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Investigating and Understanding ‘Free Reading’ Experiences through Exploratory Practice

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Introduction

In this Exploratory Practice (EP) research, I investigated the amount of extracurricular or free reading activities undertaken by students as separate and distinct to curricular reading. Curricular reading can be considered as intensive reading since it aims “... to arrive at a profound and detailed understanding of the text: not only of what it means, but also of how the meaning is produced. ... the intensive reading lesson is intended primarily to train students in reading strategies.” (Nuttall, 2005, p. 38). My investigation focused on extracurricular reading activities of preparatory school students, such as novels, stories, newspapers, comic books, blogs and websites in English. I was puzzled by this conundrum: I wondered to what extent this change has affected the amount and type of reading students do, and whether this leads to a lack of exposure to the

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language and negatively impacts language learning (Koda, 2007; Elley & Mangubhai, 1983).

At Middle East Technical University, Northern Cyprus Campus (METU-NCC), we have an English preparatory program where students engage in comprehensive English language learning. The program aims to provide students with communicative competence in everyday English as well as “basic language skills so that they can pursue their undergraduate studies at our university without major difficulty.” (<http://ncc.metu.edu.tr/sfl/general-info/>). Materials are chosen and designed to foster students’ knowledge of English for Academic Purposes (EAP), which “...is concerned with researching and teaching the English needed by those who use the language to perform academic tasks.” (Charles, 2012, p. 137) Hyland (2006, p. 2) further defines EAP as: “...language use in the academy at all age and proficiency levels, incorporating and often going beyond immediate communicative contexts to understand the nature of disciplinary knowledge itself...”

Reading helps improve vocabulary and awareness of the use of language in diverse contexts (Krashen, 2012, 2006; Pitts & Krashen, 1989), and is useful in language learning (Pazhakh & Soltani, 2010; Krashen, 2006; Cunningham & Stanovich, 2001). With online and mobile based apps and messaging tools, reading habits have also started to change (Johnsson-Smaragdi & Jönsson, 2006; Liu, 2005). Regarding extracurricular reading activities, throughout my research, I prefer to use the term ‘free reading’ to avoid confusion with the more commonly used term of ‘extensive reading’. Nation (1997, 2005) and Bell (1998) suggest that extensive reading activities should be planned and monitored by the teachers. Day and Bamford’s (1988) characteristics of extensive reading support the view that extensive reading activities should have a strict framework. The reading activities I tried to investigate were not of this nature, being closer to Krashen’s *Free Voluntary Reading (FVR)* (Krashen, 2003) and reading for pleasure, which is more in line with my thoughts regarding this research.

Below, I will provide more information about my research, my institutional context, and how I met EP and what it means for me. I will also present my methodology, data collection, findings and conclusion.

Context

METU has its main campus in Ankara, Turkey, with its Northern Cyprus Campus situated in Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. At METU-NCC, the School of Foreign Languages consists of a Modern Languages Programme, providing undergraduate service English courses, and an English Preparatory School (EPS), providing English language instruction at various proficiency levels (Beginner to Upper intermediate or A1 to B2+ in Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)).

The EPS runs intensive courses in two 16-week semesters as well as exam preparation courses in the summer. The enrollment was about 600 at the start of the 2015–2016 academic year, and the average number of students per class was 20. I have been working as an English language instructor at this institution for about ten years and I regularly get involved in various research activities and projects.

During the first semester of the 2015–2016 academic year, I was assigned to Intermediate (CEFR-B1+) level classes, the highest English proficiency level classes, and followed through in the second semester to the upper-intermediate (CEFR-B2+) level. These students are generally quite confident and comfortable using English during classroom activities such as in-class discussions, writing tasks and following instructions. Working with these students is stimulating and there is scope for a wider variety of communicative and interactive activities compared to lower proficiency level classes, which facilitates learning about their interests and how they make use of English outside. Through these discussions and talks, I realized they did not seem to read a lot out of class, missing out on the benefits of reading, especially vocabulary development (Pazhakh & Soltani, 2010, p. 388). I wondered why this might be the case.

