

Embracing technology in EFL pre-university classrooms: A qualitative study on EFL learners' perceptions of intensive and extensive reading approaches

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ABSTRACT: This study attempts to explore the perceptions of Pakistani pre-university EFL learners about the intensive reading (IR) and extensive reading (ER) approaches and the use of technology in these two approaches. This is a qualitative study using a purposive sampling technique. The participants were 10 pre-university undergraduate students enrolled in the foundation program of a public sector university in Pakistan. Researchers used semi-structured interviews and reflective diaries as data collection tools. Thematic analysis and personal interpretation techniques were used to analyze the results. The results showed that after participating in the reading classes, the students had positive perceptions of the IR and ER approaches and found them useful and interesting. The results also showed that the learners felt that their language skills improved significantly after participating in the IR and ER-related activities. Students also found these reading approaches to be complementary to each other. The results also indicated that teachers' use of intensive reading and extensive reading approaches could make learners skilled and autonomous readers. Ultimately, their reading problems could be solved with these approaches. Moreover, the learners also perceived the use of technology in these two reading approaches as of great benefit to them. The researchers recommend incorporating IR and ER activities into the EFL classroom using digital resources to maximize EFL learners' reading abilities and other language skills.

KEYWORDS: technology; online resources; extensive reading; intensive reading; perceptions; English as a foreign language

1. Introduction

According to Grabe and Stoller (2019), reading is one of the most important language skills. Phonekeo and Macalister (2021) argue that reading is beneficial for learning a foreign language. According to Oranpattanahai (2023), reading in an EFL classroom is considered an important skill for improving students' language skills. Exposure to a variety of reading materials can improve their reading habits and reading skills (Diets and Sengkey, 2023; Pineau, 2023). Similarly, reading also contributes to

students' academic performance and a variety of academic skills (Balan et al., 2019). Therefore, promoting reading skills and habits is crucial for EFL learners (Al-Mahrooqi and Denman, 2018). In this regard, teachers should engage students in abundant reading to derive maximum benefits (Okwako, 2023).

In Pakistani classrooms, English is taught to students from primary school through university (Channa et al., 2021). Moreover, English is the medium of instruction up to university education (Mukhtar et al., 2021). The prescribed books of the various majors are in English, so reading plays a major role in the academic life of a Pakistani student (Sadia et al., 2021). However, exposure to reading in Pakistani classrooms is very low as the IR approach is predominantly used in the classrooms while the ER approach is not encouraged by the teachers (Ali et al., 2022). Hence, the reading skills and reading habits of Pakistani students are very poor (Amin and Bakhsh, 2021). To develop reading proficiency and habits, learners need to be provided with an input-rich environment (Nita et al., 2022). Technology can help teachers provide that environment because, in today's era, students are more prone to use mobile phones and other digital resources in their lives. So, to engage students in reading, the use of technology is of immense importance and motivation for the students to continue reading (Zhou and Day, 2021).

The literature reports that the reading ability of EFL learners is not satisfactory (Alshammari, 2022). In EFL classrooms, teachers engage students using the grammar-translation method (Dildora and Narimanova, 2023). This approach has not produced competent language users and independent readers of English (Samikova, 2022). Furthermore, the teachers also do not provide online digital resources to their students for reading, even though, students spend most of their time using mobile phones and other social media tools. Therefore, if teachers want students to be motivated and independent readers, they need to bring technology into their teaching practices and change their traditional methods to more effective methods (Andres, 2020). Two approaches to reading are commonly used in the classroom. Nation and Waring (2020) highlight that IR and ER are two key elements of reading instruction. Both approaches differ in theoretical perspectives and pedagogical applications. Consequently, these methods have various effects on students' language and reading development and are equally vital for developing reading skills (Renandya, 2016). However, according to Robb (2022), teachers are familiar with the IR approach and always make enough time for IR-related activities in the classroom, and ER is not part of the language learning curriculum (Renandya and Hidayati, 2021). The same is the practice in Pakistani EFL classrooms (Fakazali, 2021). According to the existing literature, some studies have found the effectiveness of IR and ER approaches separately in the EFL context. However, the literature in the Pakistani context still lacks empirical studies on the integrated use of IR and ER approaches. Moreover, studies about the integration of technology in the domain of IR and ER approaches are also very few (Ermerawati, 2019; Janah et al., 2022; Fatimah et al., 2022; etc.).

