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The Effectiveness of Sustained Silent Reading in the EFL Classroom

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Resumen

La lectura es una habilidad esencial que necesitan los estudiantes para tener éxito en los estudios y en la vida. Una hipótesis común sobre la lectura es que los estudiantes mejoran su competencia lectora al leer en grandes cantidades. El presente estudio es una síntesis de investigación, que examina estudios recientes sobre la efectividad de un programa de lectura conocido como Lectura Silenciosa Sostenida en el contexto de la enseñanza del inglés como idioma extranjero. Este análisis incluye estudios experimentales y cuasi experimentales realizados en diversas instituciones educativas alrededor del mundo donde el inglés se enseña como idioma extranjero y cuyos estudiantes tiene edades que oscilan desde los 13 años hasta la edad adulta. Después de una búsqueda exhaustiva en la literatura y al definir un criterio de inclusión y exclusión, se reunieron un total de 15 estudios primarios (una tesis de doctorado y 14 artículos de investigación) de 2000 a 2018 con un total de 1,264 participantes. Esta síntesis de investigación tuvo como objetivo principal descubrir si la lectura silenciosa sostenida era efectiva para mejorar habilidades cognitivas de los estudiantes, tal como la comprensión de lectura. También exploró los beneficios afectivos en los estudiantes, tal como cambiar su actitud hacia la lectura. Los hallazgos revelaron que (1) la lectura silenciosa sostenida juega un papel importante en la mejora de la comprensión de lectura de los estudiantes, y (2) la lectura silenciosa sostenida tiene un efecto sustancial en el cambio de las actitudes de los estudiantes hacia el acto de la lectura. Al final de esta síntesis, se discuten los resultados y conclusiones de la investigación actual y se sugieren las posibles recomendaciones

Palabras claves: Lectura. Lectura extensa. Comprensión de lectura. Actitudes. Lectura silenciosa sostenida. SSR. Efectividad. EFL. Síntesis de investigación.



Abstract

Reading is one of the most important skills students need in order to succeed in school and in life. A shared hypothesis about reading is that students improve their reading competence by reading in great amounts. The present study is a research synthesis, which reviews recent research into the overall effectiveness of an in-class extensive reading program known as Sustained Silent Reading in the English as a Foreign Language context. The study includes experimental and quasi-experimental studies conducted in diverse educational institutions around the world where English is taught as a foreign language among students whose ages ranged from 13 to adulthood. After a thorough literature search and by defining an inclusion and exclusion criteria, a total number of 15 primary studies (one PhD dissertation and 14 research articles) from 2000 to 2018 involving a total of 1,264 participants were gathered. The research synthesis aimed to explore whether sustained silent reading was effective in improving students' cognitive skills such as reading comprehension. It also explored the affective benefits on students such as shifting their attitude towards reading. Findings revealed that (1) sustained silent reading plays a significant role on improving EFL students' reading comprehension, and (2) sustained silent reading has a substantial effect in increasing EFL students' reading attitudes. At the end of this synthesis, the results and conclusions in the current research are discussed and the possible recommendations are suggested.

Keywords: Reading. Extensive reading. Reading comprehension. Attitudes. Sustained silent reading. SSR. Effectiveness. EFL. Research synthesis.



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Dedication

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Introduction

Ecuadorian students spend many hours per week studying English in their classrooms, and they are usually told to read by the teachers. In these cases, the act of reading becomes a tedious task to perform for them. In the long run, they will learn how to read; however, unfortunately, some of them will not be able to get the gist of what they are reading. The reason could be that we do not have the habit of reading. According to data presented by the Regional Center for the Promotion of Books in Latin America and the Caribbean, an Ecuadorian reads only half a book per year (Criollo, 2017). As a way to engage students in reading practices and improve their reading comprehension, Extensive Reading (henceforth ER) in the form of Sustained Silent Reading (henceforth SSR) is an option. Krashen (2001) stated that the way everyone improves reading is through ER of texts that do not require strain and suffering, and that is so interesting that we get completely absorbed in the message. Thus, this study attempts to answer the following research questions: a) Does reading extensively through a SSR program contribute to the enhancement of EFL learners' reading comprehension skills? and b) What is the impact of reading extensively through a SSR program on EFL learners' attitudes toward reading?

This research study is developed in five chapters. The first chapter is the description of the research. It consists of the background, problem statement, justification, and the research questions. The second chapter involves the theoretical framework, which covers various definitions and key terms related to reading, ER, and SSR. The third chapter is the literature review which comprises all the key data information extracted from the 15 primary research studies selected for this paper. The methodology is covered in detail in the fourth chapter. The analysis of this research synthesis is presented in the fifth chapter. Finally, the last chapter includes the conclusions and recommendation of the research.



CHAPTER I

Description of the Research

1.1. Background

Reading is considered to be the path to success in school and in life. According to Gardiner (2005), “reading is a skill for life and if students do not learn to enjoy reading, they are defrauded of a vital part of their education” (p. 69). However, reading is the kind of task that needs a great amount of practice in order to excel it. To enhance the reading skills, students need to be continuously exposed to the language by reading extensively or for pleasure (Krashen, 1985). Grabe (1991) emphasized the importance of ER in providing learners with practice in automaticity of word recognition and decoding the symbols on the printed page.

ER has been for a long time a popular reading technique in EFL and ESL learning contexts around the world. This reading approach has received several different names throughout the years. According to Gardiner (2005), ER is also known as “SSR (Sustained Silent Reading), FVR (Free Voluntary Reading), USSR (Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading), DEAR (Drop Everything And Read), DIRT (Daily Interrupted Reading Time), SQUIRT (Sustained Quiet Uninterrupted Reading Time), and a host of other catchy acronyms and abbreviations” (p. 15).

The contribution of SSR to various aspects of language proficiency has been confirmed by a number of research studies (e.g., Beglar, Hunt, & Kite 2011; Nwabudike & Anaso 2013; Masoumi & Sadeghghli 2017; Mehar, Rowebe, & Suan 2012). Thus, in order to find the overall effectiveness that SSR has on EFL learners, this paper thoroughly reviews comprehensive literature on SSR. For the purpose of this research synthesis, 15 primary research studies published from 2000 to 2018 have been examined involving a total of 1,264 participants.



1.2 Problem Statement

Definitions of reading have been evolving through the years. Views of reading as private, solitary, asocial process have been challenged in considerable ways (Bloome & Dail, 1997).

According to these authors, there are multiple theories and definitions of reading. One way to describe the modern state of reading theory is that reading is perceived as a social and cultural practice (Landis, 2003). This means that reading practices are ascertained through social interactions inside and outside of school settings (Solsken, 1993). This social and cultural view of reading leads us to raise the following question: Do students actually enjoy reading?

Unfortunately, most learners tend to become distant when asked to read, whether it is for academic purposes or pleasure. Thus, there are students with the ability to read but lacking the desire to do it.

Aliteracy or “the quality of being able to read but uninterested in doing so” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) has become an issue in different contexts around the world. For instance, in England, only 26% of 10 year-olds “like reading” compared to 46% in Portugal. In addition, 41% of 11-15 year-olds in England do not participate in reading activities that are not required for school in their spare time (Reading for pleasure, n.d.). Similarly, in the United States, The Pew Research Center surveys have found that about a quarter of American adults have not read either totally or partially a print or electronic book during the last year (Perrin, 2018).

Reading for academic purposes or pleasure seems to be a weakness also in Latin America. According to a report published by UNESCO's Institute of Statistics, more than half of young people in Latin America and the Caribbean do not reach the levels of proficiency required in reading ability by the time they complete secondary education. According to the study, 36% of children and adolescents in the region do not have adequate reading levels (Bermúdez, 2017).



In our context, the Ecuadorian government has inaugurated the International Book Fair in Quito to promote stronger reading habits among the citizens. In addition, through programs promoted by the Ministry of Education such as the “Yo Leo” campaign and “José de la Cuadra” National Book and Reading Plan, the government tries to encourage people to adopt the habit of reading (Criollo, 2017). However, despite the Ecuadorian Government efforts in implementing such projects, there still exists poor reading levels performance among students nationwide. Currently, an Ecuadorian reads about one book every two years. One of the lowest rates in relation to 5.4 books read per person each year in Chile (Criollo, 2017).

English in Ecuador is taught as a foreign language. Classrooms are usually the only source of input for EFL learners. The teaching of the target language inside educational institutions is limited to course requirements. Therefore, students have little exposure to reading due to crowded classrooms, limited space and resources, narrowly defined traditional reading programs, and highly structured schedules. Consequently, neither our students are inclined to read for pleasure during their spare time nor the teachers give the needed attention and care for reading in the target language. Given the evidence found around the world of the significance of SSR with respect to language learning, the actual scarcity of empirical evidence in the Ecuadorian context creates the need for this study.



1.2. Justification

In the last decade, the importance of reading in second and foreign language acquisition has increased (Karbalaee, 2010). In the words of Kavlu (2015), “reading is perceived as a main pillar in academic and higher education context for EFL learner” (p. 81). Being exposed to rich input in English is essential for stimulating English proficiency in L2 learners (Zhang, 2009). A SSR program is an excellent way to provide this needed input, especially in foreign language contexts where the target language is very limited or inadequate. “A longstanding, highly respected body of research definitively shows that students who read more, read better, and have higher reading achievement” (Routman, 2003, p. 85).

Many scholars have recognized the advantages of SSR (Gardiner, 2001; Krashen, 1993). SSR has been ranked higher among the different other types of reading techniques, because it permits more concentration on comprehension while reading. Pilgreen (2000) have stated that SSR is considered one of the most effective means of improving students’ reading proficiency at any grade level. Gordon (2010) argued that SSR is not only conducive to reading motivation, but it also works better than direct instruction.

The effectiveness of SSR on reading proficiency is very well acknowledged in many countries around the world. Unfortunately, in Ecuador, where students are not accustomed to the habit of frequent reading, SSR is actually unfamiliar. The lack of research about this topic in our local context demands the interest in exploring the possible role that SSR may play in improving the reading skills of Ecuadorian EFL students. Consequently, the primary purpose of this paper is to synthesize the findings of SSR studies to provide Ecuadorian English teachers with a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of this type of reading on the following aspects: (1) Improvement in reading comprehension and (2) Shifts in attitude towards reading.