I decided to look into the matter by informally inquiring during class about their reading habits and use of English outside the classroom. Not surprisingly, I noticed they had a strong preference for visual media such as movies, computer games and social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Since they were heavily engaged with digital

media, I assumed they were also exposed to reading texts, but perhaps did not consider this to be explicitly reading. Thus, I was curious to look into details about their reading habits in a more structured way, which fortuitously coincided with my introduction to EP.

Enter Exploratory Practice

Some of my colleagues had already met EP in language learning (Allwright, 2003; Allwright & Hanks, 2009) and as a result of their interest, our institution invited Dr. Judith Hanks and Dr. Kenan Dikilitaş for a series of workshops and seminars on EP, as part of our continuous professional development activities. At first, I was not really sure about what EP meant to me, and as a matter of fact, I thought it was more like Huang's definition of action research:

Action research is an orientation to knowledge creation that arises in a context of practice and requires researchers to work with practitioners. Unlike conventional social science, its purpose is not primarily or solely to understand social arrangements, but also to effect desired change as a path to generating knowledge and empowering stakeholders. We may therefore say that action research represents a transformative orientation to knowledge creation in that action researchers seek to take knowledge production beyond the gate-keeping of professional knowledge makers.

(Huang, 2010, p. 93)

One of the issues with action research, as I understood it, is that it seems to focus on change and then based on the results make necessary adjustments and then try again. In our context, we do not have a lot of time for trial and error processes during the academic year. We have a compact and loaded program. Thus, I needed something practical, which could be done while following my regular classroom activities and allow my casual interest into my students' reading habits the potential to develop into more structured research.

At that point Hanks's brief description summarized my aims: "... a form of practitioner research in language education that aims to integrate

research, learning and teaching” (Hanks, 2015, p. 2). I decided I would be a practitioner researcher, and, it would be possible to integrate my research ideas into my classroom activities.

Another important point for me, was the focus EP places on curiosity as expressed in my question: “*Why don't my students read?*” I first wanted to understand the nature of the problem before deciding if a solution or change was needed. According to Allwright that is one main focus of EP:

Practitioner Research must be about understanding. One of our first big realizations at this point was that we needed to bring understanding back to the foreground in our work, to insist that we were dealing with the notion of understanding, not problem-solving...an important distinguishing feature of EP (especially in distinguishing EP from Action Research)... So we made the epistemological issue of understanding a matter of first principle for EP.

(Allwright, 2005, p. 358)

In fact, I realized I needed to understand what sorts of reading they were involved in, and/or whether I was even correct in thinking that they were not reading. I began to question my own assumptions. Combining practice with research and looking for understanding I thought this was my best option to proceed with my in-class queries or investigations.

I needed to plan, keep track of what I was doing in class and organize it in such a way that the research itself would be part of the class. I invited my students to be my fellow researchers, not just sources of data, which I believe added more quality to the classroom culture (Hanks, 2015, p. 4).

I will not go into detail about how I feel and how I would describe quality of life in the classroom because that is not the main focus of this research. However, it may form the basis for research in the future.

I believed that relating what we study in class to movies, books or anything in our daily lives (in general) would add and hopefully lead to some sort of curiosity among my students to build on knowledge in different aspects and to reflect it to our class culture enhancing it in various ways. This could also be very helpful in our English learning and teaching experience.

Unlike faculty members, research is not part of our job description at our institution, so no allowances are made for the time and energy required for traditional research. While our administration recognizes the benefits of such research-related projects, the lack of direct support meant that the practicality of EP was very appealing at this point.

Methodology

My research was mostly done during the first semester. First semester intermediate students are interested and aware of almost everything globally. It is easy for them to find information on the Internet because they can use their English for global searches, whereas lower English proficiency level students tend to use their L1 for the same search. So, seeing their interest in using their English and interests in different areas, I wondered if I could learn about their reading habits (especially in English). My assumption, and their responses to our in-class talks, suggested that they did not read.

To find out, I asked them in our classroom conversations whether they read newspapers, magazines, books, novels, blogs, websites, forums, and so on. These were in-class small-talk type of interactions. However, when I decided to look more into it, I needed to continue in a more organized manner.