This study is significant because it will provide valuable insights into learners' individual experiences of using IR and ER approaches using digital resources. These perspectives can help students understand their learning and help policymakers design curricula accordingly. The study is also significant for teachers to adapt their teaching methods to the needs of their students. Overall, the study will provide potential benefits to Pakistani students in improving their reading habits, reading skills, academic performance, and overall language outcomes.

The present study is therefore an attempt to contribute to the existing literature on teaching reading in the EFL context using the integrated IR and ER approach. In addition, this study also contributes to the literature on IR and ER approaches using technology in EFL classrooms. Besides, there are hardly any qualitative studies on this field of study in the literature. Therefore, this study fills this gap by conducting a purely qualitative study to explore EFL learners' perceptions about the use of IR and ER

approaches in EFL classrooms and how learners perceive the use of technology in the IR and ER approaches.

2. Literature review

2.1. Extensive reading

ER is a method of teaching and learning reading skills that exposes students to a variety of books or other materials of their choice that are appropriate to their proficiency level (Bamford and Day, 1998). It has a significant impact on the motivation of young students to read in English. Harold Palmer coined the term “ER” for the first time in EFL contexts in 1917. According to Yamashita (2015), ER is known by different names such as “pleasure reading, free voluntary reading, uninterrupted silent reading, sustained silent reading, and drop everything and read”. According to Hedge (2001), the key feature of ER is reading a lot of material, including novels, short stories, newspaper, and magazine articles on a regular or frequent basis for pleasure, curiosity, or interest. Moreover, ER reduces their language learning anxiety and improves their confidence and motivation as English readers.

Several empirical research studies have been conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the ER approach. Studies have demonstrated that ER has positive effects on learners’ varied language skills, for example, reading comprehension (Suk, 2017; Mariano et al., 2020), reading motivation and attitude (Porkaew and Fongpaiboon, 2018; Yamashita, 2013), vocabulary (Alsaif and Masrai, 2019; Chang and Hu, 2018), writing (Mermelstein, 2015; Park, 2016) and grammar (Khansir and Dehghani, 2015; Lee et al., 2015).

2.2. Intensive reading

IR is the dominant instructional approach used in the classroom for teaching and learning reading skills. In this approach, teachers design multiple assignments and activities and explicitly teach reading skills, reading strategies, and reading comprehension. These strategies, taught in IR classes, are applied by learners in independent reading outside the classroom. According to Richards and Rodgers (2014), IR is a teacher-centered approach to teaching that includes short texts with grammar and vocabulary points. Brown (2007) states that the chief goal of IR is to understand the literal meaning of the text. The teacher decides the nature of the text and all students read the same text. Some studies have shown positive effects on various language skills using the IR approach (Chuenchaichon, 2011; Khazaal, 2019; Andrés, 2020; etc.).

2.3. The integrated use of intensive and extensive reading approaches

As presented above, IR and ER approaches have different characteristics. Teachers typically apply these approaches to develop language competence and provide learners with maximum reading experiences. Both approaches thus play an important role in improving learners’ language skills. Loucky (2005) claims that these approaches help to improve learners’ productive and receptive skills of the language, so language programs should have two key components including IR activities and ER activities.

The integration of ER activities into IR has also been greatly recommended by many scholars and researchers, such as (Anderson and Nunan, 2008; Anderson, 1999; Grabe and Stoller, 2019; etc.). According to Ugalde and Barquero (2021), implicit and explicit language learning takes place when both IR and ER approaches are combined. However, neither of these approaches alone is adequate to develop

students' reading abilities. It also requires explicit instructions from teachers and students to read freely and voluntarily to develop their reading skills and habits (Mulatu and Regassa, 2022).

The following section discusses studies on the use of technology in IR and ER approaches. These studies examine learners' perceptions about the use of various digital resources that benefit them in their language development.

2.4. Perceptions of learners about the use of technology in the intensive and extensive reading approaches

Perceptions are associated with individual experiences based on individual interpretations. In qualitative research, it is important to understand participants' experiences and perspectives on the research topic being investigated (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, perceptions also play an important role in the context of language learning as they influence learners' attitudes, motivation, and overall experiences of language learning (Nunan, 2003; Nuttall, 1996). Likewise, it is important to explore the perceptions of the learners' individual experiences regarding the use of technology in their reading classes.

In the present era, technology is widely used in classrooms for learning a language as it offers innovative and engaging ways to develop the language skills of the learners (Zhang and Zou, 2022). The effectiveness of the use of technology has been acknowledged in the literature (Chen et al., 2020; Shadiev and Wang, 2022). Some studies have revealed that integrating technology in the classrooms can influence engagement and self-directed language learning among learners (Shadiev and Yang, 2020). The literature reports that the use of technology also supports the development of reading skills among learners (Wang, 2017; Huang, 2013). Online apps, eBooks, and digital resources have transformed traditional reading instruction into more interactive and accessible ways (Liu, 2022).