1.3. Research Questions

The aim of this study is to investigate the impact of SSR as a daily, independent reading activity in improving EFL learners' reading comprehension and their attitudes towards reading. In order to investigate the overall effectiveness of SSR, the present study posed the following research questions:

1. How does reading extensively through a SSR program contribute to the enhancement of EFL learners' reading comprehension skills?
2. What is the impact of a SSR program on EFL learners' attitudes toward reading?



CHAPTER II

Theoretical framework

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews previous research in order to establish what is currently acknowledged within the field. It also contains diverse perceptions from different authors that provide a profound understanding about the topic. The provided elements in this chapter helped in completing this research synthesis in an orderly fashion. This information is organized into different categories. One category discusses reading, reading comprehension and the types of readers. Another category provides definitions about extensive and intensive reading, and it also discusses the theories behind ER. A final category discusses everything related to SSR. The knowledge achieved in this chapter contributes to the research process and plays an important role as it represents all the insights of the research topic.

2.2 Reading as a Process

As stated by Scott and Saaiman (2016), reading is an imperative skill for students and it is essentially interrelated with their educational success. It is also considered an important aspect for students to develop their L2 competence (Troike, 2006) and is crucial to academic achievement (Alderson 2000; Grabe & Stoller 2011; Guthrie 2008; Pretorius 2000). Reading is a vital skill but *what actually means reading?* One of the first definitions of reading can be traced back to Huey (1908). This author viewed reading as gathering or choosing from what was written, suggesting that constant feeling of values which goes on in all effective reading. Adding to this, Thorndike (1917) characterized reading as reasoning and assumed that it was an active process related to problem solving.



For their part, Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson (1985) have defined reading as “the process of constructing meaning from written texts. Reading is a complex skill requiring the coordination of a number of interrelated sources of information” (p. 7). Furthermore, according to Romero and Romero (1985), many scholars agree on the following characteristics of reading:

- Reading is decoding written symbols.
- Reading is getting meaning from the printed page.
- Reading is putting meaning into the printed page.
- Reading is the process of interpreting the written symbols.
- Reading is the process of communication between author and reader. (p. 2)

In the same vein, Alderson and Urquhart (1984) suggested that reading, viewed as a process, examines how the reader can make particular text’s interpretation. These authors declared that reading consists mainly of two indispensable parts: a reader and a text.

In the past, reading was thought to be a passive and static process, which in contrast to the speaker and the writer, did not produce language at all (Al-Nafisah, 2015). This author has also mentioned that this approach believed reading to be involved in the decoding of words on the printed page. This old-fashioned unrealistic view has recently been substituted with a different view in which reading is perceived as an interactive process that involves the reader in interpreting and extracting information (Benettayeb, 2010).

This current interactive view of reading has been highlighted by many authors. For instance, Glazer, Searfoss, and Gentile (1990) explained that:

Reading needs to take also into account both visual and non-visual information, which reflects recent findings that previous knowledge about experience involving language



(the syntactic, semantic, and orthographic elements that are used to create text) is stored in the reader's mind, allowing them to predict meaning. (p. 3)

In addition, Nunan (1991) has mentioned that “reading is a dynamic process in which the text elements interact with other factors outside the text, in this case most particularly with the reader's knowledge of content of the text” (p. 70). In the same manner, Grabe (1991) stated that “reading can be seen as an interactive process where students need to be taught strategies to read more efficiently, for example, guess from context, define expectations, make inferences about the text, and skim ahead to fill in the context” (p. 383).

2.3 Defining Reading Comprehension

As discussed above, in plain words, reading can be simply defined as the process of decoding printed symbols into phonological forms in order to have access to the meaning of the printed material (Ziegler & Goswami, 2006). This conception of reading was merely the passive activity of a decoding process (Carrell, 1998). Booth, Green, and Booth (2004) stated that readers, who have become skillful in decoding texts, need now to be proficient in comprehending or understanding texts. Furthermore, according to Machado (2010), the movement from passive to active reading involves the development of reading comprehension skills. Dechant (1991) emphasizes that “comprehension is the goal and purpose of reading. Without it there is no reading” (p. 9).

Mayor (2005) has suggested that comprehension is a construction process since it involves all of the elements of the reading process working together while a text is being read in order to create a representation of this text in the reader's mind. Harris and Hodges (1995), on their part, have defined comprehension as “the construction of meaning of a written or spoken communication through a reciprocal, holistic interchange of ideas between the interpreter and the



message in a particular communicative context” (p. 39). Adding to this, Gunning (2008) asserted that “reading comprehension includes the reader and the context in which the text is being read. Enhancing comprehension depends on the interaction between three elements: the text, the reader, and the context” (p. 7).

Moreover, Katherine Maria (1990) has expressed that “reading comprehension is the process of constructing meaning from written text through the interaction of the knowledge the reader brings to the text, the reader’s interpretation of the language used by the writer, and the situation in which the text is read. In the same way, The RAND Reading Study Group (RRSG) (2002) emphasized that:

In terms of comprehending a text, these three elements’ interaction is required: (1) the reader who is doing the comprehending, including all the capacities, abilities, knowledge and experiences he/she brings to the act of reading, (2) the text that is to be comprehended and which is broadly construed to include any printed text, and (3) the activity in which comprehension is a part and purposes, processes, and consequences associated with the act of reading are included. (p. xiii)

Sadoski (2004) have explained that when readers read with comprehension, they are able to interpret symbols as well as internalize meanings and relate to previous knowledge, experiences, and texts.

2.4 Types of Readers

At the beginning of every school year, teachers around the world hope that their students, when they walk through the door, will possess the reading skills required for that particular grade level (Birmingham, 2006). RRSG (2002) conducted a research on reading comprehension and pointed out that “one of the most vexing problems facing middle and secondary school teachers



today is that many students come into their classrooms without the prerequisite knowledge, skills, or dispositions to read and comprehend the material placed before them” (p. iii).

“Teachers often assume that students will learn to comprehend merely by reading. Although some will, many others will not” (RRSG, 2002, p. 5). Gallagher (2003) has argued that “to maximize our chances of success, we need to sell students on a wide range of reasons why they should read. These reasons—lots of them—need to be made visible to our students” (p. 4).

Therefore, it is crucial to define the types of readers that teachers will find in a classroom. On this matter, Burke (1999) defined three categories of readers: “powerful, proficient, and reluctant” (p. 41). Referring to the first type, the powerful ones, this author stated that:

They are the ideal type of readers teachers would enjoy having in their classrooms. They always inquire about the literature, characterization and the author’s message. Powerful readers look beyond the literature in order to understand the historical importance of the piece. (p. 41)

Secondly, the same author considered the proficient readers to be the typical reader. This researcher has referred to these readers as students who “have mastered the requisite skills, but have stumbling points that the powerful readers do not. For example, vocabulary or contextual information may be lacking, and so a solid understanding evades them” (p.42). He concluded by expressing that these students often will do the required reading, but they would never exceed the basic reading expectations because they lack the motivation to move to the next level.

Lastly, the reluctant reader. This type of reader has been called by different names by several authors. For instance, “literate non-readers” (Nell, 1988), “illiterate literates” (Huck, 1973), “nonreaders” (Smith, 1988), “reluctant readers” (Chambers, 1969) or “aliterates” (Beers, n.d.). Bennett (2016) described reluctant readers as, not one who is unable to read, but one who



does not voluntarily read and also someone who disengage from reading activities showing an unwillingness to read. Burke (1999) has referred the reluctant reader as struggling readers who have found strategies to avoid reading and understanding whenever possible. A reluctant reader is “someone who struggles with reading or someone who can read, but has no inclination to do so beyond the requirements of day-to-day life. These readers do not read at home for any reason and they tend to resist reading” (Boehm, 2009, p. 75).

Consequently, Mathers (2008) shared some reasons about why reluctant readers do not read. He has explained that one of these reasons could be that:

They may not be excited by the printed world. They may choose to experience life firsthand instead of through reading, or they may contemplate books as an insufficient entertainment compared with other sources of information such as the television, Internet, video games, smart phones, movies, etc. Additionally, they may also not have the desire to read because they have grown up in a socio-cultural environment that does not value reading. (p. 75)

2.5 Main Approaches in the Teaching of Reading

2.5.1 Defining Intensive Reading

Intensive reading (henceforth, IR) is the type of reading approach that invades most of the EFL reading classrooms around the world and it is also known as “narrow reading” or “a zoom lens strategy” (Brown, 1994). This type of reading is called “intensive” because the reader is intensively involved in looking inside the text (Verma, 2015). “The aim of intensive reading is to arrive at a profound and detailed understanding of the text” (Nuttal, 1996, p. 23). Additionally, Long and Richards (1987) claimed that IR is a detailed in-class analysis, led by the teacher, of vocabulary and grammar points, in a short passage.



In IR, we “take a text, study it line by line, referring at every moment to our dictionary and our grammar, comparing, analyzing, translating, and retaining every expression that it contains” (Palmer, 1964, p. 111). In the same line of thought, Day and Bamford (1998) have referred to IR as “the careful reading of shorter, more difficult texts with the goal of complete and detailed understanding” (p. 6). According to Nation (2009), “intensive reading is a good opportunity for making learners aware of how the various vocabulary, grammatical, cohesive, formatting, and ideas content aspects of a text work together to achieve the communicative purpose of the text” (p. 47).

2.5.2 Defining Extensive Reading

Kelly (1969) has claimed that Palmer was one of the first researchers in language pedagogy to use the term *extensive reading* in foreign language teaching in order to distinguish it from IR in terms of the amount of reading, degree of depth, and the extent of comprehension. Palmer (1964) defined ER as rapidly reading book after book both for language study and real-world experiences. Supporting Palmer’s definition of ER, Hafiz and Tudor (1989) pointed out that ER “is the reading of large amounts of material in the second language (L2) over time for personal pleasure without the addition of productive tasks or follow-up language work” (p. 4). A few years later, Davis (1995) described ER as an activity in which “pupils are given the time, encouragement and materials to read pleasurably, at their own level, as many books as they can, without the pressures of testing or marks” (p. 329). Concurrently, in 1998, Day and Bamford have defined ER as “an approach to the teaching and learning of second language reading in which learners read large quantities of books and other materials that are well within their linguistic competence” (p. viii).



