research question revealed that the participants developed positive motivation and attitudes towards the ERP and writing of Response Journals. They perceived the programme as beneficial to their language development. The participants' initial nervousness in reading materials in English reduced as the language used in the short stories was within their linguistic capacity. Another contributing factor was the interesting stories provided. These factors managed to attract them slowly into reading the stories and they started to believe in themselves. This again validates Krashen's (1985) claim that comprehensible input lowers the anxiety level of the readers and aid in the acquisition of second language. The participants' affective filter was low as they managed to overcome their initial fear and anxiety and began to gain self-confidence during the duration of the ERP. There was a positive swing in the participants' motivation to read the short stories provided as they were driven by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as affirmed by Huang (2015), Renandya & Jacobs (2016) and Day (2018). The acquisition of English Language words and phrases helped the participants improve their writing, hence boosting their confidence in the language. They were able to do better in their reading comprehension, essay writing and answering literature questions (short stories) which focused on giving opinions. Findings of this study unveiled that ER and reader response allowed both mediocre and low English proficiency ESL learners to boost their reading and writing skills as the tasks were manageable. Though two students were not so confident in their reading and writing initially, they slowly managed to overcome it as they were not only willing to write their Response Journals but managed to come up with Evaluative Statements which revealed that they could make judgements about the author's work or the characters in the story.

6. Conclusion

The present study demonstrated that there was a positive effect of using RRA in an ERP in the classroom itself rather than leaving it to the students to do it on their own, especially for students who are not adept at the language. When language teachers incorporate ER in their language classroom, they can ask the students to read during class time, and this would address the commonly heard complaint that students do not read because they could not find the time. The reading culture can hopefully be nurtured, as once these students start reading and realise the many benefits it brings to them, they might become lifelong readers. The ESL teachers in Malaysia can use the findings of this study to introduce ER and reader response in their language classrooms during reading lessons. They just need to source out for some interesting short stories after considering their students proficiency levels and interest. This is because students shy away from reading not only because they encounter difficulties in reading the texts given by their teachers but also due to the fact of uninteresting texts handed out.

The outcome of this research also supports the idea put forth by (Chang and Renandya, 2017; Jeon & Day, 2015 & Tien, 2015) that ER should be part of the curriculum because it enables students to do their reading during classroom hours. Moreover, if ER is embedded in the school curriculum, teachers are likely to be more than willing to give ER a try. Besides that, it would serve as motivation for the ESL students who otherwise would hardly do any extensive reading. This idea can later be extended outside the classroom once it becomes a success. It can be a vital tool to motivate students to indulge in reading and mold them to become life-long readers. Likewise, journal writing can

also be incorporated into the reading lessons, as it is a valuable method to build up students critical and creative thinking skills. Students can be prompted to write their views, feelings and take on the stories they have read. When students are writing in the aesthetic mode, they tend to open up and express their emotions and opinion, as they are not afraid of doing so. This should be encouraged to allow them to discover themselves and take charge of their own learning. Such integration can enrich the language teaching and learning process by making it exciting and meaningful.

This study was not intended to generalise to other contexts. Collecting and analysing data for this study led to several findings for enlightening productive guidelines to the authorities concerned for future research. The experiences of the six students in this study can serve as a springboard for other researchers to conduct studies in other secondary schools comprising different ethnic groups as well as schools located in rural and urban areas to gain new insights to convince teachers to employ ER, RRA and Response Journals to enhance their students' language proficiency.

It would also be a good idea to conduct a study by incorporating oral reader responses as it may improve students' oral language skills besides improving reading and writing skills, as found in this study. Students can use PowerPoint presentations to present their take on the stories read. Three language skills, namely, reading, writing, and speaking can be practiced using the ERP. This will encourage shy students to build up their oral confidence in using the language.