The literature also supports that technology can also be used in the teaching of reading using intensive and extensive reading in EFL classrooms. In the case of IR, technology-supported intensive reading activities with adaptive exercises and reading material can be provided to learners. Similarly, Sun and Tian (2020) studied how computer tools improve intensive reading abilities among students and whether these tools are advantageous or disadvantageous for them. The findings revealed that using computer tools and related software is advantageous for the learners. Satriani and Zaim (2021) aimed to investigate the need for Moodle e-learning tools for students and teachers in intensive reading classes in Indonesia. The findings revealed that learners showed their need and interest to change the intensive reading material by using smart media such as Moodle readers. Participants also showed their interest that teachers should implement e-learning to improve their reading proficiency. These technology-oriented intensive reading activities can bring about visible improvement in the reading comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, and reading strategies of the learners (Satriani and Zaim, 2021; Du and Liang, 2021; Sun and Tian, 2020).

Technology is also widely used in the ER approaches as it offers a wide range of reading material. It fosters reading engagement and enjoyment for the learners. In the technology-supported ER, the learners can use various apps, audiobooks, online websites, and digital libraries catering to their interests and proficiency level. MReader is a module for a learning management system aimed at assessing the reading progress of books designed for language learners (Collett, 2018). Similarly, Xreading is a digital library of books designed especially for English language learners. It features a learning management system to help teachers monitor students' reading progress (Wilkins, 2019). These websites are designed to develop reading proficiency and reading habits among learners (Sartika, 2020). Xreading and MReader are used in various contexts as digital reading resources for developing reading proficiency among

learners (Rajabpour, 2020; Wilkins, 2019). The use of online resources is also highly recommended to be integrated into the syllabus (Zhou and Day, 2021; Day, 2015). Some studies have also reported that applying technology in the ER is very useful for learners and teachers in EFL classrooms (Chanthap and Wasanasomsithi, 2019).

Zhou and Day (2021) conducted a study in an American public sector university of undergraduate students. The students were provided online digital resources of the Xreading library for one semester. The findings showed that the perceptions of learners were positive about the use of digital resources and that learners felt improvement in various language skills using digital resources in the classrooms. In another study, Fajardo (2021) investigated the opinions of students about the use of MReader in the classrooms for a fifteen-week program. The participants of the study were enrolled in the private university of Japan. The findings revealed that the use of MReader for assignments was beneficial for them, and this digital tool was a motivating factor for them to continue reading.

In the context of an Omani university, Rajabpour (2020) attempted to investigate the opinions of the students about the benefits and drawbacks of using digital tools like MReader in the ER classes of the foundation program, the data was collected through questionnaire and open-ended questions about the advantages and drawbacks of this digital tool. The findings revealed that the use of MReader is positive and contributes to various language skills of the learners. Learners perceive technology as a convenient and flexible way of accessing any reading material (Ermerawati, 2019; Janah et al., 2022; Fatimah et al., 2022).

The above studies support the use of technology in IR and ER approaches of EFL classrooms as it has the potential to enhance the reading proficiency and language development of the learners.

However, some studies have also shown negative feelings of the learners about the online digital resources in the IR and ER classes. McBride and Milliner (2017) found that students at a university in Japan had generally positive opinions about e-learning using MReader. However, some students reported technology-related issues, and some participants also mentioned that the online quizzes using MReader were too difficult for them. Likewise, Bakla (2020) conducted a mixed-method study of Turkish university-level students and explored their perceptions about the use of blogs and Web 2.0 in ER classes. The findings revealed that learners considered online activities as demanding and time-consuming. The findings also suggest that these online activities did not boost motivation among students. The above studies provided mixed feelings of learners about the use of technology in the IR and ER classes as some studies provided positive results while few studies also showed negative feelings of learners about the use of technology.

2.5. Perceptions of EFL learners about the integrated use of intensive and extensive reading approaches

Some empirical studies in the literature have evaluated the effectiveness of the combined use of IR and ER approaches. For example, Maipoka and Soontornwipast (2021) explored the impact of IR and ER approaches on the reading ability of primary school students in Thailand and explored their opinions. The results revealed that the learners significantly improved their reading skills after getting instruction using IR and ER approaches. Moreover, students also felt positive about the integrated use of IR and ER practices in the classroom. In another study, Suteja (2019) explored the perceptions of Indonesian university students about IR and ER approaches using a survey research design. The findings revealed that the students perceived IR and ER as very useful and important for the development of their reading proficiency.

