

THE EFFECT OF EXTENSIVE READING ON VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT IN EFL LEARNERS IN DEHDASHT LANGUAGE INSTITUTE

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Extensive reading, ER, can be considered as a good learning technique to improve learners' vocabulary knowledge. ER is a type of reading instruction program used in ESL or EFL settings, as an effective means of vocabulary development. The subjects participated in this study included were 40 upper-intermediate and 40 lower-intermediate learners drawn from a population through a proficiency test to see if ER helps them improve their vocabulary knowledge at the above-stated levels. To this end, at each level an experimental and a control group (EG and CG) were formed each of which comprised 20 subjects randomly selected and assigned. All the conditions especially teaching materials were kept equal and fixed at each level, except for the EG the subjects were given five extra short stories to read outside for ten weeks. The results showed that EG at both levels indicated improvement in their vocabulary learning after the experiment.

Keywords: Extensive Reading, Reading, Vocabulary improvement

As an element linking the four language skills in EFL, vocabulary plays the most significant role in foreign language learning. To communicate well in a foreign language, students should acquire an adequate number of words and should know how to use them accurately and appropriately.

Even though students realize the importance of vocabulary when learning language, most Iranian EFL learners learn vocabulary passively due to several factors. First, they consider the teacher's techniques such as explanation for meaning or definition, pronunciation, spelling and grammatical functions boring. In this scenario, language learners have nothing to do in a vocabulary learning section but to listen to their teacher. Second, students only think of vocabulary learning as knowing the primary meaning of new words.

Therefore, they ignore all other functions of the words. Third, students usually only acquire new vocabulary through contextualized new words in their textbooks or when given by teachers during classroom lessons. For example, learners find many new words in a text and then ask the teacher to explain the meanings and usages. Fourth, many Iranian EFL learners do not want to take risks in applying what they have learnt. Students may recognize a word in a written or spoken form and think that they already "know the word", but they may not be able to use that word properly in different contexts or pronounce it correctly.

It is clear that comprehension is one of the most fundamental reasons for reading, and vocabulary, in turn, plays significant part in comprehension. Vocabulary clearly makes a critical contribution to understanding what has been read. The reader must apply reading comprehension strategies as a way to be sure that what is being read matches their expectations and builds on their growing body of knowledge that is being stored for immediate or future reference.

One important way to develop vocabulary knowledge is through extensive reading. Students by reading extensively will be exposed to different new scope of vocabulary which is necessary in reading comprehension. Extensive reading (ER) is an important aspect of any English as a foreign/second language reading program. Bell (2001) states that ER is a type of reading instruction program that has been used in ESL or EFL settings, as an effective means of developing reading fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary development.

Day and Bamford (2004) argue strongly for including extensive reading in the L2/FL curriculum. There is new piece of evidence that extensive reading can have a significant impact on learners' L2/FL development. Not only can extensive reading improve reading ability, it can also enhance learners' overall language proficiency (e.g., spelling, grammar, vocabulary, and writing). In addition, extensive reading within language is in line with current principles for second and foreign language pedagogy.

Review of L literature

Several studies have been done in the area of extensive reading and vocabulary development. As Schmitt (2000) holds one of the most important reasons for supporting ER is that many teachers believe that intensive reading alone will not produce good, fluent readers. Of course, a number of experimental and quasi-experimental studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of extensive reading and have provided support for the use of extensive reading in ESL and EFL classroom: the gain in motivation and attitude are equally impressive. Study after study shows how attitude changed toward reading in English and how the students became eager readers. Nishino (2007) reported that the students develop "very positive attitudes toward books as they raise their literacy level in English". Besides, Bell (2001) adds that extensive reading leads to increasing reading rate and general language proficiency. Writing proficiency is also considerably impacted by reading extensively. This includes both primary students (Asraf & Ahmad, 2003) and university students.

The research convincingly shows that extensive reading increases vocabulary knowledge. It is not surprising that it helps students become better readers. Research in both L1 and L2 shows that we learn to read by reading. The more our students read, the better reader they would become. An integral part of this is learning new vocabulary. One of the primary ways in which vocabulary is learned is through reading. Learners encounter the same words over and over again in context, which result in vocabulary learning (Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 2005). While Read (2000) emphasizes the role of large vocabulary knowledge in reading comprehension and its relationship with fluency, Richards and Renandya (2002) argue strongly for including extensive reading in the second or foreign language curriculum. There is now compelling evidence that extensive reading can have significant impact on learners' second or foreign language development.

