

# **THE EFFECT OF A PRINTED EXTENSIVE READING INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM ON JORDANIAN SECONDARY STAGE STUDENTS' PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH**

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## **Abstract**

This paper reports the findings of a study that examined the effect of a Printed Extensive Reading (henceforth, PER) instructional program on Jordanian Eleventh grade students' proficiency in English and detected their opinions towards the effectiveness of the instructional program on their proficiency. In this study, the researchers utilized a cyclical integrative model through which the focus was paid to input and output skills evenly and simultaneously, quantitative and qualitative research instruments to ensure the credibility of the results, simplified and authentic ER material selected by the researcher in light of a set of criteria as will be shown in the methodology section and examined the target students' proficiency as a whole. To collect the data, a sample of two intact Eleventh grade sections from King Abdullah the Second School for Excellence was selected; one section was assigned to be the experimental group, the other as a control group. The quantitative findings of the study revealed that the mean scores of the experimental group were significantly higher than the mean scores of the control group, particularly in writing, speaking, vocabulary, reading comprehension and listening due to the teaching methodology. The findings of the study did not reveal any significant difference in the students' grammar proficiency. Further, the results of the questionnaire revealed that the respondents were appreciative and pleased with the effectiveness of the PER program. This result was also supported by the qualitative findings of the interview.

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**Keywords:** Extensive reading (ER), Printed extensive reading program (PER), English proficiency, Jordanian secondary stage students

## Introduction and background

Reviewing the related literature, one can clearly notice that most educators and researchers agree upon the fact that ER means reading a great deal of texts for the sake of pleasure or knowledge. For example, Al-Homoud and Schmitt (2009, p. 383) defined ER as "reading as much as possible, for the purpose of pleasure or information rather than learning particular language features". Likewise, Soliman (2012, p. 27) in a bit further extended definition affirmed that ER is "reading in vast amounts for enjoyment and in order to gain a general understanding of what is read". Other researchers like Hafiz and Tudor (1989, p.4) offered a definition for ER in which they reflected the common mechanism that is followed in most ER programs by stating that ER is "the reading of large amounts of material in the second language over time for personal pleasure or interest, and without the addition of productive tasks or follow up language work."

These definitions seem to explicitly recognize and support Krashen's (1982) Input hypothesis on the one hand and Day and Bamford's (2002) principles on the other hand through which the focus was mainly attributed to input at the expense of output. In light of Krashen's interpretations, it can be clearly deduced that receiving comprehensible input is the only way through which EFL and ESL students can acquire a second language. Therefore, the input hypothesis purports that an important condition for second language acquisition to take place, is that the input language should be a bit beyond the learner's existing level of competence and at the same time it should not be so close to his/her current level that they are not challenged at all. To achieve this, Krashen emphasized that an effective way to develop language proficiency and increase literacy is the practice of free reading or reading extensively due to the lack of opportunity to practice the spoken English in EFL contexts. Other researchers, for example, Grundy (2004) interpreted Krashen's comprehensible input hypothesis from another angle, referring her interpretation to Day and Bamford' (2004, p.16) first principle where they affirmed that "the materials must be at 'i minus 1' where 'i' is the student's current level of acquisition."

Another theoretical support for using ER in the field of second and foreign language pedagogy originated with the efforts of other reading specialists. For instance, considering the following statement "Given the overwhelming evidence for the importance of extensive reading in learning to read in a second language, why isn't everyone doing it? (Grabe, cited in Hedgcock & Ferris, 2009, p. 205), it can be clearly noticed that William Grabe is wondering about the reasons that impede learners from being engrossed in ER, especially after the apparent evidence of its effectiveness by the longstanding research. In support of Grabe's point of view, Nuttall (1982, p. 168) affirmed that "[t]he best way to improve your knowledge of a

foreign language is to go and live among its speakers. The next best way is to read extensively in it." In the same line of argument, Lee (1995) stated,

[I]nput is to language acquisition what gas is to a car. An engine needs gas to run; without gas, the car would not move an inch. Likewise, input in language learning is what gets the engine of acquisition going: without it, acquisition simply doesn't happen (p. 38).

In light of the reported literature, the following points seem to be dubious and questionable. 1- Is input alone enough for successful language learning and acquisition? 2- How could teachers make sure of their students' progress if there were no skills integration and follow-up activities? 3- Does exposing EFL learners to materials above or below their current proficiency level seem suitable and encouraging for more reading? 4- What are the perspectives and attitudes of other scholars and reading specialists towards Krashen's comprehensible input hypothesis? 5- Why do not instructors involve students in designing the instructional programs they intend to execute as a matter of determining their exact needs instead of asking them to select out of ready made materials? In response to these questions, the researchers of the current study assume that the output hypothesis of Swain (1985), the Whole Language approach, the constructivist theory, the five working hypotheses of Omaggio (2001) are considered a suitable response in this respect.

Actually, after the partial failure of the traditional methods and approaches of teaching English as a second/foreign language in coming up with competent learners and graduates, theorists and researchers started realizing the fact that there is no one perfect method that suits all contexts. One of the main reasons behind such a failure can be attributed to the way by which the four language skills were taught separately (Su, 2007). However, their efforts have given birth to a new era in which the focus is based on meaning, competence, learner-centered, skills-integration and the like. One of these methodologies is the Whole Language Approach. From its name, it can be inferred that language is taught as a whole not in isolation or even in bits and pieces as it was common in the past.

According to Brown (2001) there are some observations that support the language skills integration:

- 1- Production and reception are quite simply two sides of the same coin.
- 2- Interaction means sending and receiving messages.
- 3- Written and spoken language often bear a relationship to each other; to ignore that relationship is to ignore the richness of language.

- 4- Often one skill will reinforce another, we learn to speak, for example, by modeling what we hear, and we learn to write by examining what we can read.
- 5- In the real world of language use, most of our natural performance involves not only the integration of one or more skills, but connections between language and the way we think, feel and act (p. 234).

The use of ER program as an appropriate and a healthy environment for language skills integration has been encouraged and recommended by several researchers and reading specialists (e.g., Hedge, 2005; Hedgcock & Ferris, 2009). Hedgcock and Ferris (2009, p. 208) affirmed that "[A]lthough extensive reading and WL are not identical or synonymous, the two approaches share enough philosophical and practical similarities ."