Similarly, Alsheikh et al. (2020) employed a sequential explanatory study design to investigate the relationship between IR and ER approaches and their effect on Ph.D. students in the United Arab Emirates. The results demonstrated a relationship between IR and ER approaches. Additionally, the participants had favorable opinions on these approaches. Moreover, Ibrahim and Rawian (2018) conducted a mixed-methods study design to investigate how the IR and ER approaches impacted the language proficiency of undergraduate students in Saudi Arabia. The results demonstrated that the IR and ER approach is an effective method of instruction for boosting students' language competence. Similarly, Mart (2015) examined how the language abilities of Iraqi university students are developed through their use of both IR and ER activities. The researcher concluded that learners developed their multiple language skills with the combined use of both approaches.

Additionally, in the Iranian context, Rashidi and Piran (2011) examined the impact of ER and IR approaches on the vocabulary development of adult Iranian students using an experimental research design. It was found that both IR and ER can enhance students' vocabulary knowledge. Besides this, some studies have purely compared the effectiveness of IR and ER approaches. (Al-Homoud and Schmitt, 2009; Park et al., 2018; Park, 2017; etc.). According to the findings of these studies, both instructional approaches should be implemented in reading classes. The researchers also attempted to show that one of these two ways is superior or worthwhile when these two approaches were compared. However, the results have shown that the two approaches might not be viewed separately. When ER is compared with other ways, the focus of these studies remains dichotomous; however, both approaches are equally important and beneficial (Nation and Waring, 2020).

The reading scholars and practitioners have advocated the integrated use of IR and ER approaches as a valuable and effective method of instruction (Anderson and Nunan, 2008; Anderson, 1999; Grabe and Stoller, 2019; etc.). However, very few empirical studies in this area of investigation are available in the literature (Carrell and Carson, 1997; Erfanpour, 2013; Ibrahim and Rawian, 2018; etc.). These studies largely focused on vocabulary and reading comprehension. More research is needed to determine the effects of IR and ER approaches on language skills like writing, grammar, reading attitudes, and motivation.

Moreover, the studies employed mixed-methods, qualitative, and quantitative study designs. The researchers employed quantitative research designs in the investigations, specifically experimental and survey research techniques. The studies did not contain a purely qualitative study with interviews and reflection diaries as a data collection tool about these two approaches. Additionally, these studies were carried out in Indonesia, Thailand, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq. Further studies with greater sample sizes and different methods of inquiry in other contexts including Pakistan are needed to examine other aspects of language. Also, previous studies have not explored pre-university learners' perceptions of the use of IR and ER approaches.

Although some studies have explored the perceptions of EFL learners, they have studied perceptions about the ER approach alone (Al Aghar et al., 2023; Pammu et al., 2022; Ateek, 2021; etc.). These studies have shown that learners believed the use of ER was of great benefit to them and they always preferred to be engaged in abundant free reading both inside and outside the classrooms. Some studies are also available in the literature that explored the perceptions of learners about the IR approach alone (Widyaasita et al., 2020; Rejeki and Kurnia, 2019; Chen and Wang, 2019). The studies about IR have also provided valuable insights into the learners' perception regarding the use of the IR approach in the classes. In the above-mentioned studies, the learners' perceptions about the IR and ER approaches were

positive and they considered these two approaches beneficial for increasing their reading proficiency and language development.

However, there is a dearth of studies in the literature that explored the perceptions of EFL Learners about the integrated use of IR and ER, and about the use of digital resources in the IR and ER reading classes. This study will provide deep insights into the learners' perceptions of IR and ER approaches and then what they perceive when they are provided online digital resources in their reading classes. The present study will potentially benefit EFL learners, teachers, policymakers, and curriculum designers. It is expected that the current study will bring significant improvement in the learners' reading proficiency using IR and ER approaches with the integration of technology.

Therefore, this qualitative study will be a major contribution to the existing literature on reading approaches. The studies mentioned above have made it necessary to incorporate both methods of instruction into the curriculum of different contexts. Moreover, there is a need to conduct a qualitative study in the Pakistani context using both approaches.