I frequently tell my students that I expect them to be as ‘autonomous’ as they can in their English learning experience, and since within our program, we already give them lots of reading activities focused on grammar, reading skills, vocabulary, and so on, I want them to use the language freely in reading. Thus, as many instructors do, while working on some topics throughout the main coursebook (Language Leader Intermediate (Cotton, Falvey, & Kent, 2008)), I like linking the topic to various movies, computer games, books, songs and so on. I also like to have their ideas if they want to share.

During our casual classroom conversations, I came to realize that the students were more into visual and IT-based entertainment and leisure activities. Two quick examples would be *The Lord of the Rings* by J. R. R. Tolkien and the *Harry Potter* Series by J. K. Rowling. When we talked

about these in class, it seemed like they knew a lot about the stories, characters and plot. Yet, when I asked them whether they had read the books (either in L1 or English), the answer I mostly got was “NO.” It also struck me in that they also knew a lot more than what is shown in the movies or games. Thus, I deduced, their knowledge was not only from movies and games. Since they had not read the books either, then where did that knowledge come from? That question was answered during and after my data gathering and analysis, which showed that they were actually reading something.

I also needed to find out what they were reading and why they would constantly answer “*No. We’re not reading.*” The shortest answer to my questions regarding this was that they were not aware of what they were doing. Perhaps the meaning and understanding of reading might have changed given our digitally and virtually surrounded environment.

I started to realize they were reading but I was not sure what, how and where. Therefore, I would add another question to my query: “*Why are they reading whatever they are reading?*” Although skeptical of both my ideas and their responses, I still wanted to keep my original question: “*Why don’t my students read?*”

It took a couple of days to organize and plan the procedure. This was an in-class, built-in research in which research procedures were implemented within the pedagogical, daily classroom activities (one of the important principles of EP). Embedding research material or activities into in-class activities is important for many reasons and was attractive to me because of its non-invasive and non-parasitic nature, as Allwright has argued:

... Work done for understanding and/or change must not hinder language teaching and learning, and will seek to make a positive contribution to learning. This criterion is intended to counter the ‘parasitic’ reputation of research interventions into language teaching and learning... This is why EP proposes as a first stage the use of ‘monitoring’ activities, non-invasive procedures by which the teacher can keep a record of what goes on in his or her classroom. ‘Monitoring’ here might be as simple a notion as keeping notes while learners are engaged in group work....

(Allwright, 2001, p. 110)

Procedure

Here are the basic steps I followed. The ‘why’ question was needed as a start. My initial puzzles outlined above developed now into a more formal research question: *Why do some English preparatory class students not get involved in free reading in English as much as they should!?! Or do they?*

Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities (PEPAs) (as discussed by Rio EP Group in Allwright & Hanks, 2009), played the second role in my plan. Although it felt a bit confusing at first to understand this concept, I, later, figured out, again for my purposes, the key word for me was ‘exploitable’. This looked scary at first but it turned out to be very convenient.

I think the easiest way to explain how it worked for me is to provide a brief sample session description below:

We are studying a topic about seas and oceans through the coursebook. And almost every activity leads to a discussion. Then I ask: “Do you know any books or movies about the sea?” I may or may not get answers. Most of the answers I get are about movies and not books. Then I go on: “Have you read “*The Old Man and The Sea*” by Ernest Hemingway, one of my favourite authors? or “*Moby Dick*”, a classic, by Herman Melville?” If (and usually) the answer is “no”, I write the names on the board and suggest reading them, preferably in English; graded readers if they like. So, after every such query, I get puzzled more and more. Then, I start to take notes about these. They haven't read this, haven't read that. Later, these tiny notes turn into part of my data and one of my research tools which I call “The List”. I like to keep the name short and with a “The” because it sounds attractive and I think the students fancy it.

‘The List’, was an idea which emerged after I decided to take notes of what they have read or not. Simply put, instead of writing suggestions on the board, which would be erased soon, I decided to keep a list of items (books, stories, movies, etc.). They suggested, and I posted it on one of the walls in the classroom so it would be there all semester. As part of my research I was going to use it to investigate whether they read or watched any of those items in the list throughout the semester.

That was how I initially embedded research-related material into my pedagogical practice. I also tried to blend research activities into my classroom practice during my questionnaire and my group discussions, which I will explain below.

