The Effect of Teacher-directed Internet-based Extensive Reading Materials on Intermediate Students' Reading Self-efficacy

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper was to find out whether students' reading self-efficacy can be enhanced by using Internet-based extensive reading materials. A pretest-posttest control group design was employed. A sample of 60 intermediate EFL learners from an Institute in Boukan, West Azerbaijan, Iran was selected randomly and their level of reading self-efficacy was measured through Seeger's Self-Efficacy Scale in Reading (2009). In addition, a preliminary test of proficiency was conducted. For a period of two months, the experimental group was supplied with stories through a weblog designed by the researcher, whereas the control group was provided with the same stories printed on paper. The experimental group was connected to the Internet, while the control group was instructed as traditional reading classes are. After the treatment, the learners' level of self-efficacy was again measured with the same scale as in the pre-treatment. Results of the Paired and Independent samples t-tests revealed a significant difference in the reading self-efficacy of both groups, with a higher increase for the experimental group. Discussion and pedagogical implications will also be presented.

Keywords: Extensive reading; Internet-based extensive reading; reading self-efficacy; weblog

INTRODUCTION

Reading in second language (L_2) has been deemed one of the best and most important practices for the reason that it provides students with a great opportunity to learn the L_2 grammar, vocabulary, and structure (Gillet & Temple, 2000). Bearing in mind this importance, researchers have always looked for new and effective methods to teach students how to read. However, a lack of motivation, interest, and reading self-efficacy has been reported as the main obstacles for L_2 learners (Katz, 2004).

Among these three, self-efficacy has drawn more attention inasmuch as it has been considered a reliable predictor of students' success (Bandura, 1994; Zimmerman, 2000). In this regard, Tilforlioğlu and Cinkara (2009) found that those students at Gaziantep University's School of Foreign Languages who had high levels of self-efficacy for English were more successful in learning English. Therefore, investigating methods to enhance students' reading self-efficacy can be a great help to both teachers and learners.

Considering the importance of reading in L_2, it comes as no surprise that there is a huge body of literature behind it. Various researchers have carried out different studies and investigated a vast array of topics concerning reading in L_2. These topics include reading strategy and comprehension (e.g., Aghaie & Phillaie, 2009; Bang & Zhao, 2007; Cabaroglu &Yurdaisik, 2008; Karbalaei, 2010; Li & Wilhelm, 2008; Razi, 2008; Ruffin, 2009); hypertext (e.g., Ariew, 2006; Konishi, 2003); extensive reading (e.g., De Morgado, 2009; Poulshock, 2010; Powell, 2005; Takase, 2007; Shen, 2008); online reading (e.g., Anderson, 2003; Huang, Chern, & Lin, 2009; Murphy, 2007; Rahimi & Behjat, In Press; Tseng, 2010); technology in reading (e.g., Behjat, Bagheri, & Yamini, 2012; Kocoglu, 2010; Marzban, 2011); reading motivation (e.g., Guthrie, , Hoa, Wigfield, Tonks, Humenick, & Littles, 2006); reading and vocabulary learning (e.g., Huang & Liou, 2007; Shen & Wu, 2009; Wan-a-rom, 2010); L1 and L_2 reading relationship (e.g., Kong, 2006); teaching

reading through stories (e.g., Loukia, 2006) and so on.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite the numerous attempts to find effective ways to teach students how to read, there is still a great gap in students' ability to read. Some authors have referred to this gap as lack of motivation, self-efficacy, and interest in reading (e.g., Day & Bamford, 2009; Katz, 2004). Bandura (1994) and Zimmerman (2000) introduce lack of self-efficacy as a great obstacle for the students, its very existence being one of the best predictors of student achievement. In light of this, filling in the gap of a self-efficacy deficiency can be enhancing tremendous boon to students' reading capabilities, thereby making them better L_2 learners. In an attempt to fill in the gap between the deficiencies, different studies have been conducted. Some authors like Katz (2004) proposed using strategy training along with self-efficacy enhancement through reflection questions, while others like Day and Bamford (2009) have proposed making use of extensive reading (ER) to fill in the gap.