Krashen (2004) is the main advocator of the effectiveness of ER in contemporary time. He called ER as Free Voluntary Reading (FVP) and has asserted that it is better than direct instruction in terms of acquisition of all linguistic elements such as vocabulary, reading, grammar, and even writing. Yamashita (2008), on his part, stated that ER means reading in quantity and in order to gain a general understanding of what is read. This author has also mentioned that ER is intended to develop good reading habits, to build up knowledge of vocabulary and structure, and to encourage a liking for reading.

All in all, ER is different from IR. However, these two approaches should not be considered as being in opposition since both serve different but complementary purposes (Renandya, 2007).

2.6 Theoretical Support for Sustained Silent Reading

One reason that SSR has been studied for a long time is the support it receives from many recognized theories of reading. These theories explain the nature of SSR and one of them is the “Comprehensible Input Hypothesis” (Ganz, 2012).

2.6.1 Input Hypothesis

The idea of Input Hypothesis was first introduced by Krashen (1982). He named this hypothesis as “Comprehension Hypothesis” in which the author makes a clear distinction between acquisition and learning:

Acquisition is the product of subconscious process very similar to the process children undergo when they acquire their first language ... Learning is the product of formal instruction and it comprises a conscious process which results in conscious knowledge about the language, for example knowledge of grammar rules. (As quoted in Schutz, 2007, p. 1)



In addition, Lee (2007) has clarified that “we acquire language by understanding messages and by being exposed to large quantity of print that is comprehensible and compelling with no risk of being evaluated and excluded” (p. 152).

“Learners can acquire language on their own provided that a) they receive adequate exposure to comprehensible language and b) it is done in a relaxed, stress-free atmosphere” (Krashen, 1993a, p. 10). This author formulated his Input Hypothesis as $i + I$ to describe the goal of language acquisition and claims that if the learners are given sensible amount of input regularly, they will acquire that language most efficiently. In his words, “ i ” represents the learner’s current competence on the target language whereas “ $+ I$ ” means the learner next level and is the extra input provided by teachers. Moreover, the author has also explained that learners process the extra information they are exposed to by trying to close the gap between what they already know and this new information. Furthermore, he asserted that if the comprehensible input is given in abundant amount, the grammar will be comprehended automatically.

Harmonizing with Krashen’s input hypothesis formula, $i + I$, Harmer (1991) stated that “if learners are exposed to a great deal of comprehensible input, language which students hear or read and which is highly above their language level but still comprehensible, they can acquire language by themselves” (p. 34). Hedge (2000), likewise, has expressed his agreement with the $i + I$ formula when he claimed that “language is picked up, or acquired, when learners receive input from messages which contain language a little above their existing understanding and from which they can infer meaning” (p. 10).



2.7 Sustained Silent Reading (SSR)

2.7.1 Definition

SSR is a concept thought, developed and implemented together by Hunt and McCracken in the 1970s whose fundamental goal was the enhancement of reading proficiency (Noland, 1976). Hunt (1997), on his part, claimed that “Sustained silent reading itself is defined as a reading program that allows students time in class to read anything of their choices without having a graded assignment attached to it” (p. 281). SSR is seen as a classroom-based ER where “a set time each day when every pupil and the teacher read silently for a substantial period of time without interruption is integrated into regular class hours” (McCracken & McCracken, 1978, p. 406).

Moreover, Fisher, Frey and Nelson (2012) has expressed that “everyone in the school is provided time to read from books or other texts from their own choosing. As students watch their teacher model reading, they learn directly of the activities pleasure and importance” (p. 554). Furthermore, Anderson (2000), when referring to SSR, claimed that:

Ideally, students are encouraged to read the materials of their choice. SSR is not the time to require the reading of textbooks or classroom assignments. One of the main purposes of SSR is for students to experience the pure pleasure of reading. Sustained Silent Reading pays big dividends. Your students get better at reading, their test scores may improve as they practice reading more often, and, best of all, they learn to love to read. (p. 258)

Also, in his book *Building Student Literacy through Sustained Silent Reading*, Gardiner (2005), has explained that



SSR is a time during which a class, or in some cases an entire school, reads quietly together. Students are allowed to choose their own reading materials and read independently during class time. Most programs encourage students to continue reading outside of class and permit students to change books if they lose interest. Most important, SSR allows an adult to model the habits, choices, comments, and attitudes good readers develop. (p. 15)

2.7.2 Historical background

The idea of SSR can be traced back to Individualized Reading Program (IRP) in the 1950s and 1960s (Yoon, 2002). Pilgreen (2000) pointed out that

IRP was a type of reading instruction that aided teachers guide students toward assuming responsibilities and initiatives for their own improvement in reading. Children were also often provided a fixed period of time to read materials of their own choosing. (p. 1)

Dr. Lyman C. Hunt, Jr., the recognized founder of SSR, first proposed SSR as an instructional practice in an article at the University of Vermont in the 1960s (McCracken, 1971). Hunt introduced “Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading (USSR) as one of the important elements of the 1950s IRP” (McCracken, 1971, p. 521). USSR was “the essence of reading power; with the power of Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading, the reader is on his own. He is an independent reader and does not depend on outside direction by the teacher” (Hunt, 1970, p. 281).

One year later, McCracken (1971) developed one of the earliest models of SSR based on Hunt’s USSR program. This author shortened Hunt’s acronym by taking away the “U”, changing the name to SSR to decrease the negative attention the name was conveying back then. “There are no book reports, no comprehension checks, no word recognition exercises, and no teaching



as part of the Sustained Silent Reading. There is only Sustained Silent Reading” (McCracken, 1971, p. 521).

Simultaneously, another early supporter of SSR, Oliver (1970), proposed the term High Intensity Practice (HIP), which included Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading (USSR), Sustained Silent Writing (SSW), and Self-Selected Activities (SSA). According to this same author, the magic of HIP seemed to be the silent time to read in a quiet atmosphere and the favorable behavior models of classmates and teachers.

Since the early studies of SSR, a variety of acronyms and models have been created through the following years (Sullivan, 2010). The more popular terms are: Free Voluntary Reading (FVR), Sustained Quiet Reading Time (SQUIRT), Positive Outcomes While Enjoying Reading (POWER), Fun Reading Every Day (FRED), Drop Everything and Read (DEAR), Daily Independent Reading Time (DIRT), and Motivation in Middle School (MIMS) (Pilgreen, 2000, p. 1). All of these programs share common features such as letting students read silently, freely, and without interruption (Gardiner, 2001).

The latest supporter of SSR is Stephen D. Krashen who is an Emeritus Professor of Education at the University of Southern California known for his theory of second language acquisition (Rodrigo & Villanue, 2014). Krashen (1993) coined the term Free Voluntary Reading and expressed that “free voluntary reading, or reading because you want to, is the kind of recreational reading that most mature readers do most every day. In schools, this approach is often called Sustained Silent Reading, or SSR” (p. 43).

2.7.3 Characteristics

Several researchers (Elley, 1991; Davis, 1995; Walker, 1997; Hedge, 2000; Day & Bamford, 2002) agreed with the fact that the success of an ER program such as SSR is only



guaranteed if the necessary characteristics or principles are met. For the first time, McCracken (1971), in order to enhance learners' reading achievement and attitude, established some rules that serve as a framework for SSR programs. They include the following six guidelines:

1. Each student must read silently.
2. The teacher models by reading silently at the same time, and does not allow for interruptions.
3. Each student selects a single book, magazine, or newspaper and reads for the entire time.
4. A timer is used so that students do not watch the clock.
5. There are absolutely no reports or records of any kind.
6. To begin with whole classes or larger groups of students is the most effective (pp. 521-522).

Almost a decade later, in a report named *Guidelines for Secondary S.S.R.*, Moore (1980) presents a set of characteristics thought to be effective. They are

1. Each student selects his/her own materials to read: Although each student is responsible for selecting the material to be read, the teacher should have an ample supply of materials from which the students can choose (p. 3).
2. Each student is to read silently during the SSR time period: Many students lack a quiet place and time to read outside of school, so interruptions during SSR are to be discouraged (p. 4).
3. The teacher also is to read silently: This indirectly conveys to the students that the teacher values the SSR program and the act of reading (p. 4).



4. The teacher ends the SSR period by briefly and informally talking about what she/he was reading. Although no records are to be kept and no student is to be held accountable for what was read, the students should also be encouraged to talk about what they read (p. 4).

Pilgreen (2000), after an extensive review of 32 studies on SSR programs, found eight common characteristics across these studies:

1. **Access:** Students should have access to a wide variety and selection of reading materials, including magazines, newspapers, books, comics and other reading materials.
2. **Appeal:** Reading materials should be interesting to the students, and students should select the materials that they want to read). “The only surefire way to induce a love of books is to invite students to select their own. [...] Personal preference is the foundation for anyone who will make of reading a personal art” (Atwell, 2007, pp. 12-13).
3. **Conducive Environment:** SSR should occur in a comfortable, quiet and uninterrupted place. Researchers acknowledged the need for a quiet classroom environment to allow students to concentrate on their reading (Pilgreen, 2000; Gardiner, 2005).
4. **Encouragement:** Teachers should encourage students to read through modeling good reading practices, being involved in sharing and discussing books, acting as a resource for book selection, involving a child’s home with the SSR practices. Modeling silent reading means I read with them every day, not just when it’s convenient for me” (Gardiner, 2005, p. 39).
5. **Staff Training:** School staff should be trained in SSR so that they can also participate in modeling and encouragement. Pilgreen (2000) noted, training helps teachers “develop their roles as active facilitators in helping students to connect with books” (p. 14).