In a similar tendency, other researchers (e.g., Long, 1996; Omaggio, 2001; Swain, 1985) concentrated their research efforts on other dimensions concerning the language acquisition process without neglecting their counterparts' researched efforts. They maintained that opportunities should not only be given for students to develop their comprehensible input but rather they believe that opportunities for both input and output are evenly significant for second language acquisition. For example, the five working hypotheses of Omaggio (2001, p. 91) displayed the highly significance of language integration and represented a criticism for the comprehensible input hypothesis. Here is an example of these hypotheses by which one can easily notice the encouragement towards producing language without any setback "[S]tudents should be encouraged to express their own meaning as early as possible."

By the same token, other researchers (e.g., Jo-Hou, 2010; Lyutaya, 2011) highlighted the significance of using alternative and motivating learning instruments such as reading logs, journals, records, portfolios that can be used to successfully integrate the language skills. Jo-Hou (2010) affirmed that using alternative assessment strategies like reading journal is beneficial for foreign language learners to develop their reading and writing skills in particular and whole language proficiency in general as being student-centered as well as having the ability of engaging learners in their own learning. In support of this proposition, Lyutaya (2011), signified the importance of reading logs as an effective means in incorporating the language skills by stating,

[C]ompleting the entries in their reading log at pre-, during-, and post-reading intervals helps students learn strategies to enhance reading comprehension, activate new vocabulary, and develop the writing skill. In addition, the

reading log is a vehicle for peer review and various forms of assessment (p. 29).

### **Statement of the Problem**

This study has emerged as a response to several convincing and tangible reasons that can be displayed as follows:

- 1- The obvious weakness in English proficiency for most EFL Jordanian students in spite of the fact that they spend a long period of time learning English at schools from the first to the twelfth grades. To buttress this claim, Al-Jamal (2007, p. 35) affirmed that "[D]uring their twelve years of English language instruction, pupils spend a large portion of their time listening to explanations of the structure of the language and engaging in dull and decontextualized pattern drills."
- 2- The encouragement of several reading specialists and educators (e.g., Hedgcock & Ferris, 2009; Nuttall, 1982) to practice reading extensively considering it as an efficacious way for improving EFL learners' language. Unfortunately, this encouragement has also noticeably appeared in the General Guidelines that set by English Language National Team under the patronage of the Jordanian Ministry of Education as theories and claims without being taken seriously in the curriculum design. In other words, there is a clear contradiction between what is stipulated in the General Guideline and what is actually used and focused on in the EFL curriculum design and construction.
- 3- The focus of several ER studies that was mainly on some aspects of the language proficiency without paying attention to other important aspects such as speaking, listening, and writing .

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the current study :

- 1- Are there statistically significant differences in the mean scores of the students' proficiency in English due to the teaching methodology?
- 2- What are the students' opinions towards the efficacy of the PER program in developing their proficiency in English?

### **Significance of the Study**

In Jordanian public schools ER is rarely practiced either inside or outside the classroom, but rather most EFL instructors resort to use a traditional model in their teaching. Accordingly, this study may hopefully shed more attention to the importance of integrating ER in formal EFL textbook by drawing the attention of stakeholders to infuse ER as a practice in formal EFL classrooms settings, particularly in EFL institutions that are allotted to Gifted- Students, like King Abdullah II schools for Excellence, i.e., injecting the formal curriculum with adequate doses of ER materials , or even allotting formal periods for ER.

Besides, the researchers found that most of the previous studies that investigated the effect of ER focused on learners' English proficiency in term of some aspects, such as vocabulary growth, reading comprehension, reading speed, paying little or no attention to other aspects which are considered crucial parts of any language proficiency, such as the writing ability, oral fluency (speaking), listening, and the like. In light of this deficiency, this study has come to bridge this gap by addressing the effect of ER from various aspects and angles.

More importantly, this study is considered a strong advocacy of the language skills integration. Unlike most of the previous related studies whose main focus was on the "Input Hypothesis" as the only key to English language learning and acquisition, the current study attempted to break this border by combining the best pedagogical practices, premises for the sake of coming up with a healthy learning environment. This effort can be clearly noticed in the construction rationale of the PER program through which the input and output skills have been incorporated in a cyclical integrative model.

### **Operational Definitions of Terms**

**Extensive Reading:** It is a pedagogical methodology through which students are required to read varied simplified and authentic materials of different genres in vast amounts for enjoyment and knowledge . It is based on a shared accountability between the teacher on the one hand and the students on the other hand to promote and develop English language learning and proficiency in an EFL context.

**Printed Extensive Reading Program:** It is a cyclical-integrative-instructional program through which the students are required to go through the following intertwined phases: text selecting, pre-reading-reflection, reading, post-reading-reflection, reporting and interaction. The term "printed" refers to the way by which the ER material is introduced to the learners without any electronic tools. In this program, the students were asked to read a vast amount of printed texts taking into account the freedom of selecting what suits their preferences, cultural background, and proficiency levels.

**Language proficiency:** The framework of the target language proficiency in this study lies in the General Guidelines and Specific Outcomes which were prepared by the English Language National Team under the patronage of the Jordanian Ministry of Education (2006).

### **Literature Review**

The positive impact of ER in its linear mode on EFL/ESL learners' proficiency and attitudes has been proved by several research studies. Here are some of the studies that tackled various language aspects:

Elley and Mangubhai (1983) examined the effect of ER on Fiji primary students' language proficiency where over six hundred young students were divided into three main groups; the shared book group, the silent reading group, and the control group. To collect the data, the researchers used a large number of high interest simplified story books. Their study showed that the students in the shared book and silent reading groups made significantly more improvements in English reading and writing proficiency than their control group counterparts.

Shahrouri (2000) investigated the effect of free reading activity on the Ninth grade students' writing composition in English in Nablus schools on the one hand and showing the importance of feedback beside free reading strategy in writing composition on the other hand. The sample of the study consisted of six schools selected randomly, three for boys, and the other three for girls. Three groups were designated in this study: two experimental groups with two different mechanisms (the first experimental group was required to read extensively without giving feedback, in contrast the other one was required to read extensively and give feedback). In each group, there were two schools chosen randomly, one for males and the other for females. A pre- and post-test in writing composition was given to the three groups. The results showed that there was a significant difference in students' post achievements in writing composition among the three groups in favor of the second experimental group (the group of free reading and feedback). In other words, the study revealed that using feedback beside free reading can lead to efficient writing.