Such studies can be undertaken at the primary school level too to ascertain the results. If the results are welcoming, measures should be taken to introduce ER and reader response in primary schools as the reading culture could be instilled in students from a young age. Nevertheless, like most case study research, the insights attained have to be considered as hypotheses that need to be tested in future studies employing larger samples and using statistical procedures that might reveal additional insights.

References

Ahmed, S. (2016). Reading habits and attitudes of UMSKAL undergraduates. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature, 5*(2), 189-201. https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.5n.2p.189

Aka, N. (2019). Reading performance of Japanese high school learners following a one-year extensive reading program. *Reading in a Foreign Language, 31*(1), 1-18.

Akın, F., Koray, Ö., & Tavukçu, K. (2015). How effective is critical reading in the understanding of scientific texts? *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences, 174,* 2444-2451. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.01.915

Assaiqeli, A., Maniam, M., & Farrah, M. (2021). Inversion and word order in English: A functional perspective. *Studies in English Language and Education, [S.l.], 8*(2), 523-545. https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v8i2.20217

Baba, J., & Affendi, F. R. (2020). Reading Habit and Students' Attitudes towards Reading: A Study of Students in the Faculty of Education UiTM Puncak Alam. *Asian Journal of University Education, 16*(1), 109- 122. https://doi.org/10.24191/ajue.v16i1.8988

Bahagian Teknologi Pendidikan, Malaysia. (2017). *NILAM Yang Ditambahbaik: Panduan Pelaksanaan di Sekolah.* Kuala Lumpur: Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia.

Bahmani, R., & Farvardin, M. T. (2017). Effects of different text difficulty levels on EFL learners' foreign language reading anxiety and reading comprehension. *Reading in a Foreign Language, 29*(2), 185-202.

Bennett, K. (2016). Reluctant Readers: An Analysis of Educational and LIS Literature from 1993-2013. *SLIS Connecting, 5*(1), Article 11. https://doi.org/10.18785/slis.0501.11

Birketveit, A., Rimmereide, H. E., Bader, M., & Fisher, L. (2018). Extensive reading in primary school EFL. *Acta Didactica Norge, 12,* 1-23. https://doi.org/10.5617/adno.5643

Brownlie, F. (2019). *Grand conversations, thoughtful responses: A unique approach to literature circles* (2nd ed.). Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada: Portage and Main Press.

Chang, C. S., & Renandya, W. (2017). Current practice of extensive reading in Asia: teachers' perceptions. *The reading Matrix, 17*(1), 40-59.

Chou, I. (2015). Engaging EFL Students in E-books Using Reader-Response Theory. *The Reading Matrix: an International Online Journal, 15*, 167-181.

Daniel, O. C., Esoname, S. R., Chima, O. D., & Udoaku, O. S. (2017). Effect of reading habits on the academic performance of students: a case study of the students of Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti state. *American Journal of Library and Information Science*, *1*(1), 27-33.

Day, R. R. (2018). Extensive reading. In J. I. Liontas, T. International Association & M. Delli Carpini, (Eds.), The TESOL encyclopedia of English language teaching (pp.1-7). https://doi.org/10.1002/ 9781118784235.eelt0472

Day, R. R., &Bamford, J. (2013). Reprinted. *Extensive Reading in the Second Language Classroom.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ee, L. C. (2016). Engaging Students in Extensive Reading through Literary Texts in the EFL Classroom. *Proceedings of ISELT FBS Universitas Negeri Padang*, *4*(1), 48-52.