6. **Non-accountability:** No reports or records of books read should be kept. The focus should be on pleasure reading rather than assessment. “The key to non-accountability is to omit any activity that gives students the message that they are responsible for completing a task, comprehending a particular portion of their reading, or showing they have made improvement in some way” (Pilgreen, 2000, p. 15).
7. **Follow up Activities:** After reading students can be encouraged to share in interactive ways with peers or the whole class. Research indicates that students need opportunities to share their thoughts and ideas about their reading (Pilgreen, 2000; Gardiner, 2005; Atwell, 2007).
8. **Distributed Time to Read:** Ideally, students will have SSR daily, but it should at least occur twice a week for 15 to 30 minutes (pp. 32-36).

2.7.4 Aims of SSR

McCracken (1971) has emphasized that the primary purpose of SSR is to cultivate each student’s ability to read silently without any disruption for an extended period of time. Richards, Platt, and Weber (1985), on their part, claimed that SSR is intended to “develop good reading habits, to build up knowledge of vocabulary and structure, and to encourage a liking for reading” (p. 100). In addition, for Rivers (1968), “the purpose of a sustained silent reading program will be to train the students to read directly and fluently in the foreign language for his own enjoyment without the aid of the teacher” (p. 229). Similarly, Chow and Chou (2000), has stated that the main goal of SSR programs has always been to increase students’ enjoyment of reading. In the long run, learners will develop a good reading habit and will improve their English proficiency at the same time.

Additionally, Bell (1998) has claimed that the significance of SSR is to



- a) Provide comprehensible input.
- b) Increase students' exposure to the language.
- c) Consolidate previously learned language.
- d) Enhance general language competence.
- e) Increase vocabulary knowledge.
- f) Motivate students to read.
- g) Help to build confidence with extended texts.
- h) Facilitate the development of prediction skills.
- i) Lead to improvement in writing.
- j) Encourage the exploitation of textual redundancy.

In the same manner, Day and Bamford (1998) stated that the possible aims of SSR are for students to

- a. Have a positive attitude toward reading in the second language.
- b. Have confidence in their reading.
- c. Have motivation to read in the second language.
- d. Read without constantly stopping to look up difficult words in the dictionary.
- e. Have increased their word recognition ability.
- f. Know for what purpose of reading when they read.
- g. Read at an appropriate rate for their purpose in reading.
- h. Know how to choose appropriate reading materials for their interests and language ability.
- i. To develop the ability to guess new words from context (pp. 45-46).



2.8 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the theoretical framework associated with the topic of this research synthesis. As a starting point, the concept of reading as a process and reading comprehension has been clarified. These definitions are important to identify in order to understand that reading is viewed as an interactive activity nowadays. Following, the types of readers have been distinguished. This information is essential for teachers to have an idea of the kind of students they will find in their classrooms. Next, the two main approaches for teaching of reading (Intensive and Extensive reading) have been discussed. To be able to discriminate between these two approaches is vital in order to identify the benefits and drawbacks of both approaches. Also, the theory behind ER is explained in this chapter. This theory – Krashen's Input hypothesis- provides support for the type of ER dealt within this synthesis. Finally, all the information related to Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) is delivered to have a clear idea about what SSR is and how it can be applied in an EFL classroom. The subsequent chapter presents the literature review which reinforced the current research synthesis.



CHAPTER III

Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

Because past knowledge in an area is very important for effective research, this chapter provides a comprehensive review of previous research conducted worldwide related to SSR. SSR is independent, quiet reading in which a fixed period of time -from 10 to 30 minutes- is regularly devoted to in-class reading. The purpose of the current literature review is to investigate the effects of SSR on EFL learners' cognitive and affective dimensions. It focuses on research in the following areas: reading comprehension and reading attitudes. In other words, this literature review seeks to answer the following questions: (1) Does reading extensively through a SSR program contribute to the enhancement of EFL learners' reading comprehension skills? and (2) What is the impact of reading extensively through a SSR program on EFL learners' attitudes toward reading?

For this review of literature, the key data information for each of the 15 primary research studies selected for this research synthesis have been extracted in order to answer these synthesis's research questions. The chapter first centers on the effects of SSR in learners reading comprehension (Section 3.2) and the second part (Section 3.3) focuses on the impact that SSR has on students attitudes toward reading.

3.2 The Effects of SSR in Reading Comprehension

Several authors have acknowledged the benefits of SSR in the improvement of students' reading proficiency. "Studies show that giving students as little as fifteen minutes a day for SSR can impact attitudes, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension" (Beers, 2003, p. 199).



One of the principles behind SSR is students' self-selection of reading material.

According to Carrell and Eisterhold (1983), "to be effective, an SSR program must be based on student-selected texts so that the students will be interested in what they are reading" (p. 567).

However, on modified SSR programs, it is also acceptable that the teachers provide the reading material to the students. Anderson (2000) expressed that teachers can provide a classroom collection of high-interest books and recycled popular magazines and newspapers. The author expanded by stating that once the routine of SSR is established, students will begin to bring books and magazines from home or the library and will rely less on teacher provided materials.

All of the following studies analyzed for this research synthesis have reported that engagement in an SSR program produced significantly effective results in EFL students' reading comprehension, in spite of the fact that the researcher provided the reading material or the participants brought their own material.

3.2.1 Students' Book Selection

On this matter, some researchers, following the guidelines of SSR, allowed students to bring their own reading material to the classroom. Participants could choose from texts they had available at home or they could get the texts from the library.

For instance, Tamrackitkun (2010) conducted a quasi-experimental study with 284 Thai EFL undergraduates. This doctoral dissertation investigated the reading comprehension, reading fluency and attitudes of students after exposure to SSR. The reading material included a wide selection of graded reader books gotten from the university library. Day and Bamford (1998) consider SSR an approach to teaching and learning foreign languages without using a dictionary or focusing on grammar, but aiming to get learners to read extensively by choosing books on their own, for general comprehension, good reading habits and enjoyment (as cited in



Tamrakitkun, 2010). This study employed an identical pre- and a post-test and the design was based on the comparison of several groups: two experimental groups (henceforth EG) (N = 52 and 50) and four control groups (henceforth CG) (N = 46, 48, 42, and 46). All of them were native speakers of Thai aged 19-22. The EG received a SSR treatment while the others did not. The study lasted for a period of four months and the students met for a 3-hour period each week for 15 weeks. The major findings revealed that the improvement between the pre-test and post-test of reading comprehension is significantly greater for the EG than the CG. From the tests used to measure whether the reading comprehension of 46 participants in EG1 and the 36 participants in EG2 improved after exposure to SSR, the findings showed that the post-test scores were significantly higher than that of the pre-test. This suggests that SSR has a positive effect on students' reading comprehension.

Two years later, Tan, Lee and Pandian (2012) conducted a qualitative study aimed to find out if SSR would improve the reading abilities of 123 first year Malaysian undergraduates. For these researchers, before televisions and computers, reading was a primary leisure activity, people would read for hours, and many would travel the journeys of their books' characters. They also mention that is tragic that people have forgotten the passion to read and that today's youth have ignored the significance of reading. In this research study, the aspect pertaining to ownership/self-selection of reading material was emphasized to ensure not only proper execution, but also effective implementation of the SSR program. The randomly selected participants experienced SSR once a week for seven weeks with each session lasting 20 minutes, which is the duration recommended by SSR practitioners. A questionnaire was designed to capture the participants' perceptions regarding the SSR program. The findings are positive. For instance, in the questionnaire question: *Does SSR help to increase students' reading abilities?*,



the majority of the participants (84%) explained they had more time to figure out and recognize more words. The participants found that SSR has enabled them to comprehend better what they read, and they need less help with their reading. Therefore, the researchers concluded that those engaged in the SSR program experienced improvements in their reading abilities including reading comprehension.

More recently, in another qualitative study done by Masoumi and Sadeghoghli (2017), the authors attempted to investigate the impact of SSR on improving Iranian sophomores' reading comprehension. These researchers believe that ER does not imply translation and focuses on ideas rather than on grammar. They think that the majority of the activities involved in reading are based on the ER model such as: reading to gain an overall impression of a text, to find information on a topic in question, to answer questions concerning a text, to comprehend denotations, as well as connotations of words constituting a text, and to expand upon information previously supplied. In this experimental study, 60 female students with their ages ranging from 20 to 26 years old participated. The participants were randomly divided into two groups, each with 30 subjects. Both groups had instruction for 90-minute periods for 24 sessions; however, the EG were instructed to use the SSR technique for 30 minutes. A pre- and a post-reading comprehension test were administered to the EG and CG in order to ascertain the overall linguistic knowledge of the participants in reading comprehension. The results revealed that there was an effect of SSR on the development of the reading comprehension ability of students. Results showed that the mean of the CG in post-test was 60.63, while the mean in the EG equaled 70.43. Thus, it seems that the mean of the EG in post-test exceeded the mean in the CG. This finding showed a significant difference between the EG who had access to SSR treatment and the CG who were deprived of it.



Concurrently, Koc (2017), in Istanbul, Turkey, examined the effects of SSR on the foreign language achievement level of the learners at a private university. This investigator considers that learning via ER is mostly incidental, that is, learners focus on the story rather than the language items. That is why a large quantity of input which is required to foster learning gains. In this study, the respondents were free to pick readers from a set of books of different levels and genres. This research was conducted with 37 Turkish native speaker participants, 17 males and 20 females, aged 18-19 years old. The students took the Achievement Exam 2 (consisting of listening, reading, grammar, vocabulary, and writing sections) as a pre-test to identify the two classes with the closest results. Class 1 was assigned to be the CG (n=19), and Class 2 (n=18) was assigned as the EG. The treatment group received SSR sessions for about 30 minutes every school day for a period of 7 weeks. The Achievement Exam 5 (consisting of listening, reading, grammar, vocabulary, and writing sections) was considered to be the post-test to figure out whether there was any difference between the test results of the EG and the CG. The results indicated that there were significant gains in overall language achievement, especially in reading comprehension of the EG group compared to the CG. The post-test results of the EG (M=74.44) is numerically higher than the mean of the post-test results (M=65.89) of the CG. The authors argued that the difference between the post-test comparisons of the results of the groups indicate that the SSR treatment seems to have a considerable effect on the students' overall language learning achievement especially in reading comprehension.