The List

I decided to provide my classes with a list including mostly books, websites and other related media. I also asked my students to note down their suggestions if they wanted to. My idea was to see how much interest they showed toward these suggestions at the end of the semester (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 List of books read by students

Books/Work	↓	Authors	↓	Websites	↓
The Masque of the Red Death		E.A.Poe		www.bbc.co.uk	
Annabel Lee		E.A. Poe		www.bbclearningenglish.com	
The Picture of Dorian Gray		Oscar Wilde		www.theguardian.com	
War of the Worlds		H.G. Wells		www.newsinlevels.com	
The Time Machine		H.G. Wells		https://newsela.com	
1984		George Orwell		www.gutenberg.org/	
Animal Farm		George Orwell		freerice.com	
The Catcher in the Rye		J.D. Salinger		http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/	
Of Mice and Men		John Steinbeck		www.cnn.com	
Dracula		Bram Stoker		www.discovery.com	
The Old Man and the Sea		Ernest Hemingway		http://www.discoveryeducation.com/	
For Whom the Bell Tolls		Ernest Hemingway		http://discoverykids.com/	
Harry Potter (any)		J.K. Rowling		http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/	
The Lord of the Rings (any)		J.R.R. Tolkien		http://www.nationalgeographic.com/	
The Hobbit		J.R.R. Tolkien		http://education.nationalgeographic.org/	
Silmarillion		J.R.R. Tolkien			
The Rime of the Ancient Mariner		Samuel Taylor Coleridge			
Journey to the Center of the Earth		Jules Verne			
Around the World in Eighty Days		Jules Verne			
Perfume: The Story of a Murderer		Patrick Süskind			
Hamlet		William Shakespeare			
Macbeth		William Shakespeare			
Othello		William Shakespeare			
Romeo & Juliet		William Shakespeare			
Crime and Punishment		Fyodor Dostoyevski			
A Christmas Carol		Charles Dickens			
Metamorphosis		Franz Kafka			
The Trial		Franz Kafka			
		David Attenborough			

Books/Graphic novels (graphic novels suggested from Metu-Ncc library)	↓	↓
The Martian Chronicles	Ray Bradbury	
The Jungle Book	Rudyard Kipling	
Crime and Punishment	Fyodor Dostoyevski	
Othello	W.Shakespeare	
Henry V.	W.Shakespeare	
Macbeth	W.Shakespeare	
Nevermore	E.A.Poe	
Romeo & Juliet	W.Shakespeare	
Spiderman (Noir)	Marvel Comics	

The list itself, and the image created of it were both designed and created by the author; thus, both are properties of the author

Students as Research Partners

Working for understanding life in the language classroom will provide a good foundation for helping teachers and learners make their time together both pleasant and productive. It will also, I believe, prove to be a friend of intelligent and lasting pedagogic change, since it will automatically provide a firm foundation for any ‘improvements’ that investigation suggests are worth trying.

(Allwright, 2003, p. 114)

I conducted my research in two classes (18 + 20 = 38 students in total). Since I wanted my students to share their suggestions in my list, and since they were the focus of my research, I thought it would be a good idea to let them know about my plans. I informed them about my intentions in building up on this list. Just like the first practice (linking the in-class topic to books or movies via in-class discussions), I wanted to involve my students in my research, which I believe added variety, quality and above all ownership of the activities we did in class. I introduced it as follows:

- | | |
|------|---|
| T: | You know our “List” right? |
| Sts: | Yes.uhuh. |
| T: | Well...I want to conduct a research into your reading habits because it puzzles me that whenever I ask you about whether you read or not, you usually answer “No”. ... But I also know that you know a lot of stuff, especially from the movies and the Internet and I can't believe that you are not reading. I guess you are reading but maybe you are not aware or you misunderstand my question when I ask “Do you read?” |
| Sts: | <i>Hocam</i> [this is how they address us in class. It is used like a title instead of “teacher, Sir, Dr, Prof, Mr, Ms] Of course we are reading this and that but we are not reading books (a lot). |
| T: | Yes, right. But I want to know why? and I know some of you told me that it was boring, and some books are too long and so on. Now, what I want to do is to find out the real reasons and I want you to help me. I want us to be as honest as possible because there is no right or wrong here and whatever we do during this research, it will absolutely have no effect on your grades. I'll give you the details as we proceed but be assured that nothing that we do in class will change. I'll take notes of my questions and your answers about reading. Then, I'll prepare a questionnaire, of course in English and I'll ask you to answer the questions as freely as possible, preferably in English, but you might also use Turkish and we'll have a couple of group discussions based on your questionnaire responses and you can give me more suggestions and share your ideas. Is that OK with you? |
| Sts: | Uhuh. Yeah, yes... |