Iwahori (2008) investigated the effect of ER in developing EFL Japanese high school students' reading fluency. The sample of the study consisted of 33 male and female high school students and a pre- and post-reading fluency test was carried out to measure the student's progress in reading fluency. After conducting the pre- test, the students were exposed to a plenty of ER materials such as comic books, short stories through which the students chose what they liked to read in light of their preferences and interests. By the end of the study which lasted for six weeks, the students were post-tested. The results of the study revealed that there were significant differences, i.e., the ER approach proved its effectiveness in enhancing the students' reading fluency in particular and language proficiency in general.

In a similar tendency and as a matter of investigating the effect of using other innovative strategies, Brown, Waring, and Donkaewbua (2008) examined the rate at which English vocabulary was acquired from three input modes: (a) reading, (b) reading-while-listening, and (c) listening to stories. The sample consisted of 35 Japanese students of English literature from a medium-sized private university in Japan. The 35 participants were randomly assigned to three experimental groups. The approach followed in

this study was to use graded readers that were well within the subjects' current reading-ability level. The researchers administered two test types, namely a multiple-choice test and a meaning-by-translation test immediately after the reading and listening treatments, one week later and three months later .

The results of the meaning-translation test at the immediate post-test showed that the participants were able to learn new words from context and learned most words in the reading-while-listening mode followed by the reading-only mode and then the listening-only mode. The data also indicated that the more frequently a word is met, the more chance it has of being learned. It also suggests that unless the words are met a sufficient number of times and are met again soon after in subsequent reading or listening experiences, then the word knowledge gained will decay. In terms of preferred input mode, reading-while-listening was considered the most comfortable by the majority of students .

Nakanishi (2011) investigated the effect of ER and shadowing on performance on reading comprehension tests. To do this, the researcher assigned two experimental groups and a control group, using three reading comprehension tests; a pre- test, and two post-tests ; the first one after a semester of the treatment, whereas the second one after a year of the treatment. The results of this study according to the post test scores showed substantial development and improvement in the experimental groups' reading comprehension in comparison to the scores of the control group, especially in the second post test' scores.

In spite of the fact that numerous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of ER in developing various aspects of language, some scholars (e.g., Lai, 1993; Gao, 2004; Robb and Susser, 1989) were suspicious of ER effect on some language aspects. For example, Robb and Susser (1989) found that reading a quantity of books for global understanding did not seem to enhance reading comprehension effectively. Other researchers (e.g., Carver and Leibert,1995) demonstrated that reading texts that are i-1, i.e., easier than learners' existing proficiency levels did not result in vocabulary gains .

From the previous review of related literature, the researchers conclude that the major focus of these studies was on specific aspects or components of the English language proficiency, such as reading comprehension, writing, vocabulary development, reading speed, reading rate or fluency, students' attitudes, paying little or even no attention to other language proficiency components, such as speaking (oral fluency), listening, and grammar. Besides, most of the aforementioned studies used quantitative techniques for data gathering. That is, no studies have used a qualitative approach. Unlike those studies, both quantitative and qualitative data



collection techniques are used in the current study for the sake of coming up with more credible findings. Furthermore, unlike other ER programs that focused mainly on literary texts by resorting to ready-made graded readers without paying adequate attention to other types of genres like the informational texts, the current study used both literary and informational texts as a matter of creating a suitable and an appealing learning atmosphere.

### **Methods and Procedures**

This section presents the methodology that the researchers used in this study in the following order: the participants of the study, PER material, validity of the PER program construction and its execution, instruments of the study and their validity and reliability, study design and methodology, study variables, data analysis and finally the procedures of the study.

### **Participants of the Study**

Two intact sections of Eleventh grade students from King Abdullah the Second School for Excellence in Ajloun were involved in the current study. One section was randomly assigned as an experimental group whereas the other one was assigned as a control group during the first semester of the academic year 2012-2013.

### **PER Material**

In order to guarantee the PER program's success, a set of components and procedures are supposed to be available in advance. One of these components, which is actually considered the cornerstone and the essence of this instructional program, is the material selection. According to Macalister (2008), there is always a risk in selecting a text or a book for another person that they may not like it. Accordingly, a set of criteria were put by the researcher to ensure a successful selection of the material as follows:

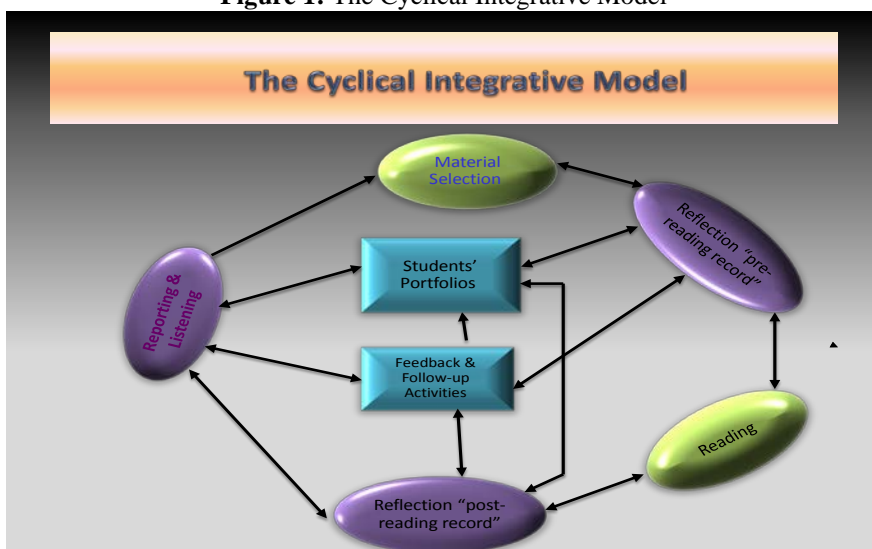
- 1- Meeting the allocated time, i.e., choosing feasible material to be accomplished inside the classroom within the assigned time.
- 2- Addressing the students' preferences and tastes. To do this, the researchers before selecting the material took the students' opinions concerning the topics they prefer to read about.
- 3- Addressing the curriculum's topics, i.e., having relevant topics to those mentioned and prepared to be taught in their formal textbook.
- 4- Considering the cultural and ethical aspects by excluding the texts that include contradictory scenes or ideas .
- 5- A blend of authentic and simplified texts/ materials is used in the program to serve the purposes of the two programs. The focus on authentic texts does not imply that we should abandon the use of simplified materials created for instructional purposes. Rather, a blend of the two seems more effective and appropriate.
- 6- In light of the above criteria, two variables were addressed seriously, the length of the text and the level of easiness and difficulty. Therefore, a

wide range of authentic and simplified texts were selected from various online sources and submitted to the validating members who decided their suitability. In fact, several texts were added and others were omitted due to the jury's suggestions.

