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The Relationship between L1 and L2 Reading Attitudes in EFL Primary School Learners: The Role of Gender, Age, and L2 Proficiency

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Abstract

Learners' attitudes towards learning have been found to influence second language (L2) development. It has been suggested that affective factors such as first language (L1) reading attitude can be transferred to the L2 along with L1 skills. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, research has shown that the role that reading attitude plays in reading comprehension is as important as the nature of the reading strategies used. Therefore, it becomes necessary to understand the relationship between L1 and L2 reading attitudes in EFL contexts and evaluate how demographic and cognitive variables can mediate that relationship. To this end, the present quantitative study sought to contribute to this area by investigating the relationship between L1 and L2 reading attitudes in 65 EFL elementary school learners and by assessing the impact of gender, age, and L2 proficiency on these attitudes. Main results revealed that age and L2 proficiency did not correlate with either L1 or L2 reading attitude components, L1 and L2 reading attitudes correlated weakly, and older female learners displayed stronger attitudes toward L1 reading recreational aspects. Results are discussed in terms of the importance of affective components in understanding L1 and L2 reading attitudes.

Keywords: L1 reading attitude, L2 reading attitude, L2 proficiency, gender

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1. Introduction

For many EFL learners, reading represents the means to acquiring English language skills, expanding vocabulary, and connecting with other cultures. The role of affective factors such as learners' attitudes toward reading is relevant in this respect, as they can positively or negatively affect the level of reading ability of students (McKenna et al., 2012; Wood & Gabas, 2017) and can predict L2 reading outcomes (Macalister, 2014; Park, 2020; Yamashita, 2013). More than 40 years ago, Alexander and Filler (1975) referred to reading attitudes as "a system of feelings related to reading which causes the learner to approach or avoid a reading situation" (p. 1). This early definition of attitudes implied that evaluating reading attitudes in and outside school settings can potentially provide useful information for the design of more inclusive and motivating instructional practices (Pitcher et al., 2007). Thus, variables such as age, gender, and L2 proficiency have been investigated in reading attitudes studies in L1 (Kolić-Vehovec et al., 2014; Worrell et al., 2006) and L2 (Park, 2020; Yamashita, 2004, 2007) settings. Indeed, students' attitudes towards learning have a clear influence on learners' behaviours and, consequently, on their performance (Fakeye, 2010; McBride, 2009). Therefore, negative attitudes and lack of motivation can lead to obstacles in language learning. If many L2 linguistic skills can be transferred from the mother tongue (García-Mayo, 2009), affective factors such as reading attitude might also be transferred to the L2 (Yamashita, 2013). It becomes necessary to understand the relationship between L1 and L2 reading attitudes in specific EFL learning contexts, since the limited generalizability of reading attitudes to specific educational and sociocultural contexts requires an evaluation of such components in diverse learning settings (Wood & Gabas, 2017; Yamashita, 2013).

Regarding the background in which the present study is embedded, it can be characterized as an EFL setting, where learners do not have the opportunity to practice the L2 outside the classroom. The teaching of English in Chile is a compulsory foreign language subject from fifth to twelfth grade in public schools since the late 1990s. The government has promoted EFL teaching and learning in the country by means of teacher development programs such as the introduction of "English opens doors" in 2004 (Cancino & Díaz, 2020). These changes were introduced with the aim of educating skilled workers that could be better positioned in a competitive globalized market in the international community. However, the measures taken by the Chilean government to improve the learning and teaching of English have not been sufficient. In 2017, the Agencia de calidad de la Educación

(2017) published the results of SIMCE (a national test that includes EFL proficiency), which revealed that only 32% of secondary education students reached an intermediate EFL proficiency level. The report concludes that the low number of EFL hours, the inadequate quality of teacher training, and delivering EFL classes in the L1 are factors that interfere with L2 learning. It can be argued that an affective factor influencing EFL learning is the motivation and attitudes of the students toward the L2. Moreover, the progress in the international L1 reading literacy study (PIRLS) carried out in Chile (Agencia de la Calidad de la Educación, 2016) indicated that the level of positive reading attitudes of Chilean students is lower than the international average. As Valenzuela, et al. (2015), state, the reading commitment of Chilean students and their attitudes towards reading are a decisive factor in their reading comprehension results, rather than their reading strategies. Therefore, the present study sought to contribute to the research addressing affective variables such as reading attitude in L2 reading (Lee et al., 2015; Park, 2020; Yamashita, 2007) by investigating the relationship between L1 and L2 reading attitudes in EFL elementary school learners and the impact of gender, age, and L2 proficiency on those attitudes. The study addresses the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between L1-L2 reading attitudes, age, and proficiency level of primary school EFL learners?
2. Do age range and gender influence the L1 and L2 reading attitudes of these EFL learners?