So they became my research partners. In a way we were all participants, researchers and practitioners. Our list started to grow with more items either from me or from them. I asked them questions like, if they used to read before university, or if they went to our library to check the items in our list, or if they liked reading blogs and if they had favorite bloggers. These questions and their responses led me to my questionnaire items and helped me understand their motives, ideas and understanding regarding reading.

Toward the end of the semester, I gave them a questionnaire and finally, we had a group discussion. This way I was aiming at a triangulated data gathering process: in-class discussions, questionnaire and a focused group discussion (Fig. 4.1).

I could do all of these within my class time and regular classroom activities: discussions regarding this research turned into speaking activities and the questionnaire became a writing activity. We had the opportunity to provide feedback about this research and share our ideas about reading in English (Fig. 4.2).

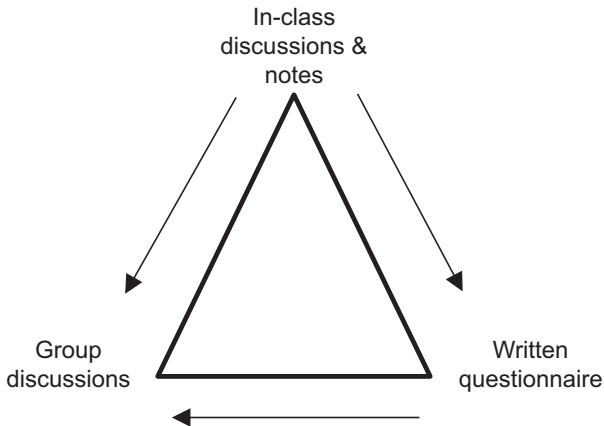


Fig. 4.1 Data for the study

Questionnaire Items

1. These books, authors and websites have been mentioned/suggested by & to you during the semester. These could be useful in enhancing your English learning experience. Which one(s) of these have you read? (please put a tick next to the ones you have)

2. In addition to the list above, this semester, have you done any reading in English (other than MTR, Lang.Lead, Reading Practices, etc. i.e. any out-of-class free reading)? Yes – No

If “Yes”, can you write some or all of those reading materials/resources?

If “No”, please explain why?

3. Do you regularly read in Turkish? Yes – No

If yes, what kind of reading do you do? (newspapers, magazines, books, encyclopedias, blogs, websites etc.)

If “No”, please explain why?

4. Do you regularly read in English? Yes – No

If yes, what kind of reading do you do? (newspapers, magazines, books, encyclopedias, blogs, websites etc.)

If “No”, please explain why?

5. Why do you think you and/or some students do not do extra-curricular (out-of-class/free/not school work) English reading? Please comment as honestly and freely as possible.

6. Please share any other comments/ideas that you have about “reading in English”.

Fig. 4.2 Questionnaire items

The Questionnaire

I devised a simple questionnaire with open-ended questions, to which students could comment on and share their ideas freely. My questions were, I believe, in line with my initial queries regarding my students’ reading habits. With this questionnaire I aimed at getting answers to the following five items by Csizér and Dörnyei (2012, p. 75):

- *language learners’ intended language behavior, that is, how students plan to respond to certain language situations* [in my case their willingness toward reading to improve their English]
- *people’s opinions and attitudes concerning specific L2s and the language learning process in general* [in my case their attitude toward reading]
- *participants’ feelings and beliefs about certain L2-related issues* [in my case their feelings about reading]
- *learners’ knowledge of certain issues in SLA (Second Language Acquisition);* in my case their idea of the value of reading

- *various background information and biodata from the students* [in my case how they perceived reading in relation to their acquired English proficiency]

I presented this questionnaire toward the end of the semester. Regarding the question of blending pedagogical activities and research activities; I believe this questionnaire served multiple aims in the language learning class:

1. They are practicing reading and understanding questions, Q&A skills and writing.
2. The 'List', may create an interest in some of the items there.
3. An opportunity to have their ideas and voices heard.
4. In all cases, they are practicing English.