**The PER Program**

Based on the related literature especially in terms of what premises and hypotheses have been presented and suggested by various reading specialists and methodologists, the following model shows the mechanism that was followed in the PER program construction and execution:

**Figure 1: The Cyclical Integrative Model**



The figure above shows how it is possible and feasible for EFL teachers to employ ER programs as a means to integrate the language skills in a successful manner. Actually, this proposed figure affirms what has been introduced in the literature starting with those scholars who advocate the importance of input and reading practice in developing learners' foreign and second language to those who encourage the language production as early as possible and not to postpone it till building strong comprehensible input. It also includes alternative assessment tools (portfolio, feedback, reading records) which play a crucial role in language learning .

**PER program construction**

To construct this instructional program, a set of applications and procedures based on clear and combined propositions were seriously taken into account. The following procedures were accomplished in advance:

- 1- Preparing the material that was selected to be used in the PER program.
- 2- Specifying a portfolio for each participant. The main elements included in the students portfolios were:

- a- Adequate number of pre-reading records (at least 50 copies in each portfolio)
  - b- Adequate number of post-reading records (at least 50 copies in each portfolio)
  - c- Quizzes
  - d- Material presentation schedule
  - e- Speaking guide
  - f- Writing guide
- 3- Specifying a locker in order to keep the students portfolios after reflecting on them by the teacher after every reading session.

**PER Program Validity**

To validate the PER program, a jury of five specialists in TEFL were asked to give their opinions and suggestions concerning the PER program construction.

**The Following General Procedures and Instructions Were Followed in Executing the PER Program**

- 1- Creating a healthy environment by arranging the seats in a proper way, preparing the PER material and placing them in a safe locker inside the lab, and preparing the assessment tools.
- 2- Using a data show in order to display illuminating information about the ER program, including the definition of ER, the benefits of ER, the objectives of the programs, varied researched findings and results that demonstrate the effectiveness of ER in different EFL contexts, the material, the schedule that will be used throughout the program execution, the students' role, the teacher's role, the follow-up activities and assignment tools, the procedures...etc.
- 3- Acquainting the students with the time distribution of their English classes. The duration of the English period for the Eleventh grade students at King Abdullah II School for Excellence is 55 minutes. In order to execute the PER program, the researcher divided the English period into two main parts. The first part (25 minutes) was assigned for teaching the formal mainstream textbook. The last 30 minutes were designated for executing the PER program. Table 1 shows precisely the allocated time for each step.

**Table 1: Time Distribution**

No.	Time	Task
1.	3 min.	Text selection
2.	2 min.	Filling out the pre-reading record
3.	10 min.	Reading the selected material
4.	5 min.	Reflecting on the items of the post-reading record
5.	10 min.	Executing varied follow-up activities closely related to what they have read, including text reporting, debating, role-play acting, feedback discussion etc.

### **The Following Specific Procedures Were Followed in Executing the PER Program**

- 1- At first, the teacher provided each student in the PER group with a portfolio to keep their accumulative work all through the program execution. Each portfolio included an adequate number of pre- and post-reading records, speaking guide, writing guide, material presentation schedule, and the like. Several reading specialists (e.g., Brown, 2001; Hedgcock & Ferris, 2009) encouraged the use of portfolio in language learning as an alternative assessment approach due to the potential great advantages, such as enhancing the learners' autonomy and motivation by involving them in systematic reflection on their own products, properly weaving the process of learning and assessment, and engaging students in decision-making about various elements of the learning and teaching process.
- 2- The teacher put the target ER material on the table asking the students of the PER group to come in a systematic order to select one of the texts.
- 3- The students took out the pre-reading records from their portfolios in order to justify the reason/reasons of their text selection. After they had finished their reflection, they got their records back to their portfolios.
- 4- After that, the students started directly reading their selected texts within the given time. In this regard, it is worth indicating that the students were free to change the texts they already selected if they found it above their proficiency level or uninteresting.
- 5- When students finished reading their selected texts, they took out their post-reading records in order to reflect on the included items.
- 6- At the end of every reading session, the last ten minutes, several activities were carried out. The oral text reporting was one of main follow-up activities the students were highly encouraged to do. More importantly, as an expansion for this activity and as a matter of breaking the routine, the students were frequently asked to sit in pairs and sometimes in groups of four to debate the items of reflection. In this respect, each student was given a chance to report to their colleagues on what they have read. The teacher's role in this process was to go round and provide help when needed.
- 7- By linking the Common Chinese proverb which states that "I hear, I forget; I see, I remember; I do, I understand" with the multiple roles that teachers are supposed to perform including being a needs analyst, curriculum and material developer, acting out some dramatic roles as one of the follow-up activities was seen as an effective and innovative technique to create a healthy environment for classroom

interaction and learning. Therefore, students in the PER program were firstly informed by the teacher of how they could employ the texts they had read in making varied dramatic activities. While reading such dramatic texts, it was noticed that students especially after providing them with proper guidance, have exceeded the prospected expectations. In fact, this kind of follow-up activities provided the participants in both programs with maximum opportunities for participation because it allowed them to work in pairs and groups.

- 8- By the end of each reading session, the teacher collected the students' portfolios taking them to his office in order to check up on the students' work as well as to provide them with suitable feedback. After that, the teacher got them back to the students who in their turn read the teacher's feedback and returned them to the locker in the computer laboratory. Students were allowed to take their portfolios home three days a week in order to revise them and write down some points suggested by the teacher as feedback on their work to be discussed in the classroom as one of the follow up activities, particularly in the last ten minutes that were assigned to perform this kind of activities.
- 9- In addition to the text reporting and debating that carried out regularly at the end of each reading session, other activities were also utilized such as weekly quizzes, weekly speaking presentations concerning one of the best topics/texts the students read throughout the week, and finally writing assignments.

**Instruments of the Study:** For the sake of this study and in order to answer the research questions, a hybrid methodology of quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques was used.

**1. The English Proficiency Test:** A comprehensive English language proficiency test (ELPT) was constructed by the researchers in light of the General Guidelines and the Specific Outcomes of the secondary stage (2006).