Moreover, as mentioned above, previous studies have not explored learners' perceptions of the IR and ER approaches in the Pakistani context using technology in the classes (Shumaila and Khan, 2021; Iqbal and Komal, 2017; Saba and Noreen, 2020). To fill the gap, this study aims to explore EFL learners' perceptions of IR and ER implementation and how learners perceive the use of technology in the IR and ER approaches in this specific context.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

Qualitative research design was used in this study. The study followed the qualitative study design by Merriam and Tisdell (2015) and Bryman (2008). This study design attempts to discover something new and interesting (Swedberg, 2020). This study aimed to explore the perceptions of pre-university EFL learners about the use of IR and ER approaches in the classroom. The researchers employed qualitative inquiry to get a rich and robust understanding of the problem under investigation in the context of Pakistan. The population of the study consists of Pakistani pre-university EFL students enrolled in the foundation semester of a public sector university in Pakistan. The study sample consisted of ten students who were taking an English language course in the 2020 academic year. The program is a foundation course aimed at building students' English language skills. The selection of ten participants from a population of pre-university students was performed by the purposive sampling technique (Calaro et al., 2023; Hassan, 2022). The participants were chosen purposely on certain characteristics. The students who were attending the IR and ER classes regularly also used online digital resources for reading. The participants consisted of six males and four females between the ages of 17 and 19. All participants had the same academic background.

3.2. Instrumentation

In this research, we used qualitative methods with semi-structured interviews and reflective diaries. For the semi-structured interviews, the researchers conducted one-to-one interviews with 10 participants. This method allows interviewers to collect more information in greater depth (Kumar, 2018). The researchers developed an interview guide by reviewing the literature on IR and ER and the relevant studies on the integrated IR and ER approaches. After the interview guide was made, the researchers sent it to three experts for validation, after which the researchers piloted the interview guide. The researchers revised the interview guide based on the experts' suggestions and the results of the pilot study.

The other tool for data collection is the reflective diary. It is a personal account of what has happened. Besides this, it also provides factual data, significant incidents, and personal interpretation (Wallin and Adawi, 2018). This tool was employed to explore EFL learners' feelings and attitudes toward IR and ER approaches and the use of technology in both reading approaches. Research participants were also provided the guidelines for writing the reflective diary to help them continue writing. The researchers also provided students with a sample of reflective diaries at the beginning of the program. Participants returned the diaries to the researchers at the end of the program.

3.3. Data collection

The interview data was collected at the end of the foundation semester of the 2020 academic year. The interviews were conducted via Zoom meetings due to COVID-19. The interview duration was between 30 to 40 min. The researcher conducted the interviews at the convenience of the participants. Participants were informed of the purpose of the interview and then formal consent was obtained to record the interviews. The participants were also ensured that their provided information would only be used for research purposes. Regarding reflective diaries, the students were provided diaries at the beginning of the program. Students could freely choose any appropriate time for them to make daily entries. The total number of ten dairies was distributed among 10 students.

3.4. Data analysis

The present study is qualitative in nature and the purpose is to explore EFL learners' perceptions about the use of IR and ER approaches in the EFL classrooms. Thematic analysis techniques and personal interpretation were used for data analysis. Thematic analysis is a flexible method of analyzing and reporting patterns within data. It organizes and describes data in rich detail (Braun and Clarke, 2022). For the interview part, all ten interviews were transcribed and then the researchers followed the six steps of the thematic analysis of Braun and Clarkes (2006). The six steps are: 1) familiarity with data; 2) generating initial codes; 3) searching for initial themes; 4) developing and reviewing themes; 5) defining, and naming themes; 6) presenting themes with in-depth descriptions. The reason for using this technique was that this is a flexible, easy, systematic, and transparent way of analyzing the data. Moreover, this approach has been widely used and cited by researchers across the globe. For the reflective diaries, researchers read the diaries intensively and repeatedly and supported the interview results with relevant citations. The researchers checked the validity and reliability of the tools. For the validity and reliability of the data, member checking was used as an approach to increase the credibility of the study. In this technique, two participants were involved in reviewing the transcripts and interpretations of the data, and any discrepancies were resolved after negotiation between the participants and the researchers. To check the trustworthiness of qualitative data, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework with four constructs was employed in this study. The four constructs consist of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. This framework is widely used by researchers to check the data's trustworthiness.

4. Results

The main aim of the present study was to explore the perception of EFL learners about the integrated use of intensive and extensive reading approaches and how the learners perceive the use of technology in the reading classes using IR and ER approaches. The following research questions guided the study:

- 1) What are EFL learners' perceptions about IR and ER approaches?
- 2) What do they perceive about the benefits of using IR and ER approaches?
- 3) How do they perceive the use of technology in the IR and ER classes?