It took 15–20 minutes for students to complete the questionnaire during which there was interaction between each other and me regarding vocabulary items, questions regarding grammar about how to write something in a specific way, and so on.

Analyzing the responses to the questionnaire took quite some time. Around then, Kenan Dikilitaş visited our campus for a workshop. Fortunately, we could get together and decide on the best way to continue. By reading and making notes about students' responses, I was to find topics or categories which would help me to group their individual responses and to come up with themes. Basically, I needed to group responses in an organized and logical manner. This was "...fairly labor-intensive ...but this is the crux of qualitative analysis. It involves reading and re-reading the text and identifying coherent categories." (Renner & Taylor-Powell, 2003, p. 2)

Final Group Discussion

I call this part of my research 'Final' because throughout the semester, we had lots of small-talk and longer discussions about reading habits. I take all of these as 'discussions' since they provided valuable information for this research.

It was the end of semester and my students asked if we could do this out of class. They were my partners and up to that point they had fulfilled their part of the process. So, I thought it was a good idea to make a

change and this provided an opportunity to thank them for their help. We met at a cafe on our campus. I would not call it as one of my best PEPAs but I believe there was much value in it. During this discussion session, I asked them about their responses to the written questionnaire. I quoted some answers (anonymously) and we discussed what they meant, what I understood, what I had expected to see with a specific item, and so on. Most of the discussion took place in Turkish; yet, we analyzed what was produced in English. This took about half an hour. I took notes and then came up with more questions based on their responses. They also had the opportunity to discuss each other's responses and ideas. Two other points of value came out of this: ownership and having an opportunity to have their voices heard, which were among the reasons I had originally decided to try EP.

Reflections

During in-class small-talk Q&As, most students said that they did not read regularly. At that point, I had to make sure that I was not only referring to reading printed books or classics like *Pride and Prejudice*, *Frankenstein*, *Crime and Punishment* but to all sorts of reading; blogs, websites, newspapers, periodicals, social networking sites, and so on. Still, mostly the answer was “No.”

Why Do They Not Read?

“*They didn't read*”, they said, because, mostly, it is a boring and time-consuming activity compared to movies, gaming and hanging out with friends and this argument was also supported by the questionnaire and the final discussion. I need to state that when I asked them about reading they were always thinking about reading books. Even so, there was still a question about why they perceive reading as boring and time consuming, especially when literature says it can be helpful in their English language studies (Krashen, 2012; Pazhakh & Soltani, 2010; Elley & Mangubhai, 1983). Some of their responses (summarized from discussions and questionnaire) are as follows:

- *It is a boring and time-consuming activity.*
- *I prefer to spend my free time with my friends. Reading is boring.*
- *I play computer games and I use my English.*
- *I study English every day and we have lots of homework. I don't want to read English books.*
- *I read something when I need it. If want to learn something about engineering I google it. Find the information read it and that's it.*

Another reason they gave was the difficulty of the texts and vocabulary. I was a bit suspicious about this because their level was intermediate (CEFR-B1+). I thought that some books I suggested could have been a bit challenging for them, but the main reason should not be their level. Besides, I always pointed out that there were numerous graded-reader books available in our Self-Access Center and the library. If they wanted to read, they had many alternatives to exploit. So the idea that there must be other reasons to why they are not reading led me to question their background and how they had approached reading in L1. Data showed they did not have a regular reading habit and thus, most of them lacked many reading skills in their own language.

I wondered if that could be why they felt uncomfortable reading long texts. Because they felt the need to check every unknown word, reading became a tiresome task for them. This was supported by data:

- *Hocam, when I start reading, I have to look at many words and then I am bored and give up.*
- *Many of us don't have a reading habit in L1. How can we read in English?*
- *I don't read books in Turkish. Why bother in English?*
- *The language scares me. When I have a look at some sentences and do not understand immediately, I lose motivation.*
- *I don't want to struggle to understand.*

Another common reason in the questionnaire was 'lack of time.' According to my students, due to their loaded program (4 hours class) and about an hour extra practice (i.e. homework), they could not find the time to read. Yet, the final discussion session proved this to be an excuse. They said they used the lessons as an excuse for almost anything they did not want to do and in fact 'lack of time' was not an issue.

