

## **The Impact of Posing (Lead in) Pre-reading Questions on Reading Engagement of Iranian EFL Learners: Focusing on Extensive Reading**

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### **Abstract**

The significance and effectiveness of pre-reading activities in the contexts of both ESL and EFL has been acknowledged by many researchers. If students lack the required background knowledge, a teacher must activate students' background knowledge or offer background information prior to reading a text. The present study aimed at investigating the role of pre-reading questions plus extensive reading in affecting the reading engagement of Iranian EFL learners. Participants of the study included two groups of 30 EFL learners with similar language proficiency. Reading engagement was measured using Reading Engagement Index developed by Wigfield and Guthrie (2004). Language learners were pretested on reading engagement and it was found that the two groups of the study were not significantly different in terms of reading engagement. Afterwards, one group received extensive reading plus pre-reading questions and another group received just extensive reading. The two groups' reading engagement was measured after treatment to explore the effect of treatment on reading engagement of language learners. The results of paired samples and independent samples t-test indicated that pre-reading plus extensive reading was more successful in enhancing reading engagement of language learners compared to extensive reading.

**Keywords:** L2 reading, reading engagement, extensive reading, pre-reading activities

### **Introduction**

Undoubtedly, reading comprehension is considered as one of essential aspects in the context of language learning. Accordingly, the scholars note that the teachers can make use of various techniques to teach reading comprehension for purposes of equipping L2 learners with better language skills. (e.g., Cho, S& Rhodes, 2010; Conrad, & Donaldson, 2004; Dreyer, & Nel, 2003). Being skilled good at understanding the L2 texts can be conducive to more effective language learning since L2 learners will have an opportunity to get exposed to more inputs thanks to reading and comprehending the texts in L2.

Furthermore, as pointed by Jacobs, DuFon, and Hong (1994), the students would find language learning more enjoyable through a having effective reading comprehension skill. In particular, those students studying at university can keep themselves updated via reading the daily press and news. Grabe (1998) attaches importance to the interaction in the reading process, asserting that the capability to read entails the reader's ability to retrieve information from a text and to integrate it with information already acquired by the reader. Such information interaction is viewed as a common way to explain reading comprehension. There are a variety of kinds of reading, one of which is extensive reading.

Extensive reading involves one's engagement in reading simple materials that are made up of one to two new words in each page. Such a reading is aimed at general understanding. Through extensive reading, the people themselves choose their own materials of interest, stopping reading when they find the materials uninteresting. There is no test on extensive reading given that the

reader's personal responses to reading is the main goal. In fact, extensive reading shares many properties with reading in the native language since are driven by the same goal, that is, pleasure. On the contrary, intensive reading has to do with reading instruction as both of them share one concern, namely, extracting the main idea of a passage as well as the identification of the gist etc. In contrast, in extensive reading the individuals generally read a large volume of text in order to figure out the overall message of the text rather than the isolated meaning of individual words or sentences.

Considering the important role of extensive reading, a strand of research has been conducted on the potential impact extensive reading may have on language skills and components (e.g. vocabulary development, listening, and reading). Based on the outcomes of these investigations, Schmitt (2000) notes that one of the most persuasive reasons for upholding extensive reading is the consensus among many teachers that intensive reading per se would not result in the production of fluent readers. Similarly, Pazhakh et al (2010) maintains that multiple experimental and quasi-experimental investigations have indicated the efficacy of extensive reading, providing evidence that lends support to the integration of extensive reading in L2 classrooms. In particular, such reading increases motivation and improves attitude. Literature reveals how such a kind of reading students' changed attitude toward reading in English and how they became eager readers.

A study conducted by Nishino (2007) concluded that learners' attitudes toward books improves due to engagement in extensive reading which raises their literacy level in English. In the same veins, Bell (2001) asserts that extensive reading leads to an improved reading speed and general L2 proficiency. The majority of studies conducted on reading have dealt with the effective reading strategies that enhance students' comprehension. According to Guthrie (1996), most studies have investigated a single cognitive strategy, avoiding focusing on multiple strategies. In addition, very few investigations have studied the issues relating to reading engagement. Guthrie claims that engaged reading has to do with the motivational and cognitive characteristics' of the reader who is driven by intrinsic motivation. This allows him/her to construct knowledge, and to apply cognitive strategies. This also enables him/her to take part in social interactions to learn from context.