**Validity of the Test:** The test validity was conducted in terms of its content, construct and internal construct. Regarding the content validity, the test was given to a jury of 11 EFL specialists, supervisors and teachers. In order to validate its construct, a pilot sample of 20 students was conducted. All difficulty coefficients ranged between 0.25-0.75 whereas the discrimination coefficients ranged between 0.45-0.95 which means that the validity of the test construct in investigating the students' proficiency in the components included in the test is appropriate. With regard to the internal construct, the results of the correlation coefficients between the test and its components ranged from 0.47-0.94. It also shows that the values of the intraclass

correlation coefficients ranged from 0.30-0.89 which means that the validity of the internal construct of the test is appropriate.

**Reliability of the Test:** The reliability of the test was measured by administering it on a pilot sample consisting of 20 students who were chosen from outside the actual sample of the study. The values of the internal consistency (Cronbach) of the test's components ranged from 0.45-0.97 and the values of the internal consistency for the test as a whole was 0.94 whereas the values of the Stability Index coefficients ranged from 0.81-0.98 which means that the reliability of the test is accepted.

**2. The Questionnaire:** Referring to the related literature and based on the researchers' experience, a questionnaire of three domains including 34 items was devised and developed to investigate the students' opinions concerning the influence of the PER program on their proficiency in English. In this questionnaire, the participants were asked to show the extent of their agreement/disagreement with each item on the questionnaire using a three-point scale: A-agree, UD-undecided, D-disagree

**Validity of the Questionnaire:** For the purpose of validating the questionnaire, a jury of 11 EFL specialists, supervisors and teachers were kindly asked to judge whether the items were enough, appropriate and comprehensive. The researchers added a number of items and omitted other ones that were vague and misleading in response to the jury's suggestions.

**Reliability of the Questionnaire:** To obtain the reliability of the internal consistency and stability index for the questionnaire and its domains, it was piloted to 20 students outside the actual sample of the study using the test-retest method. The researchers administered the questionnaire to the pilot sample twice within a period of two weeks. The values of the stability index (Pearson) for the domains of the research instrument ranged from 0.83- 0.87 and was 0.82 for the entire research instrument. The values of the internal consistency (Cronbach) for the domains of this research instrument ranged from 0.83-0.92 and stood at 0.94 for the entire research instrument. Indeed, these calculations reveal that this research instrument is suitable to be used in this study.

**3. The Interview:** The interview was used for the sake of accessing in-depth information about the participants' perceptions and suggestions concerning the PER program to support the data gained by the test and the questionnaire. The interview encompassed 17 questions that were analyzed by identifying frequent themes and discussing these them in light of the test and the questionnaire's results.

**Validity of the Interview:** The interview questions were also subjected to a process of validation by the same panel of jury who validated the aforementioned research instruments.

## Results of the Study: Results Related to the First Research Question

To tackle the first research question, the following statistics were calculated: means and standard deviations of the students' proficiency in the pre- and post- tests according to the teaching methodology, the adjusted means and the standard errors of the post- test, ANCOVA test, means and standard deviation of the students' proficiency in the components of the pre- and post- tests. After finding out that there were observed correlation coefficients among the components of the post test, MANCOVA was used to reveal a statistically significant difference in the students' proficiency in the components of the post-test due to the teaching methodology. To determine which components were more affected by the teaching methodology ANCOVA was used to test each component in the post- test. The results of this analysis is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2:** ANCOVA Results of the Students' Proficiency in the Components of the Post-Test after Excluding Their Proficiency Effect in the Pre-Test According to the Teaching Methodology

Dependent Variable	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial $\eta^2$
Reading Comprehension	Reading Comprehension (Covariate)	7.109	1	7.109	4.014	0.057	14.86%
	Vocabulary (Covariate)	3.833	1	3.833	2.164	0.155	8.60%
	Grammar (Covariate)	0.884	1	0.884	0.499	0.487	2.12%
	Writing (Covariate)	0.054	1	0.054	0.030	0.863	0.13%
	Speaking (Covariate)	0.183	1	0.183	0.103	0.751	0.45%
	Listening (Covariate)	0.010	1	0.010	0.005	0.942	0.02%
	Teaching Methodology	15.904	1	15.904	<b>8.980</b>	0.006	28.08%
	Error	40.735	23	1.771			
Total	68.712	30					
Vocabulary	Reading Comprehension (Covariate)	0.418	1	0.418	0.150	0.702	0.65%
	Vocabulary (Covariate)	7.274	1	7.274	2.607	0.120	10.18%
	Grammar (Covariate)	0.005	1	0.005	0.002	0.968	0.01%
	Writing (Covariate)	3.476	1	3.476	1.246	0.276	5.14%
	Speaking (Covariate)	0.063	1	0.063	0.023	0.881	0.10%
	Listening (Covariate)	1.900	1	1.900	0.681	0.418	2.88%
	Teaching Methodology	55.302	1	55.302	<b>19.821</b>	0.000	46.29%
	Error	64.173	23	2.790			
Total	132.613	30					
Grammar	Reading Comprehension (Covariate)	0.034	1	0.034	0.018	0.894	0.08%
	Vocabulary (Covariate)	8.516	1	8.516	4.541	0.044	16.49%
	Grammar (Covariate)	4.675	1	4.675	<b>2.493</b>	0.128	9.78%
	Writing (Covariate)	1.207	1	1.207	0.644	0.431	2.72%
	Speaking (Covariate)	1.667	1	1.667	0.889	0.356	3.72%
	Listening (Covariate)	8.958	1	8.958	<b>4.777</b>	0.039	17.20%
	Teaching Methodology	6.323	1	6.323	3.372	0.079	12.79%
	Error	43.132	23	1.875			
Total	74.512	30					
Writing	Reading Comprehension (Covariate)	6.078	1	6.078	1.265	0.272	5.21%
	Vocabulary (Covariate)	0.110	1	0.110	0.023	0.881	0.10%
	Grammar (Covariate)	14.221	1	14.221	<b>2.960</b>	0.099	11.40%
	Writing (Covariate)	74.341	1	74.341	<b>15.476</b>	0.001	40.22%
	Speaking (Covariate)	1.025	1	1.025	0.213	0.648	0.92%
	Listening (Covariate)	4.168	1	4.168	0.868	0.361	3.64%
	Teaching Methodology	187.793	1	187.793	<b>39.093</b>	0.000	62.96%
	Error	110.485	23	4.804			