3.2.2 Researchers' Book Selection

On the other hand, in the following studies, the researchers provided a clear idea about the texts from which the participants had to choose to read in class during the SSR technique. These researchers informed the participants that they have modified in some way the SSR



program guidelines. However, despite the fact that the students did not have the freedom to bring their own reading material, the overall study results showed that the reading comprehension skills of the experimental participants showed an improvement.

For instance, in the research study conducted by Mehar, Roweiba and Suan (2012), the researchers did not give much of a choice to students. The only text available was different issues of the “Readers Digest” magazine. According to the authors, one of the prevalent contributions of the implementation of SSR program is on the students’ motivation to read. In general, students display more interest in books and are actively engaged in reading. Thus, SSR serves as a platform to promote lifelong reading. The aim of this study was to investigate how SSR help students become independent readers and indirectly the improvement of students’ English language proficiency. The participants in this study comprised 50 Malaysian undergraduates (15 males and 35 females). The students read for about 15-30 minutes per session daily or twice a week during the two-hour lesson prior to the regular lesson’s instruction for eight weeks. Data for this experiment was collected using a 20-items SSR questionnaire designed and administered by the researchers at the end of the study. Five items of the questionnaire were intended to investigate the role of SSR in the context of English language proficiency in the sub-skills of vocabulary, writing, reading, grammar and oral communication. The results of these five items (Q14–Q18) indicated that 65% of the participants felt their proficiency in English language improved through the application of SSR. The respondents found an improvement in their writing, reading comprehension, and oral communication skills. In addition, it also helped them enhance their grammar. These authors concluded that SSR is an effective tool to improve the overall reading proficiency of students including, of course, reading comprehension.



Similarly, three years later, Al-Nafisah (2015) conducted a quantitative study on 54 EFL male university students at King Saudi University to explore the possible effects that a SSR program might have on their reading comprehension skills. The author selected reading material that they considered relevant to students' interests, abilities and level. This examiner claims that reading comprehension is of great significance in second and foreign language classrooms. This study employed two randomly assigned groups (EG and CG) with 27 students each. The EG was exposed to the SSR program through three 50-minute periods per week for three months. To assess the effect of the SSR program on students' reading comprehension, the researcher developed and administered a 40-item-multiple choice reading test which both groups took as a pre and a post-test. The findings showed that the EG outperformed the CG in reading comprehension. Findings showed, however, that there was a significant difference between the achievements of both groups on the post-test in favor of the EG. The mean score for the EG on the post-test was 29.58 while that of the CG was 17.21. This indicates that SSR had a positive effect on students' reading achievement. The researchers expressed that the improvement achieved in reading comprehension on the EG is attributed to the SSR program.

Lastly, Shea (2016) provided students only two options. The researcher opted to use shared texts that students read together. The texts required to read during SSR were: *Holes* (Sachar, 1998) and *Molly Moon's Incredible Book of Hypnotism* (Byng, 2002). This research investigated the overall effectiveness of using SSR in a required first-year university English course. According to this author, a good deal of educational research suggests that ER is an effective approach that improves fluency as well as attitudes toward reading, giving students the skills to deal with large amounts of text. In this study, there were two sections of the same class which met weekly over two semesters with approximately 30 students in both sections. At the



end of the program, the participants completed a 38-items evaluation questionnaire using a 4 point Likert scale (*strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree*), with open-ended questions and space for comments to get an indication of the effectiveness of SSR. Results revealed that there was a near unanimous endorsement of SSR as an effective approach to English study. Seventy-seven percent of students thought that their reading improved because of SSR. Almost everyone (88%) expressed that they also read faster and with greater understanding (96%). As a whole, all students reported that they felt either speed or comprehension had improved. The majority of students (87%) stated that they understood the gist of the texts. The evidence suggests that in reading the two novels in class, most students felt that their reading comprehension increased.

3.3 The Effects of SSR on Reading Attitude

SSR has demonstrated to be an effective instrument to shift students' attitudes toward reading in a foreign language. Gardiner (2001) stated that research studies have found substantial positive impacts from launching an SSR program, such as a close connection between SSR and students' attitudes toward reading. Similarly, Pilgreen (2000) has also expressed that student's enjoyment of reading can be fostered through a SSR program. In addition, Macdonell (2004) claimed that SSR allows students to begin to enjoy free reading as recreation.

There are different ways of implementing SSR in educational settings (e.g., exclusively outside of class or using only a small portion of class time). One SSR principle that often changes from one study to another is the requirement of having participants reading silently exclusively inside the classroom. Urquhart and Weir (2013) claimed that SSR "refers to either silent reading in the classroom or reading unsupervised in the library or at home" (p. 216).



The totality of the following studies have reported that participating in an SSR program produced a substantial impact on enhancing EFL students' reading attitudes in spite of the matter that the silent reading took place inside or outside the classroom settings.

3.3.1 Reading inside and/or outside the classroom

In some studies included in this research synthesis, the researchers have allowed participants to perform the silent reading inside and outside the classroom. For instance, Yamashita (2013) conducted a study on 61 second-year undergraduates (59 L1-Japanese and 2 L1- Chinese students) at a Japanese university in order to identify how a 15-week SSR program, performed both inside and outside class hours, affected L2 reading attitudes. For this researcher, the emphasis in SSR programs is usually not on right answers but on sustained reading experiences and personal reactions to reading material. The author also expresses that, during SSR, the fear of evaluation by the teacher or judgment by peers is minimized and the potential to promote positive attitudes towards reading expands. The respondents in this study met once a week for 90 minutes: the first 45 minutes were used for classroom administration while the latter half was devoted to free, voluntary reading. Students had the liberty to bring any book they desired. The study employed a 22-item questionnaire designed to measure two aspects of reading attitude: an affective aspect (*Comfort* and *Anxiety*) which refers to the feelings students feel towards EFL reading and a cognitive aspect (*Intellectual Value*, *Practical Value*, and *Linguistic Value*) which denote different kinds of value that students assign to reading. The questionnaire was administered as a pre and post-test. The main finding that contributes to this synthesis is that SSR increased students' feelings of *Comfort* and reduced *Anxiety* towards EFL reading. The result showed an increase in Comfort (Pre-test M=2.25 / Post-test M=2.60) and a decrease in Anxiety (Pre-test M=3.17 / Post-test M=2.84). This outcome showed that SSR's effective impact



on reading attitudes could manifest in a relatively short period of time (15 weeks). Analyzing the findings, the researcher hypothesized that the positive feelings toward reading were fostered through the SSR program and this may enhance the decision to read and create a virtuous circle of reading.

Four years later, Wisaijorn (2017) conducted a study to investigate the effects of a 16-week SSR project on the attitudes toward reading English of 51 Thai university students. The investigator explained the participants the major aspects of SSR (e.g., self-selection, easy books, reading for overall understanding). However, most of the reading was done outside the class since the author allowed students only ten minutes of in-class reading time. The author of this study relies on the idea that EFL learners are exposed to foreign language more through reading than any other mode; therefore, it is not surprising that the development of students' ability to read in English is one of the main goals of university EFL programs around the world. In this study, the respondents had to complete a pre- and post-questionnaire about attitudes. This questionnaire consisted of 20 statements related to reading and learning English, and the students were asked to complete them by selecting *strongly agree*, *agree*, *disagree*, and *strongly disagree*. Results of the pre- and post-questionnaire showed an overall positive development of attitudes to reading in English. Data collected indicated that most students responded favorably to SSR. Comparison of the students' responses to the pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire revealed an encouraging development of attitudes to reading English. For example, in item# 6 "*I have confidence in my ability to read English*", there was a substantial change in the pre- and post-questionnaire scores (*Strongly agree* Pre-Q =0 /Post-Q=6; *Agree* Pre-Q =17 / Post-Q=35). This indicated that they were motivated and enjoyed reading in English after the program. The author claimed that Thai students' attitudes to read English could be improved by engaging in SSR.



3.3.2 Reading performed exclusively inside the classroom

In the following research studies, the investigators made sure that the silent reading took place inside the classroom walls. Following this line of thought, Siah (2008), examined the effects of a SSR program on cultivating students' habits and attitudes in reading books for leisure. The author of this study explained that many types of reading programs targeting students have been designed and launched, including Sustained Silent Reading (SSR), Free Voluntary Reading (FVR), Drop Everything and Read (DEAR), Daily Independent Reading Time (DIRT), and Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading (USSR). The participants in this experiment were Form One (first year secondary education) Malaysian students. The experiment lasted for 12 months and the author measured the students three times during the year. The first measure took place in October 2002 and the second and third measures occurred in February 2003 and October 2003, respectively. The number of respondents to the three measures were 222, 208, and 224, correspondingly. The researcher used a questionnaire to collect data. The results showed that after some months, the number of students reading books for leisure during the program increased. In the question 1. *How often did you read books for leisure actively in the SSR period?* the option: "Sometimes or Most of the time" showed an increase from 76.85% in the first measure to 87.92% in the second measure and up to 88.74% in the final measure. The number of students who agreed that reading books for leisure was pleasurable also increased. In the question 2. *What proportion of your classmates read books for leisure actively in the SSR period?* the option: "Half or More than half of my classmates" showed a 62.44% in the first measure, 78.26% in the next measure, and finally reported a 80.54% in the last measure. Based on these findings, the author concluded that it is possible to say that the SSR program had a



significant effect on cultivating students' reading habits in the SSR period. Also, the program had a significant effect on cultivating students' pleasure in and enjoyment of reading.