According to Guthrie, (1996), these engagement processes can be seen in the e forms of students' cognitive endeavors, seriousness, and self-direction in their reading. Pre-reading questions is a technique which is widely used by instructors and is incorporated in text books while teaching reading materials. In their study, Rueda, MacGillivray, and Monzo, (2001) investigated the contribution sociocultural factors make to reading engagement among non-English children. Their study involved an analysis of the tasks, asking the participants to fill e a survey from (Turner & Paris, 1995) to study the impact of socio-cultural factors on reading engagement. The results revealed that L2 learners should have broader knowledge of reading engagement including a socio-cultural dimension as well.

In their work, Guthrie and Kathleen (2001) south to clarify the Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction. To this end, they carried out an investigation in which a researcher and a teacher participated. This study yielded multiple useful insights on the theory. Given that no control group took part in Guthrie' study, they are believed to entail incorporating CORI in a study where there

were control groups. The findings showed that many insights can be derived from this study as well as 7 principles in creating a classroom context that improve reading engagement.

Schraw, Flowerday and Lehman (2001) elaborate on how classrooms can make contribution to the creation of an interesting classroom. The teachers can improve the learners' motivation through providing them with multiple meaningful choices out of which they can select ones that enhance interest. It gives the learners the previous knowledge required to thoroughly understand a topic. A detailed overview of the studies regarding some of the motivational impact on reading engagement is provided by the author.

In a study, Rueda, MacGillivray, and Monzo, (2001) studied the impact of tasks (open-ended vs. closed) as well as eco-cultural on students' reading motivation. The results indicated that closed reading tasks were more appealing to the participants compared to open tasks. Furthermore, the findings showed a correlation between eco-cultural factors and participants' perceptions of themselves as readers, with a positive relationship leading to students' positive perception of reading. The readers' positive perceptions of themselves result in more active engagement in obtaining English and Spanish literacy. Similarly, participants who focused on reading came from families that were interested in literacy activities. The final conclusion was that properties of the social context are concerned with reading engagement in a complex manner. The authors proposed a broader view of reading engagement, incorporating of the sociocultural factors.

Given the importance of reading comprehension in general and the contributions of extensive reading in the reading comprehension process in particular, and the concept of engagement in this process as well as the popularity of pre-reading questions concerning reading comprehension, the present study aimed at exploring the effect of using pre-reading questions on the reading engagement of Iranian EFL learners. To this aim, the following research question was formulated:

**Q:** Does Pre – Reading questions in extensive reading have any significant impact on the reading engagement of Iranian EFL learners.

### **Participants**

The participants of the study included about 60 female EFL learners. They were chosen from intermediate level students. The initial participants of the study consisted of 85 learners. These participants were selected using convenient sampling through consulting the list of enrolled students for intermediate level in one of private language institutes in Tehran. They were within the age range of 18 to 30 years old. These participants were given a Preliminary English Test (PET), the results of which were used to choose a homogenized sample of learners whose scores lay between +/- on standard deviation from the mean.

### **Instruments**

In total four instruments were used in this study. One was the Reading Engagement Index developed by Wigfield and Guthrie (2004), another one was ACTIVE Reading Skills by Anderson and the last one was a story book called Kidnap written by Scott. In addition one language proficiency test was also used to homogenize participants in terms of language proficiency.

### ***PET***

A proficiency PET was administered to make sure that learners were homogenous with respect to their language proficiency. Preliminary English Test (PET), the Cambridge Preliminary English Test, or PET for short, is a qualification in English as a Foreign Language awarded by Cambridge ESOL. The test has these sections:

A-Reading Writing are taken together - 90 minutes

B-Listening - 30 minutes

Speaking - an interview, 10 minutes

After the administration of the test, the participants whose scores fell between the range of one standard deviation above and below the mean were chosen for the purposes of the study. That is, only the participants whose score fell under the normal curve were selected.