To answer the research questions, the researcher performed a qualitative analysis of data from ten semi-structured one-on-one interviews with students and ten reflective diaries. The researchers used thematic analysis techniques and developed three major themes, all themes have been supported by the quotes and descriptions from the interview and diaries. The findings are given below:

4.1. Perceptions of learners about the IR and ER approaches

The first research question explored the EFL learners' perceptions of IR and ER approaches. The findings showed that students considered IR and ER approaches essential, useful, and favorable for them. Students enjoyed being able to read texts that matched their interests and proficiency level. Students enjoyed participating in a variety of activities related to IR and ER. Moreover, they significantly changed their reading proficiency and reading habits after getting exposure to IR and ER approaches.

When students were asked in the interview about the benefits of the integrated role of IR and ER approaches. Students' interview data and reflective diaries revealed that both approaches played an effective and important role in the reading classes. Learners keenly involved themselves in both relevant practices. The desired results can only be achieved if the classroom practices focus on both approaches with equal time and concentration.

These approaches help develop language proficiency and habits among students. The data will further prove it through students' comments. When students were asked about the role of both approaches, most of the students remarked that both approaches were important in the reading sessions. "Both approaches are immensely important to me" (P6, P4, P10). From this comment, it can be deduced that learners realized the importance of both IR and ER approaches in the reading classrooms. Likewise, one more comment from a student justified the benefit of both approaches. One student even said that his language skills improved because of his active involvement in the reading approaches.

"The extensive and intensive approaches helped us, intensive reading was building my basic grammar and structure and the extensive reading was helping me to improve and make me fluent in English, I think both approaches helped me to improve my language skills." (P3)

Similarly, P4 wrote in the diary that: "The currently introduced reading activities in the form of textbook-based activities and the activities related to novels, and magazine articles contributed to enhancing my vocabulary, grammar, and writing skills, good writing requires rich vocabulary and correct grammar usage which I am improving daily, and I consider both these approaches useful and important for my language development and reading abilities."

4.2. Perceived benefits of the integrated use of IR and ER approaches

The second research question explored the EFL learners' perceptions about the benefits of using IR and ER approaches. The findings showed that the use of IR and ER approaches was of great benefit to learners. Using these approaches simultaneously benefits them in multiple ways. Learners consider the activities related to IR and ER approaches as conducive to their improvement in reading abilities and language skills.

When students were asked during the interview about the activities focusing on IR and ER approaches, some interesting insights emerged through students' comments which indicated that the IR approach always requires more concentration and focused reading as its sole purpose was to develop a basic understanding of the language. The IR classrooms mostly remain under the influence of teachers and the learners are involved in certain language-related activities and the learners are taught language

aspects explicitly. However, the sole purpose of the ER sessions remains to create a reading-for-pleasure environment where learners develop their language aspects implicitly.

“Both intensive reading and extensive reading are also important, but the difference is when you are reading intensively, you must put all of your focus on reading, and when you are extensively reading then you have to read for pleasure.” (P1)

The readers, after developing their language proficiency explicitly, started developing their pleasure-reading aspects. To get further elaboration on the role of IR and ER approaches when students were asked to provide more details. The findings were quite interesting and supported the role of both approaches. However, there were a few participants who favored the IR approach. Some participants considered the role of the IR approach as fundamental for improving their basic language proficiency. “Intensive reading was more helpful because we did it in detail, we focused on the structures” (P4). One other participant felt that learners must be taught reading through the IR approach to build their basic knowledge and understanding of the text. “First, we must learn intensive reading and then we move to extensive reading.” (P2, P7)

The above comment from a participant indicates that IR leads to ER. When learners read the text intensively, they adopt reading strategies and techniques that help them to be effective or strategic readers. After being skilled and strategic readers, students applied those strategies while reading independently.

“In the beginning, we were doing intensive strategies intentionally, but we continued to do them within a particular course of time. So, we have adopted these strategies and now we do this unintentionally.” (P3)

From this comment of a student, it can be deduced that learners were first taught intentional reading strategies; however, with time, they applied those strategies unintentionally during the reading of any text. This also suggests that IR sessions can be training sessions for a learner to learn how to read, and the ER session is to practically apply strategies while reading.