Matsui and Noro's (2010) study evaluated the effects of a 10-minute SSR program on reading fluency and motivation of Japanese junior high school EFL learners. These investigators claim that ER can be defined as reading in great amounts for a general understanding of the text or for the enjoyment of the reading experience. Hundred and twenty-two 3rd years participated in this study: 60 of them (EG) were involved in reading graded readers extensively for 10 minutes at the beginning of one English class in a week, and 62 of them (CG) were not involved in SSR. The SSR program was carried out for a school year. Learners' motivation was examined using a 5-point Likert-scale 31-item motivation questionnaire at the end of the program. This questionnaire was divided in 5 sections: 1. *Intrinsic motivation*, 2. *Self-confidence*, 3. *Exam-related extrinsic motivation*, 4. *Internet-related instrumental motivation* and 5. *Anxiety and negative attitudes toward reading*. The results showed that the two most influential questionnaire sections of the EG were *Intrinsic motivation* and *Self-confidence*. It is likely that learners in the EG grew confident whenever they finish reading books. They experienced the joy of reading basically by reading a lot of books, and they grew to read extensively. These findings suggested that large amounts of linguistically appropriate input seem to promote a positive attitude and the growth of intrinsic motivation toward foreign language reading. These results led the authors to conclude that one-school-year 10-minute SSR in regular classes increases junior high school EFL learners' intrinsic motivation to read English and improves their attitudes toward reading.

An experimental study conducted by Bacus, Abao, and Dayagbil (2015) investigated the influence of SSR on the students' leisure time activities, reading motivations, and reading attitude. The participants were asked to bring any material they love to read within the first 10



minutes of the 90-minute class for eight weeks. For the authors of this study, reading competence is developed through constant practice. When children read for pleasure and when they get hooked on books, they involuntarily and without conscious effort, acquire nearly all of the language skills. The respondents in this research were 55 Philippine students who were in the second year of teacher preparation. To determine the students' reading attitude, the authors used a 53-item questionnaire, a focus group discussion and individual interview. Findings revealed that after the 8 weeks of SSR, the students showed desirable change in their preferred leisure-time activities, reading motivation, and reading attitude. Of the many motivations to read, students had placed high regard on the importance of pleasure reading as evidenced by their positive attitude towards reading after the SSR sessions. Through the focus group discussion, 70% of the students revealed that they love and enjoy reading even more after they were exposed to the 10-minute SSR for two months. Nine students (16%) stated: "Before, I didn't like to read during my free time but now I enjoy reading." Generally, the majority of the students felt that SSR is valuable. The acquisition of positive attitude towards reading spells a great impact in their lives as future educators. The authors conclude that SSR is effective and has created a positive influence in guiding the students towards spending more valuable leisure-time activities, in motivating them to read and in strengthening their positive attitude towards reading.

Concurrently, Kent, Limwattanagura, and Mekhabutr (2015) conducted a qualitative study to evaluate the success of a SSR program as part of an EFL preparation course in a Thai international university. This study explored the relationship between SSR and the likelihood of continued reading after the program. These scholars share their idea about what they consider SSR is. For them, SSR focuses on giving students time to read in class, with the purpose being enjoyment rather than assessment. It has been used for decades and can be a powerful tool to



combat illiteracy. In this research, one class of 19 students in the university Academic Preparation level 2 (ACP2) program were chosen to participate. Students were asked to pick out books from the university library to be read 15 minutes at the beginning of every class. Students met for 12 hours a week, 4 hours a day on Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. At the end of the course, students were given a questionnaire to evaluate their feelings about the program. They reported how much they read, their enjoyment in reading, if they felt having time in class to read was useful and/or enjoyable, and gave suggestions to make the program better for the future. The results showed positive results. All students stated that they liked reading more after this SSR program, but for different reasons. The majority (17 out of 19 students) said that they just found that they enjoyed reading because they had never been given time in class to do it before, and had other things to do after classes. Some mentioned that reading would make them smarter and improve their English. Out of 19 students the lowest number of books read in the 12 week term was 2, the highest was 10. A few found reading at the start of the class to help them relax before learning. In addition, twelve of nineteen students read at home. All of these results showed that the participants developed a positive increase in their attitudes toward reading thanks to the engagement in the SSR program.

Two years later, Cho (2017) conducted a study to examine the impact that a short (five sessions) SSR program might have on students' reading attitude. Time devoted to SSR was an average of 15 minutes per session. During this time, students could read whatever they themselves chose to read. This investigator expresses that those who do more self-selected reading develop more reading ability, have better writing style, have larger vocabularies, spell better, and have better control of complex grammatical constructions. The participants in this experiment were 26 (11 males and 15 females) third-year intermediate level EFL students



preparing to become English teachers at a university in Korea. The students participated in SSR sessions once a week for five weeks. One week before SSR, students were given a questionnaire asking if they had ever read books written in English for fun. A post-reading questionnaire was administered one year after the SSR experience ended to find out if students consider themselves to be pleasure readers. Subjects were asked questions such as *After SSR sessions, were you more motivated to read?* and *Would you include SSR in your teaching?*. Findings showed that students reported a considerable increase in interest in free voluntary reading after the five sessions. Before SSR sessions, only 1 participant considered himself a reader while the rest (25 students) expressed that they were not readers. After SSR sessions, 19 participants (73%) said that they were now readers. The good news is that ten (38%) of these students did maintain a reading habit for a full year after their SSR experience. Participants uniformly said that they would include SSR in their teaching in the future which is a very encouraging result. Students clearly valued the SSR time, felt that the reading experience reduced their anxiety about reading, increased their motivation to read and their reading ability. The author concluded that providing access to interesting and comprehensible books and time to read resulted in a clear growth in interest in reading, even though the treatment consisted only of five sessions.

Savasci and Akyel (2018), in an effort to explore the possible effects of a short-term SSR on reading attitude, studied a group of 42 tertiary level Turkish EFL students. During the SSR treatment, the students were required to self-select graded readers and read them during the class time. These researchers consider reading competence a critical factor in students' academic lives. Particularly for students whose academic success depends on their achievement in a second or a foreign language (L2), having a good command of L2 becomes even more critical. The authors also suggests In EFL reading classrooms, one of the aims of reading teachers is to extensively



expose students to reading texts, and one way of doing this is ER. The participants were randomly divided into three groups. The SSR program was implemented for a total of four weeks. Each SSR session consisted of three class hours per week and they met only twice a week. Data for this study came from pre-, during-, and post-treatment reflections and focus group interviews. The results of the reflections the participants wrote before, during, and after the treatment, as well as focus group interviews demonstrated that the SSR treatment had several positive effects. The participants noted they not only improved their attitudes towards reading in English but they were also motivated to read more. The participants reported improvements with regard to their reading habit, reading comprehension and writing skills, fluency, vocabulary knowledge, motivation to read and their attitudes toward reading.

3.4 Conclusion

The purpose of this review of literature was to examine past research available within the field of SSR and it included 15 primary studies that described the benefits of this type of an in-class extensive reading on EFL learners. This research review has provided an idea of how extensively the topic of SSR has already been researched by several different authors around the world. This review attempted to answer the research questions that guide this synthesis: (1) Does reading extensively through a SSR program contribute to the enhancement of EFL learners' reading comprehension skills? and (2) What is the impact of reading extensively through a SSR program on EFL learners' attitudes toward reading? The findings from this review revealed that SSR is effective when it comes to enhance students reading comprehension skills and promote a positive attitude toward reading in English.



CHAPTER IV

Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This section gives an outline of the research methods that were followed in the study. It provides information on the total number of participants, the criteria for inclusion and exclusion employed in order to select the studies for this synthesis, the online databases used to search for the research studies that contributed with essential information for answering these synthesis research questions as well as the key terms utilized to perform the search.

This paper synthesizes research on the effectiveness that SSR has on EFL learners. After performing an exhaustive search of the literature for this study, an abundance of material related to the topic of SSR was found. The following research questions were defined in advance to examine the articles: (1) How does reading extensively through a SSR program contribute to the enhancement of EFL learners' reading comprehension skills? and (2) What is the impact of a SSR program on EFL learners' attitudes toward reading? Therefore, for the purposes of this review, the attention was focused on articles, studies and journals, which dealt with the effects of SSR on the students' reading comprehension as well as with promoting students' attitudes toward reading. As the research progressed, it became evident that several SSR studies had taken place more than twenty years ago. Thus, the search narrowed from the year 2000 up to 2018. This decision to limit the review of literature to the decade was made in order to keep the analysis as current as possible.

The primary databases used to conduct the research were the EBSCOhost, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), JSTOR, Scielo, Taylor & Francis, and Google Scholar. Studies with the following key terms descriptors were searched: "sustained silent reading,"



“extensive reading,” “pleasure reading,” “implementing a SSR program,” “student attitudes,” “student motivation,” “reading habits,” “reading comprehension,” “SSR,” and “independent reading.” Citations from other reviews and articles were also obtained. Moreover, the following journals were electronically examined: *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research*, *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies*, *Ubiquitous Learning: An International Journal*, *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, *Arab World English Journal*, *Language Learning: A journal of Research in Language Studies*, *TESL-EJ*, and *TESOL Quarterly*, *ijSOTL*. Key unpublished studies (Doctoral dissertations, master’s theses, conferences proceedings) were also included in the review to enhance the validity of the analysis and discussion.

4.2 Inclusion criteria

A great number of studies concerned with the issue of the impact of SSR in EFL learners were identified through the literature search. These studies were then revised to determine whether they were pertinent to the research questions. The studies included in this analysis met the following criteria.

- The study was experimental or quasi-experimental in design which has quantifiable data for analysis, and either (a) measured gains made by one group after the treatment using a pre-posttest design, or (b) compared gains made by treatment groups with control or comparison groups.
- The studies focused on experiments concerning the effects of SSR on EFL learners’ reading comprehension skills and their attitudes towards reading, and the studies used quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods to analyze data. The qualitative part dealt with the study of students’ attitudes towards the act of reading.



- The studies were published in academic peer-reviewed journals. Doctoral dissertations, master's theses, conferences proceedings, and books were also included in the review.
- The studies were published between 2000 and 2018. This time frame was chosen to keep this review as current as possible.
- The review focused on studies, which participants were EFL adolescents or adults (age 13 and over).

4.3 Exclusion criteria

In the process, I discarded and added some material that at the beginning looked like they answered my research questions. Initially, more than 25 research studies were found; however, after reading them thoroughly, it was found that some of the articles were not suitable for this synthesis.