Florence, F. O., Adesola, O. A., Alaba, H. B., & Adewumi, O. M. (2017). A Survey on the Reading Habits among Colleges of Education Students in the Information Age. Journal of Education and Practice, 8(8). Retrieved February 1, 2018, from www.iiste.org

Fulps, J. S., & Young, T. (1991). The what, why, when and how of reading response journals. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts, 32*(2), 109-116. Retrieved from https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1556&context=reading_horizons

Ghazali, Z., & Habil, H. (2020). Reading Intervention Practice: Effects of Print and E-Dictionary Use. *LSP International Journal*, *7*(1). https://doi.org/10.11113/lspi.v7n1.99

Grabe, W., & Stoller, F. L. (2020). *Teaching and researching reading* (3rd ed.). Routledge: New York. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315726274-2

Guthrie, J. T., & Wigfield, A. (2000). Engagement and motivation in reading. In M. L. Kamil, P. B. Mosenthal, P. D. Pearson, & R. Barr (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research, vol. III* (pp. 403-422). Mahwah,NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Huang, Y. (2015). Why don't they do it? A study on the implementation of extensive reading in Taiwan. *Cogent Education*, *2*(1), 1099187. https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2015.1099187

Hyland, K. (2018). Genre and Second Language Writing. In *The TESOL Encyclopedia of English LanguageTeaching* Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118784235.eelt0535

Irvin, J. L., Meltzer, J., & Dukes, M. S. (2015). *Taking Action on Adolescent literacy. Student Motivation, Engagement and Achievement.* Retrieved June 28, 2015, from http:///www.ascd.org/publications/books/107034/chapters/students/Engageme nt and Achievement.aspx

Iskhak. (2015). The Application of Reader Response Theory in Enhancing Student Teachers' Affective andLinguistic Growth: A Classroom Action Research in EFL Teacher Education in Indonesia. *The English Teacher, 44*(2), 43-55.

Iswandari, Y., & Paradita, L. (2019). Extensive Reading in EFL Setting: A Special Interview with Professor Paul Nation. *TEFLIN Journal, 30*(2). https://doi.org/10.15639/teflinjournal.v30i2/187-196

Jeon, E. Y., & Day, R. R. (2015). The effectiveness of core ER principles. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, *27*(2), 302-307.

Krashen, S. D. (1981). *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*. Oxford: PergamonPress.

Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principle and practices in second language acquisition*. New York: Prentice Hall.

Krashen, S. D. (1985). *The Input Hypothesis: Issues and Implications*. U.S.A: Longman

Mahzan, A. (1998). *Malaysian student teachers' responses to multicultural literature*. University of Pittsburgh: USA.

Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025. (2013). *Malaysian Ministry of Education*. Retrieved from http://www.moe.gov.my/en/pelan-pembangunan-pendidikan-malaysia-2013-2025

Marshall, J. D. (1987). The Effects of Writing on Students' Understanding of Literary Texts. *Research in the Teaching of English*, *21*(1), 30-63. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40171100

McLean, S., & Rouault, G. (2017). The effectiveness and efficiency of extensive reading at developingreading rates. *System*, *70*, 92-106. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2017.09.003

Mermelstein, A. D. (2015). Improving EFL learners' writing through enhanced Extensive Reading. *Reading in a Foreign Language, 27*(2), 182-198.

Muhamad, S. N., Latiff Azmi, M. N., & Hassan, I. (2020). Reading Interest and its Relationship with Reading Performance: A Study of English as Second Language Learners in Malaysia. *Humanities & Social Sciences*

Reviews eISSN, 2395-6518. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3524723

Mustafa, Z. (July 25, 2018). Boosting the Reading Habit. News Straits Times.

Nakanishi, T. (2015). A meta–analysis of extensive reading research. *Tesol Quarterly, 49*(1), 6-37. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.157

Nakano, T. (2018). Implementing extensive reading in Japanese as L2 environment: A case using Facebookto build a reading community. In M. Gobert (Ed.), *Proceedings of the 3rd World Congress on Extensive Reading* (pp. 69-78). Extensive Reading Foundation.

Navinder, K. (2015). *The impact of extensive reading on English language proficiency and motivation to read.* PhD thesis, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Faculty of Education.

Newell, G., Suszynski, K., &Weingart, R. (1989). *The effects of writing in a reader based and text-based mode on students' understanding of two short stories.* https://doi.org/10.1080/10862968909547657

Nuttall, C. (2005). *Teaching Reading Skills in a Foreign Language*. Oxford: Macmillan.