2. Literature Review

The literature review will address the construct of attitude and how it can influence preference and learning. Then, reading attitude will be examined in terms of its impact on L2 learning. To this end, the variables of gender, age, and proficiency will be discussed in relation to how they can mediate L2 reading ability.

2.1. Attitude theory and reading attitude

The term “attitude” has been addressed from psychology and educational perspectives. Ajzen (2005) defined attitude as a characteristic of human beings that allows them to express their feelings toward an object, person, or event. Glasman

and Albarracín (2006) regard it as a predictor of human behavior and future preference. Finally, Ajzen and Fishbein (2005) regard attitude as a learned predisposition to respond consistently favourably or unfavourably with respect to a given object. This notion of object is general and may either denote entities (e.g., people, groups, places) or behaviours that can be acquired throughout an individual's lifetime. A relevant aspect of attitude derived from these definitions is that attitudes – such as L2 reading attitudes – can be acquired from and shaped by past experiences – such as L1 reading attitudes.

It is important to distinguish attitude from motivation. Generally speaking, an attitude is a set of beliefs, while motivation represents a reason for doing something (Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011). A person's interest in reading is not the same as their attitude toward reading. Although attitude is related to the concept of intrinsic or extrinsic interest in each person, these constructs are dimensions of motivation, which in turn implies an inclination to action (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Thus, attitude can be regarded as a factor that influences people's motivations. A positive attitude may contribute to intrinsic motivation, while a negative attitude tends to inhibit it, although this can be manipulated by including extrinsic factors.

One of the first definitions of reading attitude was put forward by Alexander and Filler (1975), who referred to it as “a system of feelings related to reading which causes the learner to approach or avoid a reading situation” (1). This implies that the affective domain plays a fundamental role in developing the value of reading, and that if reading attitudes can be developed in the first years of schooling, long-life reading habits will be created. Three main components of reading attitude have been identified in the literature: cognitive (personal beliefs and thoughts), affective (feelings and emotions), and conative (disposition to action and behavioural intentions; van Schooten & de Glopper, 2002; Yamashita, 2013). In this model, affective attitude can modify conative behaviours, while cognitive aspects fail to do so (Park, 2020; van Schooten & de Glopper, 2002), which underscores the relevance of the affective component while reading. Longitudinal studies in L1 have found a decrease in positive attitudes towards reading throughout the school years. Bokhorst-Heng and Pereira (2008) postulated that this deterioration in reading attitudes among secondary school children (13 years old) was in part the result of access to a wider range of leisure activities in adolescence, activities that tend to be more attractive to this age group than reading. In line with this, Kolić-Vehovec et al. (2014) monitored changes in reading attitudes in 10- to 14-year-old

primary school students after carrying out an adapted version of the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS; McKenna & Kear, 1990). The authors found that positive attitudes toward reading decreased significantly as these learners aged, and that girls displayed more positive attitudes than boys toward recreational and academic reading components of the ERAS.

2.2. Reading attitude and L2 learning

L2 achievement depends not only on cognitive factors but also on learners' attitudes toward learning the language (Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005; de Bot et al., 2005; Visser, 2008). Gardner (2001) linked a positive attitude towards language learning with motivation and reported that students who are motivated to learn a foreign language can achieve enjoyment in their L2 learning activities. Attitudes towards learning can be influenced by social (e.g., family and daily life) and psychological phenomena (e.g. the development of cognitive processes) that can affect learners' behaviors toward the target language as well as their L2 performance (Fakeye, 2010; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003).

With a specific focus on L2 reading attitude, a pioneering model for its acquisition and development was proposed by Day and Bamford (1998). According to this model, four factors contribute to L2 reading attitude: L1 reading attitudes; previous experiences (if any) with learning to read L2 other than English; attitudes towards L2, culture, and people; and the L2 classroom environment. This model included the L1 reading attitude as a factor influencing L2 reading attitude, a relationship that has been addressed in the literature. For example, Yamashita (2004) investigated the relationship between both L1 and L2 reading attitudes, and learners' performance in the context of L2 extensive reading of 59 Japanese EFL university students. Yamashita found that reading attitudes are generally transferable between the L1 and the L2 but with different degrees of transferability. She identified four variables for reading attitude (comfort, anxiety, value, and self-perception), and reported that although L1-L2 transfer was identified, value components (what a person thinks) is more transferable than comfort, anxiety, or self-perception components (what a person feels). However, merely valuing reading as a beneficial activity does not bring forth motivation to read on its own. She concludes that positive feelings towards L1 and L2 reading can increase reading success in learners. In a subsequent study, Yamashita (2007) investigated the transfer of L1 and L2 reading attitudes in 61 undergraduate EFL Japanese students.