Typically, studies were excluded from the analysis for one or more of the following reasons:

- SSR was used for a purpose other than analyzing students' reading comprehension skills.
- Studies did not focus on the impact of SSR in learners' attitudes toward reading after completing the reading program.
- Studies were not empirical.
- Experimental research did not take place in an EFL setting.
- Participants in the studies were 12 years old or under.

In the end, 15 study reports from the over 27 studies initially identified, met all the inclusion criteria and were included in this research synthesis. These 15 studies were then



reviewed focusing on the research questions listed earlier. Studies preceded by an asterisk in the references section are included in the research synthesis since some studies did not provide the information required to conduct the research synthesis.

4.4 Conclusion

This section focused on the methodology that was used in this research synthesis. Detailed explanations of the inclusion criteria requirements were also described. All the databases used for performing the research of previous studies were clearly identified. Lastly, this section explains that from more than 20 studies initially took into consideration, only 15 met the inclusion criteria previously established.



CHAPTER V

Analysis

5.1 Introduction

The primary aim of this synthesis was to determine the effectiveness of SSR on EFL learners' reading comprehension and their attitudes toward reading. The key findings of the primary studies chosen for this synthesis are presented systematically to answer the research questions that motivated this study. This section synthesizes and compares 15 research studies in order to provide a fuller picture of their main findings

Of the 15 studies that met the criteria for this research synthesis, there were 14 experimental (randomized selection of participants) and one quasi-experimental (no random assignment of participants) studies. There were 1,264 students represented, with sample sizes across studies ranging from 14–284 students. Thirteen studies examined the effects of SSR on undergraduate university students, and two studies were performed with secondary education learners. The studies examined were all published in professional journals or conference proceedings, including one PhD dissertation. Since the focus of this synthesis was to examine the effectiveness of SSR on an EFL context, the chosen studies were the ones conducted in places where English was not taught as a second language. Therefore, as shown in figure 1, the research studies selected were performed in countries such as Iran (Masoumi & Sadeghoghli 2017), Japan (Matsui & Noro 2010; Yamashita 2013; Shea 2016), Korea (Cho 2017), Malaysia (Siah 2008; Mehar, Rowebe & Suan 2012; Tan, Lee & Pandian 2012), Philippines (Bacus, Abao, & Dayagbil 2015), Saudi Arabia (Al-Nafisah, 2015), Thailand (Tamrackitkun 2010; Kent, Limwattanagura, & Mekhabutr 2015; Wisaijorn 2017), and Turkey (Koc 2017; Savasci &

Akyel 2018). It is noticeable that Asian countries are the preferred places for scholars to perform SSR studies.

Figure 1. Countries of primary SSR studies

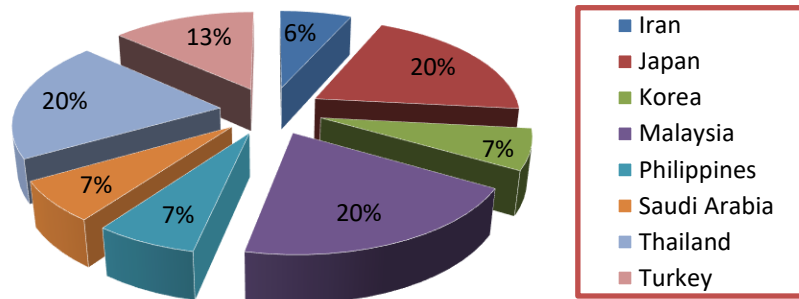


Table 1

Primary SSR studies selected for the synthesis

Study No.	Authors	Aims of the study	Publication year
1	Al-Nafisah	Reading comprehension	2015
2	Bacus et al.	Attitudes toward reading	2015
3	Cho	Attitudes toward reading	2017
4	Kent et al.	Attitudes toward reading	2015
5	Koc	Reading comprehension	2017
6	Masoumi and Sadeghohli	Reading comprehension	2017
7	Matsui and Noro	Attitudes toward reading	2010
8	Mehar et al.	Both	2012
9	Savasci and Akyel	Both	2018
10	Shea	Both	2016
11	Siah	Attitudes toward reading	2008
12	Tamrackitkun	Reading comprehension	2010
13	Tan and Pandian	Both	2012
14	Wisaijorn	Attitudes toward reading	2017
15	Yamashita	Attitudes toward reading	2013

Note. N=15



Table 1 indicates that most of the studies ($n = 7$) focused on learners' attitudes toward reading, while four concentrated exclusively on reading comprehension. However, there are four studies that focused on both aims. This suggests that investigation on ways to improve the attitudes of learners toward reading in English is one of the most common objectives of SSR researchers currently. Table 1 also shows that 12 of the 15 studies examined in this research synthesis were published between the years 2012 – 2018, and only three of them were published between the years 2006 - 2011. This suggests that, even though SSR research can be traced back to the 70s, this reading program has become of high interest among EFL researchers since the beginning of the second decade of this millennium.

After this overall analysis of the 15 primary studies, the major findings will be next discussed in relation to the research questions that motivated this study: (a) *Does reading extensively through a SSR program contribute to the enhancement of EFL learners' reading comprehension skills?* and (b) *What is the impact of reading extensively through a SSR program on EFL learners' attitudes toward reading?*

5.2 Effect of SSR on Reading Comprehension

The first research question is concerned with the overall effectiveness of SSR on reading comprehension proficiency. To answer this first question, seven primary studies (Tamrakitkun 2010; Mehar, Roweba & Suan 2012; Tan, Lee & Pandian 2012; Al-Nafisah, 2015; Shea 2016; Koc 2017; Masoumi & Sadeghoghli 2017) have been taken into consideration. All of the studies mentioned above focused on the possible improvements in the learners reading comprehension skill after being part of a SSR program and reported positive results.



Table 2

Findings of SSR studies that aimed on Reading Comprehension

Study No.	Authors	Data collection instruments	Results
1	Al-Nafisah	Pre/post-test	Positive
2	Koc	Pre/post-test	Positive
3	Masoumi and Sadeghoghli	Pre/post-test	Positive
4	Mehar et al.	Questionnaire	Positive
5	Shea	Questionnaire	Positive
6	Tamrackitkun	Pre/post-test	Positive
7	Tan and Pandian	Questionnaire	Positive

Note. N=7.

Table 2 indicates that all of the primary studies have shown positive findings. The majority (n=4) of the studies (Tamrackitkun 2010; Al-Nafisah, 2015; Koc 2017; Masoumi & Sadeghoghli 2017) used identical pre and a post-tests between experimental (EG) and control groups (CG) to determine the potential improvement in the students reading comprehension. The experimental groups, where students received SSR instruction, outperformed students in the control group who were deprived of the SSR approach. When contrasting the mean of the pre and post-test of the EG in this study's literature review section, it is clear that students made a significant progress in their reading comprehension skill after receiving SSR instruction. That is, experimental groups outperformed control groups on their identical post-test. This shows the superiority of the SSR over the intensive or traditional reading technique.

However, the authors of the three remaining studies (Mehar, Rowebe & Suan 2012; Tan, Lee & Pandian 2012; Shea 2016) did not employ the typical pre and post reading comprehension test. They appealed to the participants' perceptions by using surveys, questionnaires, and focus group discussions in order to discover any improvement in their reading comprehension skill. After completing the SSR program, learners were asked to fill out



questionnaires and participate in focus group discussions where they shared their insights about the experience of being part of this reading program. As reported in the literature review section, the majority of the respondents stated that they felt their overall reading proficiency enhanced specially their reading comprehension. Even though there was not statistical proof to confirm that the learners reading comprehension skill actually improved, the researchers of these studies interpreted the collected qualitative data and concluded that SSR is effective and it should be implemented in regular school daily classes. It should be noted that all these positive effects of SSR are consistent with the results of a previous literature review performed by Chow and Chou (2000), which confirms that SSR has positive impact on students' reading comprehension.

Furthermore, it must be emphasized that the three studies that utilized a qualitative approach to collect the data, examined the participants reading comprehension but also their attitudes toward the SSR program itself. The findings of these studies showed that the respondents ended up liking the reading experience and even some of them –future English teachers- were motivated to use this program later in their careers.

Consequently, one of the possible reasons for the participants to affirm that their reading comprehension has actually improved based solely on their perceptions may be founded in the idea that when students have a positive attitude toward reading, in consequence, they tend to have a feeling of improvement in their language proficiency as well . This can be represented as a virtuous circle: positive attitude → improved reading ability → positive attitude. This suggestion is consistent with studies (Kim 2003; Avallone 2005) that found that attitude toward reading and English language competence had a significant relationship. In these studies,



students who had a positive attitude toward reading, read more in English, and as a result, showed progress on their reading skills and comprehension.

Another reason could be the fact that in two (Mehar, Rowebe & Suan 2012; Tan, Lee & Pandian 2012) of the studies, the authors explained ahead to the participants about what SSR was and what were the expected improvements after the completion of the program. The students had an introductory class in which they were introduced to the program, its aims, and the reading skills they were going to develop. The importance of using SSR programs in developing reading comprehension was also explained. Thus, there is a possibility that, since the participants were informed about the possible outcomes of the program and the expected benefits, they felt compelled to please the researchers and answered the after program surveys and questionnaires with positive comments about their improvements on reading comprehension.

5.3 Development of Positive L2 Reading Attitudes

Another aspect investigated in this research synthesis was the effect of SSR on students' reading attitudes. The main objective of SSR programs has always been to increase students' enjoyment of reading. Eight (Siah 2008; Matsui & Noro 2010; Yamashita 2013; Bacus, Abao, & Dayagbil 2015; Kent, Limwattanagura, & Mekhabutr 2015; Cho 2017; Wisaijorn 2017; Savasci & Akyel 2018) of the 15 primary studies examined, aimed to investigate the impact of SSR on the participants attitudes toward reading. Table 3 shows that all of the studies mentioned above showed positive findings. These results are consistent with a research conducted by Arthur (1995) in which the author investigated the connection between SSR and attitudes toward reading in middle grade students, with special attention to alliterates. The author found several studies that correlated daily silent reading opportunities with improved attitudes.