Othman, N. I., Shah, P. M., Karim, A. A., Yusof, A., Din, R., Ramli, N. A., & Salleh, N. S. M. (2015). Personalizing Learning of English Literature: Perceptions and Challenges. *Journal of Personalized Learning*,*1*(1), 104-112.

Park, J. (2016). Integrating reading and writing through extensive reading. *ELT Journal*, *70*(3), 287-295. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccv049

Purves, A. C., & Rippere, V. (1968). *Elements of writing about a literary work: A study of response toliterature* (Research Report No. 8). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Renandya, W. A. (2016). Should you be teaching reading intensively or extensively? In D. Shaffer & M. Pinto (Eds), *Proceedings of the 24th Annual Korea TESOL International Conference: Shaping the Future: With 21st Century Skills,* 31-39. Seoul, Korea: KOTESOL.

Renandya, W. A., & Jacobs, G. M. (2016). Extensive reading and listening in the L2 classroom. In W. A. Renandya& H. P. Widodo (Eds.), *English language teaching today* (pp. 97-110). New York, NY: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-38834-2_8

Robb, T. (2015). Quizzes-a sin against the sixth commandment? *In defense of M. Reader. Reading in a Foreign Language, 27*(1), 146-151.

Rosenblatt, L. (1982). The literacy transaction: Evocation and response. *Theory into Practice, 21*(4), 268-277. https://doi.org/10.1080/00405848209543018

Rosenblatt, L. M. (1985a). The transactional theory of the literary work: Implications for research. In C. Cooper (Ed.), *Researching response to literature and the teaching of literature.* Norwood, NJ: Ablex

Rosenblatt, L. M. (1995). Literature as Exploration. New York: MLA.

Rosenblatt, L.M. (1978). *The reader, the text, the poem: The transactional theory of the literary work*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Shih, Y. C., Chern, C. I., &Reynold, B. L. (2018). Bringing extensive reading and reading strategies into theTaiwanese junior college classroom. *Reading in a Foreign Language, 30*(1), 130-151.

Steils, N. (2021). Qualitative Experiments for Social Sciences. *New Trends in Qualitative Research*, *6*, 24-31. https://doi.org/10.36367/ntqr.6.2021.24-31

Suk, N. (2016). Teacher and student perceptions of extensive reading activities. *Modern English Education, 17*(1), 69-88. https://doi.org/10.18095/meeso.2016.17.1.04

Suk, N. (2017). The effects of extensive reading on reading comprehension, reading rate, and vocabulary acquisition. *Reading Research Quarterly, 52*(1), 73-89. https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.152

Tien, C. Y. (2015). A large-scale study on extensive reading program for non-English majors: factors and attitude. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature, 4*(4), 46-54. https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.4n.4p.46

Tyson, L. (2015). *Critical theory today* (3rd ed.) New York and London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315760797

Webb, S., & Chang, C. S. (2015) How does prior word knowledge affect vocabulary learning progress in an extensive reading program? *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 37*(4), 651-75. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263114000606

Woodruff, A. H., & Griffin, R. A. (2017). Reader Response in Secondary Settings: Increasing Comprehension through Meaningful Interactions with Literary Texts. *Texas Journal of Literacy Education,5*(2), 108-116.

Yamashita, J. (2015). In search of the nature of extensive reading in L2: Cognitive, affective, and pedagogical perspectives. *Reading in a Foreign Language, 27,* 168-181.

Zahrah, Y. (2020). Boosting the reading habits among Malaysians. *The Malaysian Reserve*. Retrieved from https://themalaysianreserve.com/2020/09/08/boosting-the-reading-habit-among-malaysians/

Zainol Abidin, M. J., Pour-Mohammadi, M., & Low, J. S. P. (2011). A Preliminary Study of Creative BuddyReading Program. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, *1*(16).