Due to such great features as being interesting, making students feel confident in dealing with reading, motivating them to read, helping them read at an appropriate rate and fluently, and so on, ER programs have been considered an effective way of teaching L_2 reading (Day & Bamford, 2009). It has also been introduced as the easiest way to provide students with a large amount of

the L_2 input they vitally need for language acquisition (Jarrell, 2003).

Since the authenticity of the materials is one of the most important criteria in ER programs (Day & Bamford, 2009) and the Internet has been introduced as one of the main sources of authentic materials (Berardo, 2006), some researchers (Silva, 2006) have decided to set up Internet-based ER programs. Silva (2006) claims that the Internet-based form of ER programs is more effective than the paper-based ones. This is due to the great features and capabilities of the Internet along with the wide availability of authentic materials (Dong-lin, 2008; Silva, 2006). Therefore, in this study, a teacher-directed Internet-based ER program is designed and its effect on the students' reading self-efficacy is investigated. To fulfill this aim, the following questions are posed:

1. Is there a significant difference between the reading self-efficacy pretest and posttest scores in the experimental group?

2. Is there a significant difference between the reading self-efficacy pretest and posttest scores in the control group?

3. Is there a significant difference between the experimental and control groups' reading self-efficacy pretest and posttest scores?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Self-efficacy: Definition and Theoretical Foundation

Bandura (1994) defines self-efficacy as people's beliefs about their ability to perform at a specified level. It is believed that such beliefs affect how people feel, think, get motivated, and behave (e.g., Katz, 2004; Pajares, 2007; Schunk, 2003; Zimmerman, 2000). Self-efficacious people, therefore, consider difficult tasks as challenges to be tackled rather than threats to be avoided (Bandura, 1994; Schunk, 2003). As a result, such persons have high intrinsic interest and are deeply engrossed in activities (Bandura, 1994; Zimmerman, 2000). That is why Hamill (2003) concludes that there is a positive relationship between self-efficacy and resilience — the ability to persist until one attains favorable results and outcomes, and that self-regulation and self-efficacy facilitate the development of coping mechanisms in resilient children.

Methods of Enhancing Self-efficacy

Bandura (1994, pp. 2-3) introduces four ways to raise self-efficacy beliefs: (1) experiencing success: if people experience overcoming obstacles through perseverance, a strong sense of self-efficacy will be engendered; (2) having vicarious experiences provided by social models: people will come to believe that they themselves possess the same capabilities of those whom they have observed persevere in the face of adversity; (3) being socially persuaded: convincing people verbally that they are capable of succeeding encourages them to

try harder than ever; and (4) being involved in successful self-efficacy builder situations: providing students with situations that bring them success and prevent them from engaging in situations that are likely to result in failure can enhance their self-efficacy beliefs. Li and Wang (2010), Pajares (2007), and Schunk (2003) also put emphasis on these four methods of enhancing learners' self-efficacy. Schunk and Meece (2005) believe that individuals' self-efficacy will increase if they are motivated to achieve, exposed to positive academic and social models, and taught strategies that they can use to overcome obstacles.

Reading Self-efficacy

Li and Wang (2010) define reading self-efficacy as, "learners' perceptions of their reading abilities to perform various reading tasks" (p. 146). These reading abilities include comprehending the gist, guessing the probable meaning of unknown words, and inferring the writer's attitudes. Students' beliefs and perceptions in their abilities help them achieve higher results in their reading tasks. In their study, Li and Wang found that the reading self-efficacy of sophomore Chinese students majoring in English at a university was significantly related to their use of reading strategies. In the same vein, Aghaie and Pillaie (2011) concluded that strategy instruction helps students enhance both their reading comprehension and self-efficacy.