### ***Reading Engagement Index***

The Reading Engagement Index or briefly called REI is a scale developed by Wigfield and Guthrie at the University of Maryland in 2004 to measure how much students are engaged in reading. REI has 8 items reflecting the behavioral, motivational, and cognitive characteristics of engaged reading (Wigfield& Guthrie, 2004). Items need to be completed by teachers on each student in their class. Wigfield (2008) reported that REI takes about 20 minutes to rate all students in the class. Items of the index are scored on a scale of 1=not true to 5=very true. Therefore, the total score for a student ranges from 8 to 40. Wigfield et al. (2008) used internal consistency measure to estimate the reliability of RIE and it was found to be at the level of 0.92 which is a high index of reliability (Brown, 2007). It is noteworthy that the reading engagement index, based on the guidelines given in (Wigfield& Guthrie, 2004, 2008) should be filled out by the teachers and is not a tool which can lend itself to self-assessment.

### ***Dominoes Starter Kidnap***

Dominoes is a full-color, interactive readers series that offers students a fun reading experience. Kidnap is a starter level book in this series which was written by Scott and published by oxford university press in 2005. The book is a story book which is fully illustrated. This book was served as the selected book to be read by students as extensive reading material.

### ***ACTIVE Reading Skills (book 3)***

The textbook ACTIVE Reading Skills (book 1) was employed in this study to measure the engagement level of students. Book 1 is the introductory level of a four book series designed especially for adult ESL/EFL students. It has been written by Neil J Anderson which has 12 units each containing two chapters and each chapter has a reading passage which is in line with the topic of the unit. As claimed by author the textbook has the main purpose of helping learners activate prior knowledge, cultivate vocabulary comprehension, and develop reading fluency. Active

reading skills were used in this study during the time when the reading engagement index was being filled out by the teacher. Since the study sought to probe the effect of pre-reading questions on the reading engagement of the participants through *extensive* reading, it was not psychometrically appropriate to use the same extensive reading material used for treatment out of class for measurement and assessment purposes inside the classroom due to the threats it might exert on the validity and reliability of the scores gained. Extensive reading by definition is an activity of reading which takes place for pleasure outside of the class and cannot simply be employed in in-class contexts.

### **Data collection**

Data which reflect students' reading engagement scores were collected by teacher as students were involved in a set reading task. Teacher observed students while they were busy reading selected passages of ACTIVE Skills for Reading. Through employing Reading Engagement Index (REI), each student was rated on each item of REI with a range of score between 1=not true to 5=very true. Since there were 8 items in REI, each student had a score ranging from 8 to 40.

### **Procedure**

Initially, participants of the study were selected through convenient sampling and consulting the enrolment list of intermediate students. To this end, a foreign language institute was contacted and an appointment was made to visit the manager of the institute. Next, in a session, the manager of the institute was briefed about the researchers' intention to do a research on the language learners of the institute. All the purposes of the research were clearly outlined and the manager was assured about the confidentiality of all names and name of institute. After obtaining the manager's cooperation, researcher asked the institute to provide a list of pre-intermediate language learners. Totally about 85 female students were selected and asked to take the PET (Preliminary English Test). Based on PET scores, 60 students whose scores fell within the range mean score $\pm$ 1 SD were selected for the current study. In other words, only those students whose scores were close to mean score of PET or were under normal curve were selected to the study. Afterward, they were divided randomly into two groups of experimental and control. An independent samples t test was run between the two groups to further make sure that the two groups are not significantly different from each other in terms of language proficiency.

In the first session, students in experimental and control groups were introduced to the Kidnap and were told that the book had to be read in their free time. Moreover, for the first two sessions and last two sessions of the course students read selected passages of ACTIVE Reading Skills (book 1) and did the reading comprehension questions accompanying the passages. To elicit naturel reading behaviors of the students they were not told that they were participating in a research project. During these four sessions – the initial two and the last two sessions, the teacher observed students' reading behaviors and scored their reading engagement through using Reading Engagement Index in both groups.