	Total	398.220	30				
Speaking	Reading Comprehension (Covariate)	0.742	1	0.742	0.083	0.776	0.36%
	Vocabulary (Covariate)	8.875	1	8.875	0.993	0.329	4.14%
	Grammar (Covariate)	3.395	1	3.395	0.380	0.544	1.62%
	Writing (Covariate)	17.515	1	17.515	1.959	0.175	7.85%
	Speaking (Covariate)	415.834	1	415.834	<b>46.521</b>	0.000	66.92%
	Listening (Covariate)	20.806	1	20.806	2.328	0.141	9.19%
	Teaching Methodology	269.683	1	269.683	<b>30.171</b>	0.000	56.74%
	Error	205.587	23	8.939			
	Total	942.437	30				
Listening	Reading Comprehension (Covariate)	0.023	1	0.023	0.017	0.896	0.08%
	Vocabulary (Covariate)	1.774	1	1.774	1.317	0.263	5.41%
	Grammar (Covariate)	0.238	1	0.238	0.177	0.678	0.76%
	Writing (Covariate)	0.173	1	0.173	0.128	0.724	0.55%
	Speaking (Covariate)	0.143	1	0.143	0.106	0.747	0.46%
	Listening (Covariate)	34.599	1	34.599	<b>25.682</b>	0.000	52.75%
	Teaching Methodology	10.142	1	10.142	<b>7.528</b>	0.012	24.66%
	Error	30.986	23	1.347			
	Total	78.078	30				

According to the results in the table above, there are statistically significant differences at  $\alpha = 0.05$  among the students' mean scores on all the components of the post-test attributed to the effect of the teaching methodology except for the grammar skill.

The results of Table 2 above can be presented as follows:

- 1- With regard to writing proficiency, the results were in favor of the PER as compared with the conventional methodology.
- 2- With regard to speaking proficiency, the results were in favor of the PER as opposed to the conventional methodology.
- 3- With regard to vocabulary proficiency, the results were in favor of the PER as opposed to the conventional methodology.
- 4- With regard to reading comprehension proficiency, the results were in favor of the PER as compared with the conventional methodology.
- 5- With regard to listening proficiency, the results were in favor of the PER as compared with the conventional methodology.

### Results of the Second Research Question

To answer the second research question, a questionnaire and an interview were used. The researchers calculated the percentages of the students' responses to the questionnaire according to a 3-point scale, means and standard deviations of the students' responses to the questionnaire items as a whole and to its domains. Furthermore, a content analysis for the interview questions that were posed for the experimental group was conducted. The results are presented in a descending order in Table 3 as follows:



**Table 3:** Percentages, Means, and Standard Deviations of the PER Students' Responses to the Items of the Questionnaire

Dimension	Rank	Item ID	Item Content for Students' Attitudes toward Printed Extensive Reading	Percentages:			Mean	Std. Dev
				D.A	U.D	A.		
The Effect of the PER on My English Proficiency	1	1	<i>Extensive reading improves my English</i>	0.0	0.0	100.0	3.00	0.00
	2	2	<i>Reading literary texts, such as stories, poems, tales, fables, etc, is necessary to acquire English</i>	0.0	0.0	100.0	3.00	0.00
	3	3	<i>Reading informational texts is necessary to acquire English</i>	0.0	5.3	94.7	2.95	0.23
	4	4	<i>Literary texts help me to improve my English better than informational texts</i>	0.0	5.3	94.7	2.95	0.23
	5	7	<i>Extensive reading increases my English vocabulary</i>	0.0	5.3	94.7	2.95	0.23
	6	9	<i>Extensive reading improves my writing proficiency</i>	0.0	10.5	89.5	2.89	0.32
	7	11	<i>Extensive reading enhances my reading proficiency</i>	0.0	10.5	89.5	2.89	0.32
	8	6	<i>Reading extensively helps me perform better in the English exams</i>	0.0	15.8	84.2	2.84	0.37
	9	10	<i>Extensive reading develops my speaking proficiency</i>	0.0	15.8	84.2	2.84	0.37
	10	8	<i>Extensive reading strengthens my grammar</i>	0.0	21.1	78.9	2.79	0.42
	11	12	<i>Extensive reading ameliorates my listening proficiency</i>	0.0	31.6	68.4	2.68	0.48
	12	5	<i>Informational texts help me improve my English better than literary texts</i>	60.0	20.0	20.0	1.60	0.45
My General Opinion concerning ER	1	14	<i>Reading a wide range of English materials gives students a better knowledge of the world</i>	0.0	10.5	89.5	2.89	0.32
	2	18	<i>Literary texts like stories and poems are easier and more appealing than informational texts</i>	0.0	15.8	84.2	2.84	0.37
	3	13	<i>Reading extensively has changed my mind toward English learning positively</i>	0.0	15.8	84.2	2.84	0.37
	4	15	<i>Extensive reading material is appealing and helpful</i>	0.0	15.8	84.2	2.84	0.37
	5	16	<i>Extensive reading material should be part of the public curriculum</i>	0.0	26.3	73.7	2.74	0.45
	6	21	<i>This program is considered a starting and turning point in my learning life</i>	0.0	31.6	68.4	2.68	0.48
	7	17	<i>This is the first time I have read ER materials</i>	0.0	36.8	63.2	2.63	0.50
	8	19	<i>Informational texts like the Kid's magazine and the mixed topics are easier and more appealing than literary texts</i>	63.2	16.8	20.0	0.97	0.50
	9	20	<i>My teacher in the previous grades used to encourage me to read supplementary materials</i>	57.9	42.1	0.0	1.42	0.51
The Content and the Procedures	1	31	<i>Using follow-up activities promotes my reading proficiency</i>	0.0	5.3	94.7	2.95	0.23
	2	33	<i>Getting feedback plays a crucial role in developing my proficiency in English</i>	0.0	5.3	94.7	2.95	0.23

of the PER Instructional Program	3	22	<i>The texts are easy and suit my proficiency level</i>	0.0	10.5	89.5	2.89	0.32
	4	25	<i>Using follow-up activities shows the close bond among the language skills(Listening, speaking, reading and writing)</i>	0.0	10.5	89.5	2.89	0.32
	5	26	<i>Using follow-up activities helps me understand the text properly</i>	0.0	10.5	89.5	2.89	0.32
	6	28	<i>Using follow-up activities develops my speaking proficiency</i>	0.0	10.5	89.5	2.89	0.32
	7	29	<i>Using follow-up activities helps me in learning and acquiring new vocabulary</i>	0.0	10.5	89.5	2.89	0.32
	8	32	<i>Getting feedback concerning what I do helps me a lot</i>	0.0	10.5	89.5	2.89	0.32
	9	23	<i>The time is enough for reading and reflection</i>	0.0	15.8	84.2	2.84	0.37
	10	24	<i>The material is varied and covers various genres</i>	0.0	21.1	78.9	2.79	0.42
	11	27	<i>Using follow-up activities develops my writing proficiency</i>	0.0	21.1	78.9	2.79	0.42
	12	34	<i>The program is well-prepared and systematic</i>	0.0	26.3	73.7	2.74	0.45
	13	30	<i>Using follow-up activities helps me in learning and acquiring new grammar</i>	0.0	26.3	73.7	2.74	0.45

The data above together with that information gained by the interviews demonstrate and confirm those results of the comprehensive test, especially in areas such as "The Effect of PER on English Proficiency", "Opinions Concerning ER".