When another participant was asked the same question. She responded, “Just because of intensive reading activities, I enjoyed extensive reading activities” (P6). It was found that in the IR session, the teachers helped them learn new language structures and different aspects of reading. “The participant found that this learning proved to be of great help while reading extensively.” Similarly, another participant remarked that he learned grammatical knowledge through IR activities. “In the grammatical context, intensive reading helped me through extensive reading as I got more interest and habit for reading.” (P2)

In addition to this, one student commented that undoubtedly both approaches are useful, but when basic rules of language are to be developed, the IR approach excels over the ER approach. “Both were useful but especially intensive reading was very useful because we were being taught the rules of the language” (P9). The above-mentioned comments accentuated the role of both approaches was synchronous and equal not only for reading proficiency but also for interest and motivation. In contrast to the above ideas, some students preferred the ER approach to the IR approach. One amazing comment came from a student when she was asked the same question, the respondent gave more worth and value to ER approach. In her view, it is essential first to involve students in more reading input for developing reading interest and reading love. Through this approach, they enhanced their language skills and vocabulary. “Extensive reading activities are more beneficial for me to have my skills improved from them” (P4, P10). The findings suggest that language proficiency would develop through more reading input from the ER approach.

4.3. Perceptions of learners about the use of technology in the IR and ER classes

The third research question explored the EFL learners' perceptions of the use of technology in IR and ER classes. The findings showed that unanimously all the participants considered the use of digital resources in the IR and ER classes of great benefit to them. These digital resources should be adopted by teachers in their respective classes to maximize reading proficiency and reading habits among students.

When students were asked in the interview about the use of technology in reading classes. Some of the participants responded that teachers introduced to us some useful online resources and websites that proved very helpful for us, and they benefitted a lot from those digital resources.

P2 said, "I must appreciate my teacher because he introduced me to some blogs and reading websites that I use regularly, and I am still benefiting a lot from those online resources."

Similarly, another participant responded: "We did not rely on the prescribed books that were provided during the foundation semester, but the teachers guided us to make some accounts on various websites of reading like Read Theory, and ER Central. We kept reading using this app and teachers awarded us some marks for whoever read more and achieved more scores and some reading targets. One participant remarked that these online resources also had some mechanism of assessment, we used to read and had some online quizzes at the end." (P5)

Regarding the use of technology in the intensive reading and extensive reading sessions, Participant 5 wrote in the diary: "Today our teacher introduced us to some online reading activities in which we performed some online quizzes. The teachers also asked us to read some interesting reading material of our choice and after this, we presented our understanding to the whole class. We did both oral and written activities. Our teacher also introduced us to online books and for that, he shared two very useful websites, Moodle Reader and Xreading. In my free time, I keep on reading those two useful websites. I also make the best use of my mobile phone as I also read using my mobile phone. I will be using digital resources in the future and continue reading from social media and other apps." (P4)

In summary, participants had a positive opinion of the IR and ER approaches. The roles of both IR and ER approaches are complementary in building the reading and other language skills of EFL learners. The results also suggest that IR and ER activities are useful, and their integration is meaningful. The respondents' comments also highlight that IR is useful, so it can be said that IR strategies already in use should not be discontinued, but the addition of ER would be of great benefit to EFL learners. The results also suggest that the role of digital resources in these classes could benefit learners more since students tend to use digital apps and social media tools in their lives. Moreover, the teachers' use of online digital resources in the IR and ER sessions to develop the reading proficiency of their students is also required.

5. Discussion

In this study, almost all participants demonstrated positive opinions about IR and ER. Both these approaches were considered essential and complementary to each other, and their role helped develop reading proficiency and language-related skills.

Moreover, it was also found that learners preferred to be exposed to digital resources in their respective IR and ER classes because they found those resources to be a motivating factor for the inculcation of reading culture among them. The results also indicated that IR classrooms mostly remained under the influence of teachers but with the active involvement of the students. Moreover, learners were involved in certain language-related activities and were taught language aspects explicitly.

However, the ER sessions were only to create a reading-for-pleasure aspect and learners developed their language aspects implicitly. The findings supported the role of both approaches. However, it was observed that the role of the IR approach was fundamental for improving basic language proficiency. Furthermore, findings also indicate that IR leads to ER. The IR approach helped to develop a basic understanding of language and it also made them strategic readers. After being skilled and strategic readers, students applied those strategies while reading independently.

It can be inferred that learners were first taught intentional reading techniques and strategies; however, with time, they applied those strategies unintentionally during the reading of any text. This also suggests that IR sessions proved to be training sessions for a learner and in the ER session learners were practically applying them in reading. Findings also suggest that the IR approach outperformed the ER approach in promoting reading culture among learners, as some participants deemed their academic background unsuitable for direct reading. Both approaches are essential for developing reading proficiency and habits, but some preferred the ER approach due to their academic background.