She administered a questionnaire including affective and cognitive components of L1 and L2 reading attitude and a proficiency test. Results revealed that a significant proportion of L2 attitudes could be explained by L1 reading attitude, and that proficiency level was not as significant as L1 reading attitude in explaining the findings.

2.3. Reading attitude: gender, age, and proficiency level

The relationship between gender, age, and proficiency level has been addressed in the reading attitude literature. Regarding gender, female learners have been found to outperform males in terms of linguistic predisposition to remembering words (Maitland et al., 2004), although Wallentin (2009) argued that the potential verbal advantage of women will tend to disappear with age. When the focus is placed on gender and attitudes towards reading, several studies show that it is an important factor explaining reading academic ability and performance. Worrell et al. (2006) identified gender differences in the reading attitudes of academically talented students and reported that female learners displayed more positive attitudes toward recreational reading than males and that these differences are generalized and can be found in students of all performance levels. Similarly, Wood and Gabas (2017) examined the relationship between reading attitudes and language performance of 204 Spanish-English kindergarten and first graders by means of the ERAS instrument and standardised linguistic and literacy measures. Results revealed that although participants in general displayed relatively positive attitudes toward reading, female learners displayed significant higher attitude levels than male learners in recreational reading. Age was not found to be a significant factor affecting overall mean reading attitudes. Further findings also suggest that female learners generally have more positive attitudes toward reading than males, and that difference is maintained at elementary (McKenna et al., 1995), upper elementary (Logan & Johnston, 2009), and middle and high school (Swalander & Taube, 2007) levels.

With respect to age, researchers who have explored the relationship between attitude toward reading and age have consistently found that attitudes toward reading typically tend to decline over time. For example, McKenna et al. (2012) administered an adapted version of the ERAS measuring recreational and academic reading to 4,491 students in the U.S.A. and found that attitudes towards L1 academic and recreational reading at the beginning of schooling were relatively

positive, but that they drastically plummeted in sixth grade. These results are in line with Petscher (2010), who conducted a meta-analysis and reported the same trend throughout school levels, results that are in line with Kolić-Vehovec et al. (2014). In sum, the studies reviewed suggest that reading attitudes tend to gradually decrease with age as learners go through primary school.

Regarding L2 proficiency, its role in L1 and L2 reading attitude is not clear-cut. Akbari et al. (2017) asked 230 Iranian EFL intermediate level learners to complete L1 and L2 reading attitudes questionnaires and found a strong correlation between L1 and L2 reading attitudes, with L1 reading attitude explaining 51% of the variance in L2 reading attitude, and L2 reading attitude being the sole contributor to L2 reading achievement. This is in line with Yamashita (2007), who found that although L2 attitude formation is related to linguistic processing, L2 proficiency does not critically affect it. Similarly, Kush et al. (2005) found that poor readers with positive attitudes kept their positive attitudes despite experiencing challenges with reading. Reading attitudes generally declined as individuals advanced in school, a finding that has been reported in subsequent studies (Kolić-Vehovec et al., 2014; Petscher, 2010). In sum, it can be stated that gender, age, and L2 proficiency can influence reading attitudes with different outcomes.

3. Methodology

3.1. Overall research design

This correlational and quasi-experimental study sought to assess the relationship between L1 and L2 reading attitudes across L2 proficiency and age, and the impact of gender, age, and L2 proficiency on those attitudes. Reading attitudes were measured through an adapted version of the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS; McKenna & Kear, 1990), which analysed the reported L1 and L2 reading attitudes of 65 primary school EFL learners. L2 proficiency was assessed by means of the reading section of the TOEFL Primary test. The first research question sought to examine the relationship between both first language (L1) and second language (L2) reading attitudes, so the variables analyzed were L1 reading attitudes, L2 reading attitudes, L2 proficiency, and age. The second research question sought to assess whether demographic differences influence reading attitudes, so it included gender and age as independent variables, and L1 and L2 reading attitudes as dependent variables.