### **Discussion of the Results**

The results of the first research question revealed that there was a statistically significant difference at  $\alpha = 0.05$  in the students' proficiency as a whole in favor of the PER group as opposed to the control group. This significant difference was attributed to the treatment variable (teaching methodology) with practical significance of 61.98%. The researchers believe that these significant differences in the students' proficiency in the test as a whole could be mainly ascribed to the utilization of the PER program through which various pedagogical issues were consciously and purposefully addressed. Here are some characteristics of those issues: 1- The easiness and the feasibility of these applications inside the classroom, i.e., the program was presented in an easy and interesting way and did not require much efforts and advanced capabilities. 2- Including varied texts with varied levels. 3- The use of various follow-up activities whose main purpose was to show the students the extent of incorporating the language skills in a cyclical integrative manner. 4- The use of alternative assessment tools particularly the portfolio whose main purpose was to encourage and foster the students' intrinsic motivation. 5- The direct feedback which is believed that it had an

obvious impact on the students of different proficiency levels. 6- The relativeness of the ER texts to students' formal curriculum.

In support of this discussion, the questionnaire's as well as the interview's findings revealed that the students' opinions concerning the effectiveness of the content and the procedures in PER program were positive. Looking at the results of the items related to the content and procedures' domain, one can clearly notice, especially by the students' responses, that the program included interesting and encouraging texts and follow-up activities that played a crucial role in developing the students' entire proficiency in English. When asked to respond to the items number 24,25,26,27,28,29,and 30 which aimed to uncover the program's procedural effects, the PER students responded by asserting that the program with the included material and the follow-up activities as well as the assessment tools helped them to a high extent in developing their proficiency in English. The following are examples of the PER interviewees' responses showing how they were highly satisfied with the procedures of the program:

*"In my opinion, the pre and post reading records was [were] very nice because they helped me so much to learn and follow up my work".*

*"The follow up activities are very necessary, for example, if there were no post reading record, I could just read the story without getting much benefit. In addition, the use of such activities is very interesting and helpful simultaneously because we can realize what we read and whether our reading was correct or wrong".*

With regard to those factors that are believed to be behind the improvement of the PER students' proficiency in almost all skills, here are some examples of those factors: **First**, designing a motivation/proficiency-oriented program by engaging students in material selection, follow up activities and the assessment tools. In line with this, Aydin and Gönen (2012) who, in a study that examined the sources of foreign language reading anxiety, found that giving students responsibility and involving them in decision making processes enhance their motivation, confidence, and analytical skills while reading in a foreign language. This also implies creating a healthy, systematic, and safe classroom environment to ensure learning growth and progress. Such an environment could be found in the PER program where students were not required to read for getting high grades, or even avoiding being punished by their teacher. Rather, this program provided students with ample opportunities to read for pleasure and enjoyment that enhanced their intrinsic motivation. **Second**, employing one of the innovative alternative assessment tools such as portfolios and blogs is considered very beneficial. This claim agrees with Hui-jo (2011) who proposed an innovative approach of teaching and learning English language by combining ER with writing blogs aiming at reducing students' anxiety and

promoting their performance in L2 reading and writing. Taking the significant role of this factor into consideration, a portfolio was designed to enable the participants of the PER group keep their accumulative work, revise their teachers' constructive feedback concerning their continuous work throughout the program's execution. **Third**, providing the students of the experimental group with consistent feedback might also have played a role in developing their proficiency. In light of the results of the questionnaire and the interview, it can be clearly noticed that a high percentage of students in the PER program responded positively to the items of the questionnaire that asked them about their opinions concerning the effectiveness of getting feedback in developing their proficiency in English. In support of this result, all the interviewees of the PER group responded favorably to the following question **"Do you think that getting feedback on what you read, write, and speak is necessary? Please, elaborate your answer"**

Most of the students were, in fact, aware of the highly significance of getting feedback. Some students asserted that *"Feedback is very important for us in order to know whether we are right or not and to learn from our mistakes. It is like water for fish"*. Other students said: *"Of course, it is very important because when I read a text and write my reflection about that text, I think my writing is pure and there are no errors but getting feedback makes me know the errors which I fallen in [have committed]. Therefore, I think it is very important in our all learning"*. This point of view has been supported by another student as follows: *"Yes, it is important because when I reflect on a text, I don't know if it [is] right or wrong but when my teacher sees [checks] it, he tells me back what is right and wrong and how to make it better. In fact, I benefited a lot from the feedback in this program because we were always required to go back to our portfolio[s] and check our teacher's comments on our work and discuss them in the classroom."*

**Fourth**, the strong bond that links the language skills together. Based on this advocacy, a set of follow-up activities were designed to strengthen this bond as well as to develop the EFL learners' overall proficiency in English. Therefore, the program included several forms of post-reading activities, such as post-reading records on which the students were required to reflect on some questions related to the texts they read. As a response to the questionnaire items especially on those that were related to the follow-up activities, a high percent of the PER students showed their agreement with the effectiveness of the use of follow-up activities in developing their language proficiency in general and writing in particular. In addition, this result was supported by the findings of the interview through which all students expressed their inclination toward using such activities. One student stated: *"In fact, the use of follow activities is very important and these activities are the source of our learning."* Another student expressed her

opinion concerning the importance of these follow-up activities by saying *"I think they are very important and useful because they give us the freedom of choice to express our points and thoughts with no limits"*. **Fifth**, text reporting. In light of the results of the questionnaire and the interview, it can be clearly noticed that a high percentage of students in the PER program responded favorably to the items of the questionnaire that asked them about their opinions concerning the effectiveness of text reporting in developing their speaking proficiency in English. In response to the item number 10 regarding whether PER improves proficiency in speaking, 84.2 agreed while 15.8 were undecided. Such a result means that there was a strong and an evident agreement in the opinions expressed by students towards the effectiveness of the PER program in developing English speaking proficiency. In support of this result, all the interviewees of the PER program responded positively to the following question giving various reasons to their development in speaking **"Has your speaking proficiency improved due to this ER program? If so, elaborate how?"** The following statements are some of the students' responses through which the majority of the students focus on the importance of learning new vocabulary as well as text reporting: *"Now, I have a lot of new vocabulary that [is] makes my speaking better"*. *"Because as I said, the more vocabulary you get, the better you are. Sometimes, while you are speaking you miss a word so the alternatives should be there"*. Another student supported this point by stating that *"I was not able to make this interview before attending this program even I had a lot of vocabulary ... because my teachers didn't focus on speaking just grammar"*.