In addition to these, they came up with other minor reasons why they would not read in L2 (as shown in the poster).

But Do They Read?

The students told me they use social networking sites and online sources, but they never thought of it as reading. I noticed that the understanding of reading differed among us. I explained that my idea of reading was related to every reading activity they were involved in, including blogs, Twitter messages, magazines, newspapers, books, and so on. Following on that I asked them what they do read.

After I analyzed the questionnaire and asked them about it during the final group discussion, I found out that they did do some sort of reading actually. One common answer was that they read about things when they needed it or when they were curious about something. Thus, they meant reading more non-fiction and factual, short and focused (content-specific) data. They mostly read out of necessity and texts tended to be short and to the point.

- *Hocam, for instance, I am a mechanical engineering student. I want to find something about this topic [meaning engineering]. I just google it, read it and that's it.*
- *We want to find and read real information. Stories....we always have movies and that's more fun.*
- *Maybe, if I watch a movie and I like it. I might read the book.*

Of course, there were also some students who valued reading. Some mentioned that it was a great way to spend time. Some also mentioned that it was a good way to practice their English vocabulary and grammar.

- *I can learn new words and I can use them in my paragraph writing.*
- *I think reading in English is very important. But I think my friends do not understand this.*

- *I know it is important, but I can't find the right motivation. And I have to study for the exams.*
- *When I read a book and understand, it gives me a lot of pleasure.*
- *I like reading. I always have.*

All in all, I believe we need to take a look at our understanding of reading and analyze reading behavior of the younger generations.

Dissemination

I presented my work using an infographic (see below) at the IATEFL-ReSig-Teachers Research Conference at Bahçeşehir University, Istanbul, Turkey, in 2016.

My first aim was to write a paper and present it that way, but after we (Kenan Dikilitaş, Judith Hanks and I) talked about alternative ways to present it we decided how useful infographics are and how much they could contribute instead. It was agreed at that point that I was going to prepare an infographic poster. However, I also ended up writing this chapter later on.

During the event at Bahçeşehir University, it was really convenient because my audience could follow my workflow at once. They could ask me questions pointing at a certain part in that graphic, so it became livelier and more interactive (Figs. 4.3, 4.4, 4.5).

I would like to explain my infographic. Below the title, there is a color code: red for L1 (Turkish & Arabic) (one student; L1-Arabic) and blue for L2 (English). I used my main questionnaire items to create the infographic.

Do you regularly read in L1–L2? This aimed at double-checking their responses given in class discussions. Although their initial response was “no” in class, it emerged that many were regular readers.

The next question was about what they were reading. Websites were the most common medium (including news websites, department related or just surfing for fun). 19 of my 38 students stated that they read those items in the list in both languages, and 4 stated that they do not.