3.2. Participants

A purposeful sampling approach was applied where elementary school students were selected from third to seventh grade because they represented characteristics that were relevant to the study. Participants belonged to the same school, had the same teacher, and had six hours of EFL classes per week before SARS-CoV-2 (Covid-19) restrictions. The participants were 65 Chilean elementary school EFL students (25 girls, 40 boys). The students' ages ranged between 8 and 12 years old ($M = 10$, $SD = 1.41$), and during 2020 they were required to attend an online class (synchronous learning) that lasted 45 minutes twice a week, and complete offline assignments (asynchronous learning).

3.3. Instruments





3.3.1. Elementary reading attitude survey (ERAS)

The instrument used to measure learners' L1 and L2 reading attitudes was an adapted version of the Elementary reading attitude survey (ERAS) developed by McKenna and Kear (1990). It is a 20-item instrument designed for primary education students. The first 10 items of the survey assess attitudes toward recreational reading – reading done for leisure (e.g. *How do you feel when reading a book in Spanish on a rainy Saturday?*) – while the last 10 questions assess attitudes toward academic reading – reading done for school (e.g. *What do you think of taking a reading test in the language subject?*). The ERAS scale contains a 4-point Likert scale that uses pictorial anchors; that is, each question presents a short and simple statement about reading, which is followed by four images of a cartoon (Garfield) representing a different emotional state. These states range from very positive to very negative. Students must choose the image that is most representative of their feelings towards the statement presented (Figure 1 below). The ERAS was translated into the learners' L1 (Spanish) to prevent L2 proficiency from affecting item comprehension (see appendix for the translated version of the ERAS for L2 reading). The translated versions of the instruments (L1 and L2 attitudes) were discussed with another researcher to identify further comprehension issues before the pilot session.

Figure 1

Sample from the Elementary Reading Survey (How do you feel when reading a book in Spanish on a rainy Saturday?)

1. ¿Cómo te sentirías al leer un libro en español en un sábado lluvioso? *

	
<input type="radio"/> Muy bien	<input type="radio"/> Bien
	
<input type="radio"/> Mal	<input type="radio"/> Muy mal

In order to investigate the relationship between L1 and L2 reading attitudes, two versions of the ERAS were created, each addressing attitudes towards reading in a particular language (Spanish and English). The ERAS is frequently used in studies designed to examine relationships between reading attitudes, reading habits and selected cognitive and demographic variables (Kolić-Vehovec et al., 2014; McKenna et al., 1995, 2012). With respect to reliability measures for the ERAS instrument, internal consistency was assessed by means of Cronbach's alpha. The recreational reading and academic reading subscales in both versions of the instrument (L1 and L2 reading attitudes) displayed alpha values between .78 and .91, which suggests a good internal consistency.

3.3.2. TOEFL primary reading test

The TOEFL Primary test (Educational Testing Service, 2019) is a test that assesses EFL core communication skills (reading, listening, and speaking) intended for young

learners. The purpose of this test is to measure the English language skills of young learners aged 8 and up who are developing communicative proficiency in English. This test was designed to accommodate a broad range of English proficiency levels represented in the population. For the purposes of the study, the L2 reading proficiency of the participants was assessed through the reading section of TOEFL Primary test. This section includes 36 multiple-choice items that are associated with reading stimuli such as pictures and images. Reading text types include correspondence, instructional, narrative, and short, age-appropriate academic passages.

3.4. Procedures

3.4.1. Pilot study

Four elementary school students from the same population were asked to participate in the pilot phase of the instruments. Respondents answered both versions of the ERAS by means of Google forms and were asked to indicate any issues with the clarity of the instructions and questions, or with the time limit allocated for the surveys. Feedback provided by the students focused on one specific question that hindered their understanding: *¿How do you feel when you complete reading tasks from the English textbook and the handouts?*. The item was rewritten to place the focus on reading tasks in general (*How do you feel when you work on reading tasks or handouts in English?*). They did not report further issues with item comprehension or with the allotted time. As for the TOEFL Primary test, the four students took an online version of the test on Google forms and did not report any issues with it.

3.4.2. Data collection

Consent was secured from the school and the children's parents before starting data collection. The ERAS and TOEFL Primary tests were administered online across nine EFL classes. A Google forms link allowed participants to complete a brief demographic survey (name, gender, and age), the ERAS, and the TOEFL Primary test. To reduce the possibility for reading proficiency to affect their responses in the ERAS, all the items were read aloud in Spanish by their teacher. The first part of the survey (reading attitudes toward L1) was administered over the course of a week. The second part (reading attitudes toward L2) was completed a week after the first part. Finally, the TOEFL Primary test was administered a week after the ERAS. The time determined for test completion of this test was 30 minutes.