**Sixth**, the soul of competitiveness that did really exist among the students and worked on encouraging them to look for the knowledge in all means. **Seventh**, practicing various drama texts inside the classroom. This kind of activities was purposefully selected due to the fact that drama had positive effect on the development of language skills. **Eighth**, the use of free-chosen ER material, i.e., the ER material was carefully tailored to meet the students' preferences, levels, and interests. **Ninth**, the repetitive exposure to the target language. It is proven in research that learners require several times of exposure to the target words (Coady, 1997) in order to be part of their mental dictionaries. Thus, providing the participants of the PER program with varied informational and literary texts and asking them to reflect and report to the class on what they have read goes hand in hand with Coady's premise. **Tenth**, unlike the widespread methodology that is followed in most if not all EFL/ESL classrooms in teaching reading by focusing on the traditional reading instruction, i.e., introducing short passages and analyzing them in details, ER which is considered a meaning-based or a top-down oriented approach focuses on engaging learners in reading a lot of enjoyable

texts at a fairly easy level. **Eleventh**, logically speaking, reading a vast amount of comprehensible texts, a number of changes are expected to take place in students' performance: students become more capable to visually and mentally process the target material in a smoother and more natural way, the capacity of vocabulary and grammar basis of English are supposed to be much better established by being processed in the learners' minds, the sense of autonomy and self confidence as well as a feeling of satisfaction are promoted. In support of such a discussion, here are some of the interviewees' responses on the following question "**Has your reading comprehension developed? How?**": *"In the first text I read, I stopped on every word I didn't know its meaning but after reading more and more texts, I realized that the general meaning or the idea could be reached [extracted] easily with no need to know the meaning of every word. Even the difficult words I encountered while reading, I could guess their meaning by connecting the same word with the previous word and post word in the same line and sometimes I could guess the meaning from the title of the text"*. Other students focused on vocabulary and frequent reading in developing comprehension in the following words: *"when you learn new vocabulary, they will settle in your brain so next time when you read, write, there will be new vocabulary to be used. In addition, when we read a text, and answer some questions our comprehension will be naturally developed. Therefore, I believe that reading regularly leads ultimately to developed skills"*. **Twelfth**, the unity of the language skills, i.e., when we communicate, one skill often is not performed without any other. Based on this proposition, the students of the PER program were required to follow a cyclical procedures through which they could practice reading various informational and literary texts, reflecting directly on the texts they read, reporting to their colleagues what they have understood from the texts, listening to each other while presenting their text reportings.

With regard to grammar, the results of the statistical analysis revealed that there was no significant difference at  $\alpha=0.05$  between the students' scores in the two groups. This means that the control group's scores in the grammar post-test were similar to their counterparts of the experimental group. In fact, getting such a result was expected due to the widespread methodology that is followed by the EFL teachers in Jordanian schools. That is, in the Jordanian EFL classroom, teaching is mostly focused on a close study of the language itself. A typical procedure would be for the teacher to begin by asking students to open their textbooks on a certain page. Then, the teacher would read the reading passage out, asking the students to look up the meaning of the new vocabulary in the text. After that, he/ she would explain any grammatical points, most probably with some use of Arabic.

The results of this study is in congruence with that of Gorsuch (2011) who found that a mixed input and output oriented approach was very effective in improving the second learners fluency particularly in their presentations. It is also in agreement with those results attained by Shahrouri (2000) who concluded that there was a significant difference in students' post achievements in writing composition in favor of the experimental group that was exposed to free reading and given feedback all along the study execution. Regarding the students' vocabulary proficiency, several studies affirmed the positive effectiveness of ER on students' vocabulary growth. For example, Juan and Cheng (2008), who in a study that explored the possibility of using ER as a remedial program to improve the learning performance of EFL elementary school underachievers in Taiwan, found that all remedial students increased their vocabulary knowledge and became more engaged in English learning at school. Other studies (e.g., Al Ananzeh, 2010; Burrows, 2012; Elley & Mangubhai, 1981; Nakanishi, 2011; Rezaee & Nourzadeh, 2011) supported the results of the current research by proving the positive impact of the PER in developing the EFL learners' reading comprehension.

### **Conclusion**

This study concludes with the focus on ER as an integrative pedagogical methodology whose main purpose lies in attracting the EFL learners' attention to the importance of reading varied ER genres for the sake of pleasure and proficiency development. Besides, it can be concluded from the findings of this study that EFL learners' proficiency can be improved using various follow-up activities and alternative assessment tools such as logs and portfolios as a means for language skills integration. More importantly, it was found, especially after executing this research that dealing with self-selected ER material opens the door for the EFL teachers and the students to share the responsibility of learning and teaching. For example, engaging students in decision making by allowing them to select their favourite topics and the way they like to be assessed by sounds very effective and appealing since it draws their attention and upgrades their self-esteem, and self-ruling.

### **Recommendation**

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers recommend that since the English Language National Team admits the importance of ER for developing learners' English proficiency and considers it one of the guidelines that are supposed to be taken seriously into account, why do not they adhere to the General Guidelines when they set up a new curriculum or even evaluate the current ones? Based on these observations, the researchers recommend the stakeholders, EFL textbook designers, and curricula planners in the Ministry of Education to infuse ER as a practice in formal EFL

classrooms settings. More importantly, for the sake of developing the EFL learners' proficiency as a whole in English, there should be a serious orientation from the Jordanian Ministry of Education towards the four language skills integration. Such an attitude requires integration not only in learning and teaching but also in testing in order to change the stereotype that has nested in EFL learners' and teachers' minds.

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