The treatment in the experimental group was as follows: At the end of each class hour, the students were given a list of pre-reading questions to answer related to part of Kidnap they were supposed to read for the following session. Students were allowed to share their answers with their

classmates. After that students were asked to read a selected part of kidnap at home. As for the control group students were just asked to read the same selected part of Kidnap as experiment group. However, there were no pre-reading questions for the control group. Next session students' comprehension of the selected part of kidnap were checked in both groups through post-reading comprehension questions. This was continued for about 10 sessions for both groups. As mentioned, the only difference is that there were no pre-reading questions for the control group. Finally, during the last two sessions the learners' engagement with reading was assessed based on Reading Engagement Index again while they were busy with the reading tasks from ACTIVE Reading Skills (book 1). Ultimately, students' scores in reading engagement at the beginning and end of the course were compared both within and across groups to detect possible changes in their reading engagement levels.

## Results

In the following sections the results of the statistical analyses carried out to investigate the research questions will be presented.

### Participants' Selection Process

As stated in the method section, initially a sample of 60 students out of 85 were selected based on their closeness of their scores to the central point of PET score distribution. Speaking statistically, scores were presented in the form of normal distribution and the 60 students whose scores were within mean score $\pm$ 1SD were selected as the legitimate participants of the study. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the 85 language learners and Figure 1 shows the histogram with normal curve of the sample.

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics of Initial Pool of 90 Students on KET Scores*

N		Std.		Std. Error of		Std. Error of		Minimum	Maximum
Valid	Missing	Mean	Deviation	Skewness	Skewness	Kurtosis	Kurtosis		
85	0	57.7765	8.36571	-.448	.261	.773	.517	28.00	74.00

According to the descriptive statistics, 85 students had a mean score of 57.77 (SD=8.36) with minimum score of 28 and maximum score of 74. From these 85 students 60 of them whose scores were between the +1 and -1 standard deviation were chosen as the legitimate participants of the study. Table 2 shows the characteristics of the 60 selected participants.

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics of Actual Participants of the Study on PET Scores*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
PET homogenized	60	48.00	66.00	57.1833	4.60468
Valid N (listwise)	60				

As seen in the Table 2 mean score of the 60 students is 57.18 (SD=4.60) with maximum score of 66 and minimum of 48. Mean score of 60 students did not change noticeably from that of 85 students but the standard deviation was almost reduced to half which is an indication of less dispersed scores.

### Normal Distribution of Data

The first step before doing any statistical analysis was to check the normality of the data based on which parametric or non-parametric statistics be chosen. Since there was a set of PET scores, a set of reading engagement pretest scores, and a set of reading engagement posttest scores for two groups, then there were six sets of data available to check for normal distribution of data. Table 3 shows the results of Kolmogorov Smirnov test of normality.

Table 3

*Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test of normality on the Scores of Reading Engagement Pretest, Reading Engagement Posttest, and PET*

	Groups	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>		
		Statistic	df	Sig.
PET homogenized	Pre-reading	.116	30	.200*
	No pre-reading	.090	30	.200*
Reading Engagement Pretest	Pre-reading	.107	30	.200*
	No pre-reading	.098	30	.200*
Reading Engagement Posttest	Pre-reading	.136	30	.168
	No pre-reading	.111	30	.200*

According to Table 3, the significant levels for PET scores, reading engagement pretest scores, and reading engagement posttest scores for the two groups of study are greater than the significant value of 0.05. Therefore, it was demonstrated that all data sets are normally distributed. Due to establishment of normality assumption, parametric tests was chosen to be used for subsequent data analysis.

### Reliability of Reading Engagement Index

The reliability of the reading engagement index was estimated before starting the study on a pilot sample of 20 language learners. To this end, internal consistency measure of Cronbach's Alpha was used to obtain the reliability index of reading engagement index. Table 4 shows the Cronbach's Alpha and the descriptive statistics of the pilot sample.