3.4.3. Data analysis

To answer the first research question assessing the relationship between L1 and L2 reading attitudes, descriptive statistics were presented with L1 and L2 reading attitude components, age, and proficiency level, across gender. Pearson correlational analyses were computed with L1 and L2 reading attitude components, age, and proficiency level. As the second research question measured the impact of gender and age on L1 and L2 reading attitudes, a 2 (Gender) x 2 (Age range) analysis of variance (ANOVA) was run with the data to compare the effects of each variable in a factorial experiment with a two-way layout.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive statistics

Table 1 reports the descriptive statistics for participants' scores on the reading attitudes toward the L1 as measured by the ERAS.

Table 1.
L1 ERAS results

L1 ERAS Recreational Reading									
Age Range	Female			Male			Total		
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
08-10	2,88	0,50	13	2,93	0,42	21	2,91	0,45	34
11-12	3,12	0,53	12	2,58	0,66	19	2,79	0,66	31
Total	3,00	0,52	25	2,77	0,57	40	2,86	0,56	65
L1 ERAS Academic Reading									
08-10	2,9	0,56	13	3	0,38	21	2,96	0,45	34
11-12	2,73	0,46	12	2,83	0,60	19	2,79	0,55	31
Total	2,82	0,51	25	2,92	0,50	40	2,88	0,50	65
L1 ERAS Total									
08-10	2,89	0,51	13	2,97	0,37	21	2,94	0,42	34
11-12	2,93	0,34	12	2,71	0,60	19	2,79	0,52	31
Total	2,91	0,43	25	2,84	0,50	40	2,87	0,47	65

The overall mean scores for L1 recreational reading ($M = 2.86$; $SD = 0.56$) and L1 academic reading ($M = 2.88$; $SD = 0.5$) show that participants held similar attitudes in both components (academic and recreational reading). With respect to gender, the total means for males ($M = 2.84$; $SD = 0.5$) and females ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 0.43$) suggests that although female learners marginally outperformed males, the difference is negligible when age is not considered. The total mean scores of the participants in the 8-10 age range ($M = 2.94$; $SD = 0.42$) and the 11-12 age range ($M = 2.79$; $SD = 0.52$) shows that the younger group as a whole did slightly better than older students. Table 2 below reports the results of descriptive statistics for the reading attitudes toward the L2 as measured by the ERAS.

Table 2
L2 ERAS results

Age Range	Female			Male			Total		
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
L2 ERAS Recreational Reading									
08-10	2,75	0,74	13	2,98	0,55	21	2,89	0,63	34
11-12	2,61	0,80	12	2,84	0,60	19	2,75	0,68	31
Total	2,68	0,76	25	2,91	0,57	40	2,82	0,65	65
L2 ERAS Academic Reading									
08-10	2,75	0,74	13	2,84	0,58	21	2,81	0,64	34
11-12	2,59	0,66	12	2,74	0,64	19	2,68	0,64	31
Total	2,67	0,69	25	2,80	0,60	40	2,75	0,64	65
L2 ERAS Total									
08-10	2,75	0,73	13	2,91	0,55	21	2,85	0,62	34
11-12	2,60	0,72	12	2,79	0,60	19	2,72	0,65	31
Total	2,68	0,71	25	2,85	0,57	40	2,78	0,63	65

Participants displayed similar overall L2 ERAS scores in recreational reading ($M = 2.82$; $SD = 0.65$) and academic reading ($M = 2.75$; $SD = 0.64$), with the difference being in favor of the former. With respect to total gender differences, the total means for males ($M = 2.85$; $SD = 0.57$) is higher than the total mean for females ($M = 2.68$; $SD = 0.71$). Again, L2 reading attitude scores do not differ greatly between the 8-10 age range ($M = 2.85$; $SD = 0.62$) and the 11-12 age range ($M = 2.72$; $SD = 0.65$). In general, the means reveal that scores in both instruments yielded quite similar outcomes, with means suggesting that participants held rather positive views in both instruments across gender and age (means ranging between 2.7 and 3). The lowest mean is found in 11–12-year-old males' L1 recreational reading (2.58). The highest mean is found in 11–12-year-old female L1 recreational reading (3.12). Overall, these learners display somewhat positive attitudes towards reading across age and gender, with slightly higher means in the 8-10 age range.

4.2. Inferential statistics

4.2.1. Pearson correlations

A Pearson correlational matrix was run with the participants' scores for the L1 and L2 reading attitude components, together with their TOEFL Primary scores and age (Table 3 below).