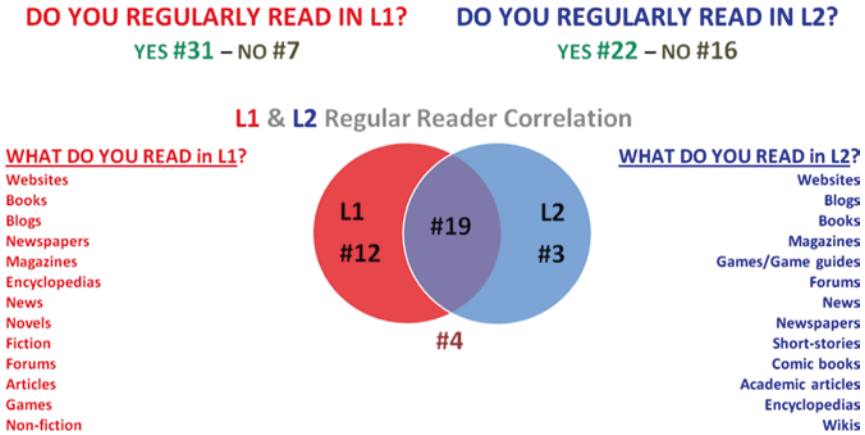


Fig. 4.3 Students responses to reading habits in L1 and L2

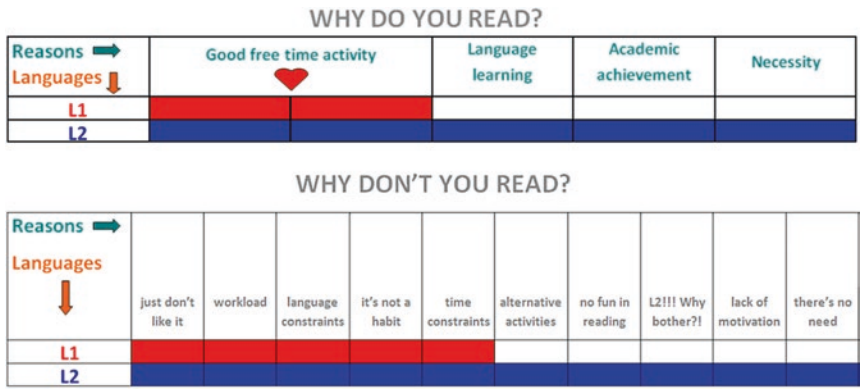


Fig. 4.4 Students responses to the reasons for reading and not reading

The next question was *Why do you read?* These reasons are the themes via their responses to the questionnaire. The responses surprised me because, in our classroom talks, they had mentioned that it was not fun and they had better things to do. Surprisingly, some stated that reading was actually a nice free-time activity. Still, through the other themes, we can see that interest in reading in English is mainly related to academic success.

READING in L2 - STUDENTS' BELIEFS

positive	excuses	negative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • academic development • self-development • importance • fun 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not appealing enough • need more time • looking for motivation • torn between school-work and reading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not my type of thing • I've got more important and appealing stuff to do... • too difficult at this level

Fig. 4.5 My students beliefs about reading in L2

Then, the next question: “*Why don't you read?*” There were more reasons not to read, such as workload (we forget how much work they have to do), language constraints and lack of motivation.

Then, in the last section I compiled their responses to my query “*Please share any other comments/ideas you have about reading in English.*” I could group them in three sections: those with a positive approach, those who were not sure and those with a negative approach toward reading in English.

Concluding Remarks

I am aware I cannot make any generalizations with such a small-scale research, but I can share some comments. The definition and understanding of “reading” as well as reading habits and approaches are changing (Liu, 2005). As seen in the mismatch of student responses, I believe they are often not that aware they are doing a form of reading while they do so. Therefore, I came to a conclusion that our shared prejudice “*We are not reading*” was somehow incorrect. My EP question “*Why are they not reading?*” was answered in an interesting way, which raised more questions for me. They read, but the texts were (mostly) non-fiction. The digital world has become pervasive and we need to find ways to exploit it effectively. This would be another topic to discuss in another paper. Yet, for future reference, I think I can make use of different strategies like suggesting more online tools such as Google Alerts, Flipboard, websites such as <http://www.newsela.com>, <http://newsinlevels.com> or, simply more graded readers.

I am sure EP research means something different for everyone. Understanding EP initially was a bit difficult for me. During our first EP sessions on our campus, sometimes I felt lost because it all seemed too free and frameless. Then, I also had some difficulty with PEPAs. EP gave me focus though it was not easy. As with any research or any academic endeavor, one needs to spend time, energy and put a lot of effort into it. In any case, I am glad that it motivated me to pursue this work with my students. It helped me focus easily on both class work and research activities.

As a language instructor, I always thought that there was something which was not quite right about research related to language learning and teaching. It was the researcher, observing, taking notes, asking questions, trying to understand and to match the findings with literature and previous work and (sometimes) hoping to come up with an idea that would make learning more effective. However, there are a lot of things that are missing in this kind of an approach (with all my respect to all researchers); I believe the classroom is a very dynamic entity and one can only try to understand how it behaves by spending a lot of time in it, just like the teachers and students do. One needs to be a part of it to be able to understand how it functions as a whole (and the word ‘understand’ plays an important role here). EP helps us to understand the classroom better because it involves the individuals in it.

With the fast pace of technology surrounding us, I believe we need to be ready to face many other challenges and may need to change many methods and approaches to teaching that we have taken for granted for so many years. In my case, EP was one great tool to see this need for myself.

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