To overcome the barriers posed by lack of motivation, self-efficacy, and interest, Katz (2004) says that students should be taught reading skills and strategies while being helped to raise their self-efficacy beliefs in reading through reflection during reading tasks. Since self-efficacy is a metacognitive process (Bandura, 1994; Pajares, 2007), and reflection increases such processes, Katz (2004) uses this technique to enhance her students' self-efficacy. Another solution that may help overcome the problem of students' lack of interest and motivation in reading, as proposed by sich authors as Day and Bamford (2009), is conducting extensive reading to enhance students' interest in and fondness of reading.

Extensive Reading (ER)

The term extensive reading refers to reading books quickly while seeking the meaning instead of the language (Day & Bamford, 2009). In ER, the reader tries to discern the whole meaning (Gillet & Temple, 2000). In such reading, the purpose is to acquire information and gain pleasure (Day & Bamford, 2009). This type of reading has also been called "uninterrupted sustained silent reading" and "drop everything and read" (Farrell, 2009, p. 83). Here, using dictionaries is not common, readers hardly analyze the structure of the sentences and since such reading puts no assignment on students' shoulders and occurs for the purpose of pleasure and general understanding, it enhances students' interest, willingness and confidence in dealing with reading tasks (Day & Bamford, 2009).

Different benefits and aims are mentioned for ER. For example Day and Bamford (2009) believe that such readings

build vocabulary and structural awareness, develop automaticity, enhance background knowledge, improve comprehension skills, and promote confidence and motivation. Therefore, applying such programs in L_2 classes can be of great advantage and help to both teachers and learners.

Yamashita (2008) concludes that administrating ER programs for a short period of time can affect students' reading comprehension and interest rather than their grammatical competence. He calls the former (i.e., reading comprehension and interest in reading) "general reading ability" and the latter (i.e., grammatical competence) "lower-level linguistic ability" (Yamashita, 2008, p. 661). The reason for this, as Yamashita points out, is that when students have already developed skills and strategies in reading their L1, and are subsequently given opportunities to activate their effective strategies in L_2 reading by reading texts of their interest within the level of their L_2 linguistic resources, it is possible that they can quickly learn to apply their effective strategies to L_2 reading.

Shang *et al.* (2007) suggest ER as an effective way of teaching reading to L_2 students, which can enhance students' motivation in terms of learning, vocabulary, reading speed, and comprehension. Powell (2005) characterizes ER as fast reading of a large amount of longer, easy-to-understand materials, with little or no follow-up written work or testing. In ER, since students are provided with materials which are at their level of competence and interest, they will never get bored or frustrated with

reading (Shang et al., 2007). In addition, ER enhances students' vocabulary recognition ability and personal reading strategy use (Powell, 2005). Waring (2006) introduces ER as an ideal complement to any kind of language study. Extensive reading provides students with a great amount of exposure to the target language and integrates the learner's growing sense of the language. Bell (2001) indicates that ER enhances students' reading speed and reading comprehension abilities better than intensive reading does. Tudor and Hafiz (1989) also propose ER as a means of input to L_2 learning, input which can influence learners' reading and writing abilities.

Internet-based Extensive Reading

Extensive reading has been administered for many years in a paper-based format. Its Internet-based version has recently been introduced, which is called web-based extensive reading, or W-ER for short (Silva, 2006). Silva prefers an Internet-based ER program to a paper-based one because the Internet-based ER program boasts some important advantages (e.g., students become more autonomous, motivated, and self-empowered). Brandl (2002) supports integrating the Internet into a language curriculum and mentions four advantages for that. The first advantage is the universal availability of authentic materials; the second is communication capability through networking, the third, multimedia capability, and the fourth, non-linear (hypermedia) structure of the information. Brandl also mentions the broad amount of information

that causes students to get lost and the lack of control over the quality and accuracy of the contents as some of the disadvantages of using the Internet in education. To tackle the disadvantages, Brandl suggests that the online materials be teacher-directed. In this way, both the amount and the quality of the materials can be guaranteed. Behjat, Bagheri, and Yamini (2012) studied web-assisted language learning in the EFL context of Iran and found that reading on the Internet can significantly foster students' reading comprehension.