It can be deduced that the role of both reading approaches is successful in developing reading proficiency, encouraging reading motivation, building reading attitudes, and developing language skills of EFL learners. The above findings are consistent with the claims made by ELT practitioners and researchers who emphasize the role of both approaches as important and complementary (Anderson, 2014; Brown, 2007; Nunan, 2003: etc.). The findings also correspond with some studies conducted about the effectiveness of integrated IR and ER approaches. (Maipoka and Soontornwipast, 2021; Carrell and Carson, 1997; Erfanpour, 2013; etc.).

Apart from the combined use of both approaches, the findings of the study also indicate that learners were also involved in some online reading resources in both IR and ER approaches. These findings are also consistent with the literature that supports the use of technology in language learning. The findings indicate the learners enjoyed reading when they were introduced to some online digital resources in the classes and some online quizzes proved useful for their assessment. The use of online resources is not restricted to ER only, but it could also be employed in the IR classes. Hence, it can be said that relying only on printed material is not sufficient but digital/online reading resources may be encouraged in the classrooms.

The present study findings also correspond to the findings of related studies that revealed that technology is essentially required in both IR and ER classes. In those studies, learners perceived the use of technology in the classrooms as positive and useful for them (Chen et al., 2020; Shadiev and Wang, 2022; Zhang and Zou, 2022; etc.). The teachers are required to train their students in the use of technology, and they should make their students familiar with certain online reading softwares and websites, such as MReader, Xreading, Read theory, and extensive Reading Central.

6. Conclusion

The findings of the current study provided evidence that both IR and ER approaches could successfully promote reading abilities and other language skills and the use of technology would be a great value for the learners.

The present study is a major contribution to the IR and ER reading approach as it has confirmed the positive perceptions of students about IR and ER approaches. The study tried to fill the gap in the literature by exploring the perceptions of learners about IR and ER approaches using technology in the same setting. The previous studies either investigated the ER approach alone or compared the IR with

the ER approach quantitatively, or the perceptions of learners were explored about the ER approach. Contrarily, this study is a major contribution to the methodological and knowledge gap in this dimension of the research. The overall findings of this study indicated that learners could get benefits in their linguistic competence using the current reading approaches. The study also contributes to the practical domain of teaching IR and ER using online resources as it was evident from the data that integrating digital resources was of immense support for the learners to read intensively and extensively.

The current study has some implications for the teaching of reading in EFL classrooms. This study implies that teaching EFL learners with the help of explicit instructional approach (IR) and implicit instructional approach (ER) could provide learners with a motivating and fostering environment to develop their reading abilities. The study findings also imply that teachers should not adopt traditional ways of teaching reading, but they should bring technology into the area of teaching IR and ER approaches, and they should make students familiar with multiple online digital resources, apps, and software. The overall findings of the study are consistent with the literature that suggests that learners need to be involved in more reading to become avid and effective readers.

This study also has some limitations which need further attention in future studies. First, this study would have been conducted quantitatively, and the results could have been triangulated with the help of qualitative data to support the quantitative data. This study was conducted for one semester so for the most desirable results, the longitudinal study is required in different settings. Future studies may be carried out in various settings and other dimensions such as reading motivation and reading strategies may be studied after the learners are provided intervention through IR and ER approaches using technology tools in the classes.

This study proposes some recommendations based on the findings. EFL teachers in Pakistan and outside should revisit their teaching reading methodology by adopting the balanced IR and ER approach to get the maximum benefits from this reading instructional approach. It is believed if this approach is followed in various contexts in Pakistan and abroad as a reading instructional approach, the poor reading proficiency and reading habits of learners could be developed. This study is also helpful for administrators and educators to design their curriculum and syllabus with the incorporation of ER activities in the language syllabus and curriculum. The ER model could be incorporated in multiple ways in EFL classrooms depending on the needs of the learners. Moreover, the study recommends that curriculum designers should make online resources a part of the syllabus and that policymakers should devise a policy to purchase reading softwares for the learners in the undergraduate programs.

Author contributions

Conceptualization, ZA, STP, and MMA; methodology, ZA; software, ZA, STP, and MMA; validation, ZA, STP, MMA, HHR, and MM; formal analysis, ZA, MMA and STP; investigation, ZA, STP, MMA, MM, HHR; resources, ZA, HHR, and MM; data curation, ZA and MMA; writing—original draft preparation, ZA; writing—review and editing, ZA, STP, MMA, HHR, and MM; visualization, HHR, and MM; supervision, ZA, STP and MMA, MM, HHR. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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