Table 3

Correlations for the L1 and L2 reading attitude components

	Age	TOEFL	L1 Recreational Reading	L1 Academic Reading	L1 Total	L2 Recreational Reading	L2 Academic Reading	L2 Total
Age	1							
TOEFL	,131	1						
L1 Recreational Reading	-,150	,175	1					
L1 Academic Reading	-,237	,082	,597**	1				
L1 Total	-,214	,146	,905**	,882**	1			
L2 Recreational Reading	-,137	,045	,275*	,244*	,291*	1		

	Age	TOEFL	L1 Recreational Reading	L1 Academic Reading	L1 Total	L2 Recreational Reading	L2 Academic Reading	L2 Total
L2								
Academic Reading	-,065	,010	,301*	,274*	,322**	,914**	1	
L2 Total	-,104	,028	,294*	,265*	,313*	,979**	,978**	1

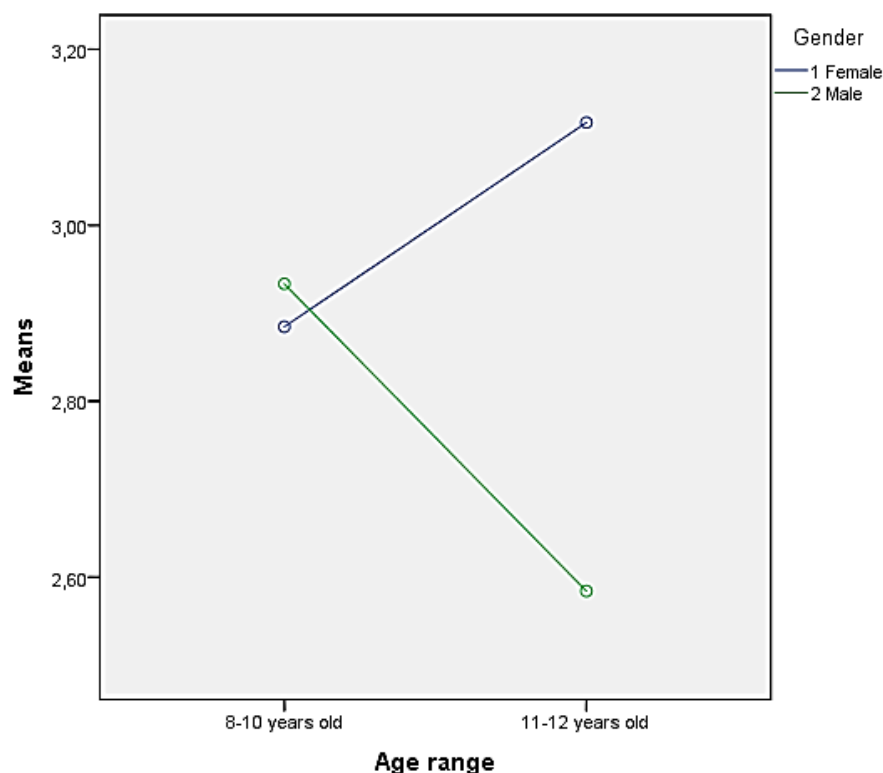
** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Results revealed that the relationship between recreational and academic reading attitudes toward the L1 and L2 is very strong, as the correlations range from $r = .60$ (L1 academic reading and L1 recreational reading) to $r = .98$ (L2 recreational reading and L2 total ERAS). Interestingly, the relationship between the components is stronger in the L2. For example, the relationship between L1 academic reading attitudes and L1 recreational reading attitudes is only moderate ($r = .60$), whilst the same relationship in the L2 is strong ($r = .91$). With respect to gender and age, the variables did not correlate with learners' reading attitudes in either language. Finally, a relationship between L1 and L2 reading attitudes was found in all the components, but the correlations were low/moderate, ranging from $r = .24$ (L1 Academic reading and L2 recreational reading) to $r = .32$ (L1 total ERAS and L2 academic reading).

4.2.2. Two-way ANOVA

A 2 (Gender) x 2 (Age range) ANOVA was run with the data to assess the effects of gender and age on reading attitudes toward L1 and L2. No main effects for age or gender were found across measures. An interaction effect was found for the L1 recreational reading component with a moderate effect size [$F(1, 61) = 4.513$, $p = .038$, $\eta^2p = .069$]. This showed that in the 11-12 age group, female participants ($M = 3.12$) significantly outperformed males ($M = 2.58$) in their attitudes towards L1 recreational reading. This difference did not reach significance in the 8-10 age group. Figure 2 below illustrates this difference:

Figure 2*Means for L1 Recreational Reading across age levels*

5. Discussion

5.1. What is the relationship between L1-L2 reading attitudes, age, and proficiency level of primary school EFL learners?