Table 4

*Results of Cronbach's Alpha and Descriptive Statistics of Pilot Sample*

	N	Alpha	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pilot	20	.811	12.00	31.00	23.2000	4.93750
Valid N (listwise)	20					

The mean score of the pilot sample was found 23.90 (SD=4.57) and Alpha value was found 0.81 which was acceptable index of reliability.

**Homogeneity of participants in terms of Language Proficiency**

In order to make sure that the two groups of the study are homogenized in terms of language proficiency their PET scores were compared and analyzed. Descriptive statistics of PET scores in the two groups of the study are found in Table 5.

Table 5  
*Descriptive Statistics of PET*

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
PET homogenized	Pre-reading	30	57.0333	4.61992	.84348
	No pre-reading	30	57.3333	4.66338	.85141

As seen in Table 5, the group with extensive reading plus pre-reading activities had a mean score of 57.03 (SD=4.61) and groups with extensive reading without pre-reading activities had a mean score of 57.33 (SD=4.66). Independent samples t-test was run on the PET scores to make sure about the homogeneity of the two groups of the study in terms of language proficiency. Result of independent samples t-test between is found in Table 6.

Table 6  
*Result of Independent Samples t-test on PET Scores*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
PET homogenized	Equal variances assumed	.000	.985	-.250	58	.803	-.30000	1.19848
	Equal variances not assumed			-.250	57.995	.803	-.30000	1.19848

Since the two groups have equal variances (F=0.00, P=0.98) on PET scores, t value was found 0.25, P>0.05. Accordingly, the two groups were not significantly different from each other in terms of language proficiency scores or were homogenized on language proficiency in other words.



### Homogeneity of participants in terms of Reading Engagement

In order to make sure that the two groups of the study are homogenized in terms of reading engagement their reading engagement scores before receiving treatment were compared and analyzed. Descriptive statistics of reading engagement scores in the two groups of the study are found in Table 7.

Table 7

*Descriptive Statistics of Reading Engagement*

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Reading Engagement Pretest	Pre-reading	30	20.8333	4.28376	.78210
	No pre-reading	30	21.7000	4.30837	.78660

As seen in Table 7, the group with extensive reading plus pre-reading activities had a mean score of 20.83 (SD=4.28) and groups with extensive reading without pre-reading activities had a mean score of 21.70 (SD=4.30). Independent samples t-test was run on the reading engagement scores to make sure about the homogeneity of the two groups of the study in terms of reading engagement. Result of independent samples t-test between is found in Table 8.

Table 8

*Result of Independent Samples t-test on Reading Engagement Scores*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Reading Engagement Pretest	Equal variances assumed	.001	.969	-.781	58	.438	-.86667	1.10924
	Equal variances not assumed			-.781	57.998	.438	-.86667	1.10924

Since the two groups had equal variances (F=0.001, P=0.96) on reading engagement scores, t value was found 0.78, P>0.05. Accordingly, the two groups were not significantly different from each other in terms of reading engagement scores or were homogenized on reading engagement in other words.

### Investigating the Research Question

To answer the research question of the study, first students' enhancement in reading engagement after receiving pre-reading plus extensive reading was checked using paired samples t-test and second, their reading engagement scores were compared with those just practicing extensive reading using independent samples t-test.

Accordingly first, reading engagement of the group that received extensive reading plus pre-reading activities was compared before and after the treatment by employing statistical test of paired samples t-test. Result of paired samples t-test is found in Table 9.

Table 9

*Result of Paired Samples t-test for Reading Extensive Group plus pre-reading*

		Paired Differences			t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean			
Pair 1	Reading Engagement Pretest - Reading Engagement Posttest	-5.10000	.80301	.14661	-34.786	29	.000

Table 9 clearly shows that the significant value of t test is less than the confidence interval of 0.05 which means that treatment has significantly affected reading engagement of students. In the next step, reading engagement of the two groups of the study was measured and compared after treatment. Descriptive statistics of the two groups of the study after receiving treatment are found in Table 10.