In this regard, the aim of this study was to figure out an effective method of enhancing intermediate students' reading self-efficacy by combining the best features of extensive reading, the Internet, modeling (i.e., providing students with effective procedures to comprehend a given text either through explanation or live models), and strategy training.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A true experimental randomized subject, pretest-posttest control group design was employed in this study, in which the participants were randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups. The independent variable of the study was the teacher-directed Internet-based extensive reading materials and the dependent variable was the reading self-efficacy of the students.

Participants

The participants of the study (N=60) were selected from among 83 would-be-intermediate participants who attended an Institute in Boukan, West Azerbaijan, Iran in the summer term of 2011 after having been administered a placement test called Nelson English Language Test (Fowler & Coe, 1976). They were all Kurds whose mother tongue was Kurdish. They also knew Persian as their L2 and they studied English as a foreign language (EFL). By the time this study started, the average time they had spent studying English was about 2 years with a minimum of 216 hours of formal instruction. These 60 participants included both sexes with a proportion of 60 % girls and 40 % boys (36 girls and 24 boys). Their ages ranged from 16 to 20, with an average of 17.5. The participants were randomly assigned to the experimental (n=30) and control (n=30) groups. The experimental group included 11 boys and 19 girls, while the control group consisted of 14 boys and 16 girls.

Instrumentation

The instruments used in this study include: (1) Nelson English Language Tests (Fowler & Coe, 1976) to determine participants' proficiency level; (2) Self-Efficacy Scale in Reading taken from Seeger (2009) to assess participants' reading self-efficacy before and after the study; (3) the Internet and a researcher-designed weblog to provide participants with extensive reading materials; and (4) a researcher designed

semi-open-ended questionnaire to determine participants' favorite type of stories.

Nelson English Language Tests

Since participants in the present study were supposed to be at an intermediate level of proficiency, the tests assigned for participants with 200 hours of instruction were chosen. Test 200 B was selected to be administered. This test consists of 50 items, including 36 structural questions in single-item format and 14 structural questions in continuous-prose format (cloze test). According to Fowler and Coe (1976), all the items in this battery of tests have been carefully pre-tested. This placement test has also been introduced as a valid and reliable one in the present context (Jalilifar, 2009). However, the reliability of this test was checked in the present study by employing the Kuder-Richardson 21 (KR-21) formula and a very high reliability ($r = 0.93$) was obtained for the test.

Self-efficacy Scale in Reading

The scale used to measure the participants' level of reading self-efficacy before and after the study was adopted from Seeger (2009). This scale consists of 20 items which measure participants' ability, interest, and confidence in dealing with reading materials. Participants needed to determine their confidence in any of these 20 items by writing values from 0 to 100. The scale's reliability calculated through Cronbach's Alpha was 0.98 and 0.94 in pre-administration and post-administration of the study, respectively, with an average of 0.96, which shows a very high reliability of the scale and its items in this study.

The Internet and the Researcher-designed Weblog

The medium of instruction for the experimental group was a researcher-designed weblog (www.enjoyreading. loxblog.com) (see the Appendix for a sample of this weblog). Following Brandl's (2002), the designed weblog was created and managed in a way that the teacher (i.e. the researcher) assigned the materials and provided them beforehand. As Brandl explains, for intermediate participants or lower learners, the online materials should be assigned and provided by the teacher due to the fact that providing intermediate participants with the opportunity to choose their own learning materials results in their confusion and bafflement. In putting the selected stories on the weblog some delicate points were considered. First, a nice theme with beautiful background colors was selected (as suggested by Tseng, 2010). Second, the writing font of the stories was assigned to be 12-point and all of the stories were assigned headings as advised by McCabe, Kraemer, Miller, Parmar, and Ruscica (2006).

Semi-open-ended Questionnaire

In this researcher-designed questionnaire, six types of stories, including biographies, funny stories, romance, legends, horror stories, and detective stories (these stories were selected based on the researchers' own experiences and knowledge in ER),

are provided in the left column of a table. In the right column, a space is provided for those six types of stories to be sorted out from the most to the least liked. There are also two blank spaces on both columns for the participants' other preferences, if they have any.