Table 3

Findings of SSR Studies that Aimed on Attitudes toward Reading

Study No.	Authors	Data collection instruments	Results
1	Bacus et al.	Questionnaire/focus group	Positive
2	Cho	Questionnaire	Positive
3	Kent et al.	Survey	Positive
4	Matsui and Noro	Questionnaire	Positive
5	Savasci and Akyel	Focus group	Positive
6	Siah	Questionnaire	Positive
7	Wisaijorn	Questionnaire	Positive
8	Yamashita	Questionnaire	Positive

Note. N=8.

As indicated in the literature review section, the findings obtained from the analysis of the participants reflections, focus group discussions, and interviews demonstrate that the majority of the students loved and enjoyed reading more after they were exposed to the SSR program. Comparing the results of the surveys and questionnaires before and after SSR engagements, it is clear that a great deal of students felt that their attitudes toward reading changed after the SSR sessions. Findings from the focus-group interviews revealed that the students experienced a number of advantages of SSR, particularly affective factors, such as a desirable change in their preferred leisure-time activities, reading motivation and reading attitude. Students clearly expressed that the reading experience has reduced their anxiety about reading and increased their intrinsic motivation to read more independently. Participants also indicated that SSR gave them an avenue to read for pleasure, intrinsically motivated them toward sustainable reading, and consequently developed long term interest in reading. These findings



encompasses with Pilgreen's (2000) idea that "because reading is intrinsically rewarding, SSR induces students to develop the book habit, which represents a positive, long-term effect" (p. 5).

5.4 Reading material

Table 4

Type of Reading Material

Study No.	Authors	Reading material
1	Al-Nafisah	Variety of texts
2	Bacus et al.	Students' material
3	Cho	Graded readers
4	Kent et al.	Graded readers
5	Koc	Graded readers
6	Masoumi and Sadeghoghli	N/A
7	Matsui and Noro	Graded readers
8	Mehar et al.	" <i>Readers Digest</i> " magazines
9	Savasci and Akyel	Graded readers
10	Shea	" <i>Holes</i> " and " <i>Moon's incredible book of hypnotism</i> "
11	Siah	N/A
12	Tamrackitkun	Graded readers
13	Tan and Pandian	N/A
14	Wisaijorn	Graded readers
15	Yamashita	Graded readers

Note. N=15.

The fact that the students read many different types of texts during the program helped the students develop healthy reading habits and simultaneously led the way to promoting the reading comprehension performance. In this line, as shown in table 3, it is worth clarifying that the conditions of two studies (Mehar, Rowebe & Suan 2012; Shea 2016), which focused on reading comprehension, were less than optimal. Readers were asked to choose the reading texts



among a limited material selected by the researchers. According to Worthy, Moorman, and Turner (1998), self-selected reading is an important key feature of SSR since stimulates students love for reading and helps them to improve their reading attitude and achievement. This condition of not having the liberty to self-select the reading material, which is one of the guidelines of SSR, may have interfered with comprehension at the end. Nevertheless, what is remarkable about these studies results is that they were quite similar to what has been found in the other studies. SSR was effective even though conditions were not 100% optimal, concluding that the program helps readers improving their reading comprehension in spite of the matter if they select their texts themselves or not.

5.5 Impact of the Duration of SSR

Table 5 shows the period of time of the SSR program of the different studies examined for this research synthesis. It can be noticed that there are studies in which their reading program took a considerable length of time (Masui & Noro 2010: a school year; Shea 2016: two semesters; Yamashita 2013: one semester). On the other hand, table 5 also presents other studies whose programs did not last for very long (Cho 2017: 5 sessions; Kent et al. 2015: 12 sessions). In this regard, authors believe that the possible effects of SSR will not be obvious immediately and it may take months until students read enough so that improvements are noticeable. For instance, according to Krashen (1993), long term SSR programs (eight months or longer) show much more consistent results than short-term programs do. It is unlikely to observe any positive effect of SSR in the short term (Bell, 2001). However, as it has been already mentioned in the literature review section, all of the studies showed positive results either on the learners reading comprehension or on their attitudes toward reading.



Table 5

Length of the SSR program

Study No.	Authors	Length of SSR program
1	Al-Nafisah	3 months
2	Bacus et al.	2 months
3	Cho	5 sessions
4	Kent et al.	12 sessions
5	Koc	7 weeks
6	Masoumi and Sadeghoghli	24 sessions
7	Matsui and Noro	A school year
8	Mehar et al.	2 months
9	Savasci and Akyel	1 month
10	Shea	2 semesters
11	Siah	A school year
12	Tamrackitkun	4 months
13	Tan and Pandian	2 months
14	Wisaijorn	One semester
15	Yamashita	One semester

Note. N=15.

The reason for the positive findings on these short-period SSR studies may be due to the high commitment that the participants might have given to the program. It is probable that the students made an effort and actually read as much as possible and were not distracted by anything else during the duration of the reading approach. Consistency and frequency of reading might have played an important role in the impact of SSR on the learners' achievement. This idea echoes with Pilgreen's (2000) statement that "when considering effective SSR programs, the length of time students spent reading was not found to be as influential in their success as the frequency with which they read" (p. 18). Despite the believe that it requires time for SSR to be



reasonably successful, if learners are consistent and focus only on their reading during the program, positive effects can manifest in a relatively short period of time.

5.6 Conclusion

This section focused on the analysis of the key findings reported in the 15 primary research studies selected for this synthesis. Tables and figures have been employed to provide a better understanding on the issue being analyzed. The two research questions that encouraged this study were given an answer showing positive results. These answers were then evaluated in order to establish the possible reasons for these positive outcomes even though some of the studies were conducted in far from optimal conditions.



CHAPTER VI

Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

This research synthesis aimed to examine the overall effectiveness of SSR on reading comprehension in EFL settings. It also explored how the attitude toward reading of EFL learners was influenced by participating in a SSR program. After analyzing the most relevant research studies published in the area of SSR, including several not discussed but referenced in this synthesis, the findings show that SSR does indeed improve EFL students' reading comprehension (Tamrackitkun, 2010; Mehar, Rowebe & Suan 2012; Tan, Lee & Pandian 2012; Al-Nafisah 2015; Shea, 2016; Koc 2017; Masoumi & Sadeghghli 2017). Additionally, it was also found that a SSR program helps EFL learners developing positive attitudes towards reading (Siah 2008; Matsui & Noro 2010; Yamashita 2013; Bacus, Abao, & Dayagbil 2015; Kent, Limwattanagura, & Mekhabutr 2015; Cho 2017; Wisaijorn 2017; Savasci & Akyel 2018).

Furthermore, from the results analysis, three major issues are noted. Firstly, it is the issue of the lack of reliable data in some studies (Mehar, Rowebe & Suan 2012; Tan, Lee & Pandian 2012; Shea 2016) that aimed to investigate the effectiveness of SSR on reading comprehension. Despite the fact that these studies based their findings only on the participants' perceptions and did not use reading tests of any sort, their authors concluded that SSR was after all effective.

Secondly, there is the matter involving the length of the SSR program. Grabe and Stoller (2011) considered that it requires a time commitment for a SSR program to be reasonably successful. Few examined studies (Cho 2017: 5 sessions; Kent, et al. 2015: 12 sessions) would be thought not to be necessarily sufficiently long enough for the full benefits of SSR to show.



However, this synthesis findings show that SSR's effects can manifest in a relatively short period.

Finally, there is the issue of the students' self-selection of reading material. A couple of studies (Mehar, Rowebe & Suan 2012; Shea 2016) did not let the participants choose their books to read on their own. Yet, the findings of this study show that SSR is effective in spite of the book restriction.

Moreover, the results of this research synthesis is consistent with the Comprehensible Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985), which has stated that people acquire language via a great quantity of input that it has to be comprehensible and compelling. The author added that everyone improves reading skills through extensive reading of texts that do not require strain and suffering, and that is so interesting that we get completely absorbed in the message. On this matter, SSR satisfies these conditions since it involves reading large amounts of relatively easy material and with little or no follow-up work or testing (Holden, 2007). Rashidi and Piran (2011) also believed that "sustained silent reading provides these conditions as it involves reading a large amount of books at home with little or no follow-up activities" (p. 472).

6.2 Recommendations

Based on the results discussed in the previous section, it is clear that there is still some further research in the area of SSR that needs to be conducted.

The results analyzed above show a promising outlook for the practice of SSR programs in EFL settings. Thus, it is recommended that schools should find a way to implement SSR reading programs as part of their curricula and provide their learners with opportunities to read more extensively. In addition, parents at home should take a conscious effort in providing access to



varied types of reading materials (print or electronic) that are fascinating and appealing to their children in order to help them improve their overall reading proficiency.

Additionally, SSR deserves more attention especially in an EFL context such as Ecuador, where students do not have many opportunities to interact with English native speakers. Therefore, more research is encouraged to be done in our local context since there are only few studies (Salvador 2010; Vargas 2015; Campaña 2018) performed regarding to ER in general.

The research studies included in this synthesis were primarily conducted in Asian contexts, which may not reflect a balanced view of SSR use around the world. Therefore, in order to get a fuller picture of the true effects of SSR, future research should include studies done in other parts of the world.

Regarding to the use of tests and the acquisition of reliable data, it is recommended that future research look for studies in which a pre and post- test is used, avoiding the use of qualitative instruments such as interviews, discussion, and questionnaires in order to get more trustworthy data.

In addition, in the studies analyzed in this research synthesis, most participants are undergraduate students (86%), followed by secondary school students (14%). Therefore, the lack of younger participants is noticeable. In this line of thought, findings in some studies (Hafiz & Tudor 1989; Tsang 1996) have shown that ER programs such as SSR might improve reading proficiency and develop the joy of reading at an earlier stage of learning. The authors claimed that once the joy of reading is developed at early ages, students will read books regularly and there is a potential of creating a better combined effect on other studies as well. Thus, having younger participants included in future research is recommended.



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Appendix 1

List of Primary Studies for Analysis

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