The first research question explored the relationship between L1 and L2 reading attitudes across age and L2 proficiency levels. First, descriptive statistics showed that learners did not display overall stronger attitudes toward reading in the L1. This is in opposition to Yamashita (2007), who reported that students have more positive feelings when reading in L1 than in L2 due to the perceived difficulty of the L2. One possible cause for the positive attitudes toward reading in L2 found in our study may be explained to some extent by the previous learning experiences of these learners. The motivational drive of a teacher can influence learners' attitudes and prompt interest in engaging with L2 texts. With respect to the correlations found, the relationship between academic and recreational reading attitudes was

stronger in L2 ($r = .91$) than in L1 ($r = .60$), which suggests that when these participants read in their L2 reading, their attitudes toward academic and recreational reading were more consistent than when they read in the L1. This may have influenced the strength of the low to moderate significant relationship found between L1 and L2 recreational reading ($r = .28$) and between L1 and L2 academic reading L1 and L2 ($r = .27$). Although these findings confirm to some extent the links between L1 and L2 reading attitudes identified by Yamashita (2004), they contrast the strong correlations found by Akbari et al. (2017). The absence of significant correlations between proficiency level or age and L1-L2 reading attitudes suggests that reading attitude did not change in relation to the level of English or the age of these participants. These findings are in line with Kush et al. (2005), who found that poor readers with positive attitudes maintained those attitudes despite experiencing difficulties with reading in their L1. Furthermore, Yamashita (2007) argued that L2 competence may not correlate with L1-L2 reading attitudes since the cognitive and affective aspects of reading belong to different domains. This contributes to the idea that reading attitudes are less likely to be related to cognitive factors such as L2 competence.

5.2. Research Question 2: Do age range and gender influence the L1 and L2 reading attitudes of these EFL learners?

The Two-way ANOVA run with the data showed no significant main effects for either age or gender. This implies that age and gender were not found to be factors that could impact L1 and L2 reading attitudes on their own. Several studies have shown that gender is an important factor when trying to explain reading attitudes, indicating that female learners generally have more positive attitudes toward reading than men (McKenna et al., 1995; Worrell et al., 2006). However, an interaction effect (Age*Gender) was found for the L1 recreational reading component, which means that 11-12-year-old female learners displayed significantly higher scores than 11-12-year-old males when asked questions about their attitudes towards L1 recreational reading. Older female teenagers displayed stronger attitudes toward recreational reading activities in the L1, which may imply that they are more willing to engage in reading for pleasure in their mother tongue than their male counterparts. This is in line with studies reporting more positive attitudes in females than males in the recreational component (Kolić-Vehovec et al., 2014; Logan & Johnston, 2009; Wood & Gabas, 2017). The finding also mirrors

McKenna et al.'s (1995) finding whereby the gap between girls and boys seems to widen with age and provides some support for the L1 reading report conducted in the country (Agencia de calidad de la Educación, 2016). However, a single interaction showing a significant difference between the attitudes reported by females and males across age levels and languages cannot be taken as evidence for the overall superiority of female learners in generating attitudes toward reading, as has been reported in other studies such as McKenna et al. (2012), who found that the L1 attitudes of women were more positive than those of men toward academic reading and recreational reading.

Overall, the findings reported in the present study reveal that there is a low to moderate relationship between reading attitudes in L1 and L2, but there is no significant relationship between those attitudes and age and L2 proficiency across gender. However, an interaction effect between gender and age was found for the L1 recreational reading component, which suggests that older female learners may display stronger reading attitudes toward reading for pleasure in their mother tongue. As observed by Yamashita (2004), the transfer of the L1 to L2 reading occurs not only in the cognitive domain (reading skills and strategies) but also in the affective domain (attitudes influenced by comfort and anxiety). In the present study, this transfer of the affective domain of reading was not influenced by L2 competence and was kept even if learners did not have a good level of English.