Procedure

Before the treatment

After the permission of the subjects' parents was obtained, participants were given Nelson English Language Tests (Fowler & Coe, 1976) in order to determine their proficiency level. Then, those who scored at the intermediate level were randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups. The semi-open-ended questionnaire was given to the participants to find out their favorite type(s) of stories. The most liked type of story among the majority of the participants (nearly 75 %) was reported to be funny stories, including daily jokes, real funny happenings, etc.; therefore, these kinds of stories were used in this study. Afterwards, participants were given the Reading Self-Efficacy Scale.

Treatment

Experimental group

After the participants' level of self-efficacy was determined, they were called to attend two separate classes in which they were given the required instructions. In these sessions, the experimental group was required connect to the Internet at their homes on Sundays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays between the hours of 6 p.m. and 7 p.m. They were also reminded that, should they fail to connect to the Internet at the assigned times, they would lose their final score for the reading part, which was 20 points out of 100. In this session, they were also given instructions on how to use the weblog. They were asked to read five short stories and, after reading them, they were asked to write their comments by sending phrases like **great**, **good**, **so-so**, and **not good** through the system of commenting. Therefore, during the two month treatment, the experimental group, which had access to the Internet at their homes, connected to the Internet and read the extensive reading materials provided through the researcher-designed weblog.

Control group

The control group was asked to attend the classes at the Institute at the same times as the experimental group did, i.e. on Sundays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays from 6 to 7 p.m. They were also warned that their absence from the class would result in the loss of their reading score, which was 20 points out of 100. They were also required to have pieces of paper in each session in order to write in their comments about the stories. The control group was provided with the same materials on paper with the same font and size but not in color and the same features, which could be found in the online version of the stories

Justification for holding simultaneous classes

The reason for holding the two classes simultaneously on the three specified days was that many of the participants were friends; therefore, the participants of the control group were in touch with the experimental group. So, if the classes had been held at different times or days, there would have been this possibility that the control group would get access to the Internet and use the online materials, too. As a result, they would have extra exposure to the materials and this issue would diminish the reliability of the final results. Another consideration which was taken concerning the online materials was that the extensive reading materials were put on the weblog only a quarter before the class and immediately after the class the materials were taken off by the researcher, so neither the experimental group nor the control group had any extra exposure to the reading materials. There was a concern that some participants from the experimental group would copy the materials; therefore, the possibility of copying the materials was obviated through the available options of the blog provider.

Reading Strategies

Both groups were provided with useful strategies in dealing with the stories. These strategies included: (a) guessing the probable content of the stories based on their titles; (b) trying to guess the approximate meanings of the unknown words using the contextual clues and avoiding using dictionaries; (c) trying to get the whole meaning of the stories without worrying about the details; and (d) asking themselves questions concerning whether their guesses about the probable content had been true or not while reading the stories.

Extensive reading materials

The stories used as extensive reading materials were taken from an entertainment website (www.surfersam.com). These stories all had the required criteria to be used as extensive reading materials. They were funny stories and jokes not specifically written for educational purposes; therefore, they possessed authenticity (Berardo, 2006). Authentic materials are strongly preferred as reading materials in English extensive reading classes (Day & Bamford, 2009). In addition, these stories were easy and of participants' interest so they were highly motivating for the learners (Day & Bamford, 2009; Gillet & Temple, 2000). The length of the stories was between 120 to 230 words. Therefore, in each one hour session, participants in both groups were provided with five stories, about 800 words in total.

After the treatment

After two months of treatment, participants were asked to gather in the Institute, where they were given the Reading Self-Efficacy Scale again. They were asked to give their scores from 0-100 to each question of the reading self-efficacy scale.