Table 10

*Descriptive Statistics of the two Groups of the Study after the Treatment*

		Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Reading Engagement Posttest		Pre-reading	30	25.9333	4.11836	.75191
		No pre-reading	30	23.0667	4.01663	.73333

The comparison of reading engagement scores between the groups indicated that the group with pre-reading activities had higher reading engagement mean score. In other words, the group with pre-reading activities had a mean score of 25.93 (SD=4.11) and the group with no pre-reading activities had a mean score of 23.06 (SD=4.01). Independent samples t-test was run on the reading engagement scores of the two groups to statistically test the significance of the difference in mean scores. Results of independent samples to test between the two groups of the study are found in Table 11.

Table 11

*Results of Independent Samples t-test between the two Groups of the Study on Reading Engagement Scores after Treatment*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Reading Engagement Posttest	Equal variances assumed	.000	.988	2.729	58	.008	2.86667	1.05031
	Equal variances not assumed			2.729	57.964	.008	2.86667	1.05031

Based on the output of the Leven’s test the two groups had equal variances (F=0.00, P=0.98). Accordingly t value was considered 2.72 with significant value of  $P \leq 0.05$ . This finding led to the rejection of null hypothesis and accordingly, it was concluded that extensive reading plus pre-reading has better effect on reading engagement of Iranian EFL learners.

### Discussion

The present study intended to investigate the role of pre-reading activities and extensive reading in affecting the reading engagement of Iranian EFL learners. Totally 60 EFL learners participated in the study who were divided into two groups of extensive reading plus pre-reading activities groups and just extensive reading group. The participants of the study took language proficiency test and were observed for reading engagement to establish that the two groups are homogenized in terms of language proficiency and reading engagement. When the instructional period was over, the group with extensive reading plus pre-reading activities had significantly better performance than the group without pre-reading activities in terms of reading engagement.

Concerning the positive impact of extensive reading on learners' reading engagement, the results of this study is consistent with the studies conducted by Lao and Krashen (2000) and Fujita and Noro (2009). Fujita and Noro (2009) studied the impact of 10-minute extensive reading on EFL high school learners’ reading motivation. The authors came to conclusion that extensive reading can improve the language learners' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Concerning pre-reading activities which seek to set in the motion the background knowledge prior to starting reading both theory and empirical studies lends support to the fact that the activation of the background knowledge make contribution to L2 learners’ comprehension. For example, according to the schema theory, the reader recreates the meaning of the text on the basis of the interaction between the learners' background knowledge and the printed text (Carell & Eisterhold, 1983).

Based on this theory, reading is considered an interactive process between the reader' background knowledge and what the writer writes (Nunan, 1991). Such a positive effect on

comprehension can be viewed as a force driving the reader to keep on reading and becoming more engaged with reading. According to the expectancy value theory of motivation (Brophy, 1999; Eccles & Wigfield, 1995), more expectation for achievement and success result in more motivation and engagement. Consequently, it follows that activating the background knowledge in the present study is likely to lead to more comprehension as well as more expectation of success.

Moreover, researchers have elaborated on the contribution previous and real life knowledge activation as a tool to improve reading engagement (Guthrie & Knowles, 2001; Guthrie & Cox, 2001; Cho et al., 2010). For example, Guthrie and Knowles (2001) enumerates the following as some dimensions contributing to reading motivation.

- conceptual themes
- real-world interactions
- help with self-direction
- use of interesting texts
- cognitive strategy direction
- social collaboration
- assisting students' self-expression are some dimensions

One more explanation for the improvement of participants' reading engagement is the characteristics of selected book for extensive reading. In this study, Kidnap was selected which is a thoroughly illustrated story book. According to the investigation carried out by Ivey & Broaddus, (2001), L2 learners read those materials that are interesting to them (i.e. short stories, adventure books, fictions, and horror stories). Moreover, they are interested in reading those books about which they have previous knowledge. Based on the students' opinions, it is important to incorporate free reading time in class as it allows the L2 learners to comprehend the text.

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