6. Conclusion

The present study sought to explore the reading attitudes of students in their L1 and L2 and assess how variables such as age, gender, and proficiency level would impact those attitudes with respect to recreational and academic components. Main findings revealed that age and L2 proficiency did not correlate with either L1 or L2 reading attitude components, L1 and L2 reading attitudes correlated weakly, students displayed similar attitudes toward L1 and L2 reading despite L2 proficiency level, and older female learners displayed stronger attitudes toward recreational aspects of L1 reading. The study has taken a further step towards understanding L1 and L2 reading attitudes in a specific EFL learning setting and has underscored the importance of affective components to understand the attitudes of EFL learners towards reading. Although these findings advance our understanding of L1 and L2 reading attitudes in the selected context, a limitation

caused by SARS-CoV-2 restrictions changed school attendance conditions, which may have affected the perceptions and attitudes of these participants at the time of instrument administration. In addition, these restrictions somewhat reduced the number of participants originally selected for the study. More significant differences between groups may have surfaced with a higher number of participants. The scope of the analysis was also dictated by contingency, as face-to-face classroom access would have allowed the researchers to evaluate specific aspects of proficiency and reading attitude after learners are exposed to L1 and L2 texts. Further studies could adopt an experimental design to assess changes in reading attitudes and proficiency after such intervention is carried out. Semi-structured interviews could also help document the changes in attitude toward L1-L2 reading as high school learners complete their school year.

6.1. Implications for pedagogy

Since there is a relationship between the affective domain of L1 and L2 reading attitudes, it is likely that the positive feeling towards L2 reading originates, at least to some extent, from their positive attitude towards L1 reading. Therefore, EFL teachers should seek to understand the reading attitudes of their students in both L1 and L2. If the contents and objectives of L1 reading courses are integrated with L2 courses by means of joint activities that nurture reading, learners will likely increase their self-efficacy toward reading in recreational and academic contexts. Reading comprehension difficulties in adolescents are generally influenced by their attitudes towards reading. If older female learners outperform males in their L1 reading attitudes, males could be prompted to develop positive feelings toward reading and learning by means of more interesting texts that can increase engagement (Cancino, 2021). As the present study has suggested, reading attitudes can be nurtured even before L2 proficiency is achieved. Positive feelings towards reading in the L1 will likely affect L2 reading attitudes more strongly than the L2 proficiency or the age of learners.

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Appendix

Translated items in the ERAS for L2 reading, adapted from McKenna and Kear (1990).

1. ¿Cómo te sentirías al leer un libro en inglés en un sábado lluvioso?
1. How would you feel reading a book in English on a rainy Saturday?
2. ¿Cómo te sentirías al leer un libro en inglés en la escuela durante tu tiempo libre?
2. How would you feel reading a book in English at school during your free time?
3. ¿Cómo te sientes al leer en inglés por diversión en casa?
3. How do you feel about reading English for fun at home?
4. ¿Cómo te sentirías al recibir un libro en inglés como regalo?
4. How would you feel about receiving a book in English as a gift?
5. ¿Cómo te sientes al dedicar tu tiempo libre a leer un libro en inglés?
5. How do you feel about spending your free time reading a book in English?
6. ¿Qué te parece el empezar a leer un nuevo libro en inglés?
6. How do you feel about starting to read a new book in English?
7. ¿Qué te parece leer en inglés durante las vacaciones de verano?
7. How do you feel about reading in English during the summer holidays?
8. ¿Qué te parece leer en inglés en lugar de jugar?
8. How do you feel about reading in English instead of playing games?
9. ¿Qué te parece ir a comprar un libro en inglés?
9. How do you feel about shopping for a book in English?
10. ¿Qué te parece leer diferentes tipos de libros en inglés?
10. How do you feel about reading different types of books in English?
11. ¿Cómo te sientes cuando el profesor te hace preguntas sobre lo que lees en inglés?
11. How do you feel when the teacher asks you questions about what you read in

English?

12. ¿Cómo te sientes al completar actividades de lectura en inglés o guías de inglés?

12. How do you feel about completing reading activities in English or English guides?

13. ¿Cómo te sientes al leer en inglés en la escuela?

13. How do you feel about reading in English at school?

14. ¿Cómo te sientes al leer los libros en inglés que te entrega el profesor en la clase de inglés?

14. How do you feel about reading the books in English that the teacher gives you in English class?

15. ¿Cómo te sientes al aprender de un libro en inglés?

15. How do you feel about learning from a book in English?

16. ¿Cómo te sientes cuando llega el momento de leer silenciosamente en clase de inglés?

16. How do you feel when it comes time to read silently in English class?

17. ¿Qué te parecen las historias en inglés que lees en la clase de inglés?

17. How do you like the stories in English that you read in English class?

18. ¿Cómo te sientes cuando lees en voz alta en clase de inglés?

18. How do you feel when you read aloud in English class?

19. ¿Cómo te sientes al utilizar un diccionario en inglés?

19. How do you feel about using an English dictionary?

20. ¿Qué te parece el realizar una prueba de lectura en la asignatura de inglés?

20. What do you think of taking a reading test in the English subject?