Data Analysis

To determine the participants' self-efficacy before and after the study and also to compute the reliability of the reading self-efficacy scale, values 1-4 were given to the scale's scores, which ranged from 0-100. The value of 1 was given to the numbers from 0 to 20, which means "I'm unable to do this"; numbers 21 to 49 were taken as 2, which means "I might be able to do this", numbers 50 to 70 were encoded as 3, which means "I'm **pretty** sure I can do this", and numbers 71 to 100 were considered as 4, which means "I'm sure I can do this". These four sentences (i.e., "I'm unable to do this", "I might be able to do this", "I'm **pretty** sure I can do this", and "I'm sure I can do this") are provided in the scale to help participants estimate their reading self-efficacy.

The collected data were entered into the SPSS 17.0 for further analysis. To answer the first and second research questions, a Paired Samples t-test was carried out, and to answer the third research question an Independent Samples t-test was carried out. The criterion for significant value was set at $p < .05$.

RESULTS

First and second research questions

Table 1 indicates the means and standard deviations for the reading self-efficacy scores of the experimental and control groups in the pre-study and post-study stages. The average level of self-efficacy after the study for the experimental group ($M = 3.43$, $SD = .21$) showed an increase of about 1as compared to the pre-study ($M = 2.43$, $SD = .36$), meaning a change from the range of 21-49 (i.e., I might be able to do this) to 50-70 (i.e., I'm **pretty** sure I can do this). However, the post-study of the control group ($M = 2.96$, $SD = .25$) reflected an increase of 0.60 from the pre-study ($M = 2.36$, $SD = .31$), meaning a minor change in the same range of 21-49 (i.e., I might be able to do this). This revealed a small change in the control group's level of reading self-efficacy.

To come up with a better comparison of the results in both groups and to see whether the obtained changes from the pretest to the posttest within the experimental and control groups were significant or not, a Paired Samples t-test was run (see Table 2).

As Table 2 indicates, significant differences ($p=.000$) were found between the pretest and

TABLE 1
Means and Standard Deviations of the pretest and posttest reading self-efficacy scores in the Experimental and Control Groups

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest for reading self-efficacy	Experimental	30	2.43	.36
	Control	30	2.36	.31
Posttest for reading self-efficacy	Experimental	30	3.43	.21
	Control	30	2.96	.25

posttest reading self-efficacy mean scores of both the experimental and control groups, with an increase in their posttest scores. This implies that both the teacher-directed Internet-based ER and the paper-based ER had significantly increased the reading self-efficacy of the experimental and control groups. However, in order to determine which group's reading self-efficacy level was significantly higher, the third research question was investigated.

Third research question

In order to find out whether there is a significant difference between the pretest and posttest mean scores of the experimental and control groups in their levels of reading self-efficacy, an Independent Samples t-test was employed (see Table 3). A preliminary assumption testing was conducted to check for normality and equality of variances with no serious violation noted.

The results revealed that the difference between the reading self-efficacy mean scores of the experimental group (M= 2.43, SD= .36) and the control group (M = 2.36, SD = .31) before the treatment was insignificant, $t_{(58)}$ = .774, p = .442, which means that the two groups were not different regarding the level of their reading self-efficacy at the beginning of the study. However, after the study, the result showed a significant difference, $t_{(58)}$ = 7.814, p = .000, between the mean reading self-efficacy

TABLE 2
Paired Samples t-test between the pretest and posttest reading self-efficacy mean scores for the Experimental and Control Groups

	Paired Differences			t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean			
Mean Posttest–Mean Pretest (Experimental Group)	.99	.38	.069	14.313	29	.000
Mean Posttest–Mean Pretest (Control Group)	.60	.18	.033	17.558	29	.000

* p < .05

TABLE 3
Results of the Independent Samples t-test for the participants' reading self-efficacy before and after the study

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pretest for reading self-efficacy	Equal variances assumed	2.656	.109	.774	58	.442
Posttest for reading self-Efficacy	Equal variances assumed	6.326	.015	7.814	58	.000

* p < .05

scores of the experimental group ($M = 3.43$, $SD = .21$) and the control group ($M = 2.96$, $SD = .25$). This implies that, compared to the control group, the experimental group's reading self-efficacy significantly increased after the experiment.

The results showed that, although both groups showed an increase in the mean reading self-efficacy scores after the treatment, the amount of increase was significantly higher in the experimental group. In other words, the effect of teacher-directed Internet-based ER materials was significantly higher in increasing the reading self-efficacy of the participants compared to the paper-based ones.

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to propose a method by which the best characteristics of extensive reading and online education were combined through a researcher-designed weblog. In order to determine the effectiveness of this method, a sample of 60 intermediate students was chosen by administering the Nelson English Language Test (Fowler & Coe, 1976). These 60 students were randomized into two groups. The control group was provided with extensive reading materials taken from the Internet on paper in a traditional reading class, while the experimental group was given the same materials through a researcher-designed weblog.

Both versions of extensive reading were found to be effective in terms of students' reading self-efficacy. The Internet-based version, however, was found to have more significant effects on the students' reading self-efficacy. In addition, the Internet-based version of extensive reading boasts more advantages in that it can finally lead to more autonomous learners (Brandl, 2002; Ohm, 2007; Silva, 2006; White, 2004).

The findings of the study are in agreement with other researchers' findings that introduce extensive reading as an effective method of teaching the L_2 reading to EFL participants (e.g., Day & Bamford, 2009; Gillet & Temple, 2000; Jarrell, 2003; Shang *et al.*, 2007; Yamashita, 2008). The findings also verify the significant role of the Internet in L_2 learning process (e.g., Brandl, 2002; Silva, 2006) and its integration into the L2 pedagogy (Abbitt & Klett, 2007; Brandl, 2002; Hsu & Sheu, 2008; Li, 2009; Ohm, 2007; Prapinwong & Puthikanon, 2008; White, 2004).

Many scholars and researchers have introduced extensive reading as an effective method of teaching L_2 reading to beginner and intermediate students (e.g., Day & Bamford, 2009; Gillet & Temple, 2000; Jarrell, 2003; Shang *et al.*, 2007; Yamashita, 2008). Likewise, this study revealed that extensive reading, whether Internet-based or paper-based, can be considered an effective way through which students' interest, motivation, and reading self-efficacy would be enhanced. Furthermore, the advantage of teacher-directed online extensive reading was demonstrated over the paper-based version of it (Brandl, 2000; Silva, 2006). The results of the study also showed the usefulness of the extensive reading materials in enhancing non-native readers' interest and

confidence, or more technically, their self-efficacy, in English texts, especially funny stories and jokes.

CONCLUSION

As the literature indicated, reading researchers have suggested different ways of promoting the reading ability of the EFL/ESL learners. In this regard, some researchers (e.g., Day & Bamford, 2009; Bandura, 1994; Katz, 2004) refer to the lack of motivation, self-efficacy, and interest in reading as great obstacles for increasing the reading skills of the learners. This study was an attempt to propose a way to solve this problem through the introduction of the teacher-directed, Internet-based extensive reading that turned out to be an effective alternative which increased the students' reading self-efficacy. Despite all of the attempts in this area, reading research still requires different innovative challenges to improve EFL/ESL learners' reading skills.

In this study, the effect of the treatment on students' reading comprehension ability was not taken into consideration. Therefore, a further study is needed to determine the effect of internet-based extensive reading on the reading comprehension of intermediate L2 learners; such a study can be conducted on other proficiency levels as well. Moreover, a further study can be carried out on the correlation between the self-efficacy of the students in reading and their reading comprehension.

The variables of first language (i.e., Kurdish) and cultural background of the participants, who were from Boukan, West Azerbaijan in Iran, were not considered in this study, a fact which proves to be a limitation that might reduce the generalizability of the results to students with other first languages and cultural backgrounds. It might yield further results if the effect of teacher-directed internet-based ER materials were studied on the students with different first languages and cultural backgrounds.

The findings of the study can be useful for the pedagogical purposes in L2 learning/teaching situations. In this regard, the results of the study can be used by materials writers, universities and L_2 institutes, L_2 teachers, individual students, and online language teaching websites.

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APPENDIX

A SAMPLE OF THE RESEARCHER-DESIGNED WEBLOG