Nassaji (2006) examined the particular role learners' depth of vocabulary knowledge plays in lexical inference. The result indicated that those who had stronger depth of vocabulary knowledge used certain types of strategies more efficiently than those who had weaker depth of vocabulary knowledge. This finding supports the result of Frantzen's (2003) study which showed that students' vocabulary knowledge was the most important factor affecting L2 readers' abilities to make use of context clues. Teachers and researchers are increasingly aware of the importance of reading in the development of L2 proficiency and the role reading plays in expanding vocabulary knowledge. "Reading is important because comparison of many studies shows that written texts are richer in lexis than spoken ones" (Nation, 2001). Most L2/FL learners are simply not exposed to enough L2 print (through reading) to develop fluent processing, nor do they have enough exposure to building a large recognition vocabulary. These concerns have promoted many ESL/EFL programs to include extensive reading components as a supplement to regular language classes. Extensive reading is defined as reading that exposes learners to large quantities of material within their linguistic competence. According to Day and Bamford (2002), the main goal of extensive reading is developing reading fluency; that is, rapid access to know L2/FL vocabulary is seen as an important additional benefit. They also emphasize that extensive reading promotes reading fluency and increase reading speed. As students are assigned to read a large amount of comprehensive materials, speed becomes important as it facilitates the enjoyment and comprehension of materials.

Nation (2001) claimed that when learners read, they not only learn new words and enrich their known ones, but they can also improve their syntactic knowledge. To him, the aim of extensive reading is to read, or listen to, massive amount of comprehensible language within one's comfort zone with the aim of being to build fluency. However, Day and Bamford (2004) argue strongly for including extensive reading in the L2/FL curriculum. There is new evidence that extensive reading can have a significant impact on learners' L2/FL development. Finally, "extensive reading is the only way in which learners can get access to language at their own comfort zone, read something they want to read, at the pace they feel comfortable with, which will allow them to meet the language enough time to pick up a sense of how the language fits together and to consolidate what they know" (Bell, 2001).

To Loucky (2003) wider extensive reading is helpful for broadening exposure to the target language meanings and forms, while intensive reading serves to deepen cognitive processing through learning and practicing specific lexical and reading comprehension. Accordingly the main two question of this study can be stated as follows:

1. Does extensive reading enhance vocabulary learning?
2. Does extensive reading enhance positive attitudes toward reading?

From these questions the following hypotheses were found:

1. There is no significant difference in vocabulary learning between the control group and the experimental group under the treatment through extensive reading in upper-intermediate level.
2. There is no significant difference in vocabulary learning between the control group and the experimental group under the treatment through extensive reading in lower-intermediate level.

Method

Participants

Subjects of this study were 80 EFL learners at six language institutes in Dehdasht, Kohgiluyeh & Booyerahmad Province, Iran. All of these learners were enrolled in the fall semester (school year of 2009-2010) and all of them were male learners, between ages 17-27. They were selected from 120 language learners. In the selection of them a language proficiency test was used. After that 40 upper-intermediate and 40 lower-intermediate learners were selected on the basis of their scores in proficiency test. Then, each of these levels was randomly divided into two groups: experimental and control, which each group consisting of an equal number of subjects. For each level, the control group was composed of 20 learners, while the experimental group, for each level, was consisted of 20 learners.

Instruments and Materials

In order to collect the data different instruments was used in this study. First of all, a Michigan test of English proficiency was used to identify learners' level of language proficiency: upper-intermediate and lower-intermediate. The second instrument was a post-test which used to gather data about the student's improvement in vocabulary knowledge in each level after the experiment. The third one was students' profile of experimental groups which was provided before the experiment. A semi-structured interview as a fourth instrument, which was the same for both levels, was used to collect the students' overall attitudes about the extensive reading activities concerning the vocabulary improvement. The students in experimental groups were asked questions as to their attitudes of vocabulary learning as well as their own attitudes towards reading.

In addition to students' textbooks in Language Institutes, *Interchange 1* for lower-intermediate and *Interchange 2* for upper-intermediate, five short stories were given to upper-intermediate and five short stories were given to lower-intermediate learners in the experimental groups as the materials of this study.

Procedure

After taking the administrative procedures to get the required permission, 120 EFL learners were participated in a proficiency test, a Michigan test of English proficiency (2001). The main aim was to identify learners' proficiency level in English. Therefore, 80 learners were selected as the participants of this study. In order to determine upper and lower intermediate learners, those who took one SD above the mean were selected as upper-intermediate and those who took one SD below the mean were determined as lower-intermediate. After that, the learners in each level were divided into two groups: upper-intermediate and lower-intermediate ones, each level was comprised of 40 EFL learners. Then the learners at each level were randomly divided into experimental and control groups each of which was comprised of 20 learners. On the first day of class, students of the experimental groups were informed of the importance of the extensive reading and the vocabulary knowledge and their vital importance in language learning. Therefore, to investigate the effect of extensive reading on vocabulary learning ten short stories, five for upper-intermediate and five for lower-intermediate, were given to learners in experimental groups, while learners of both experimental

and control groups, at each level received the same reading instruction appropriate to their levels. Learners of experimental groups read one story per two weeks. After finishing each story, learners in experimental groups were required to give a summary of the story and to write a paragraph and a sentence contextualizing a newly learned word. This study was conducted for ten weeks from November 2009 to January 2010. At the end of the experiment, a post-test was given to learners in both control and experimental groups in two levels to distinguish the effect of extensive reading on the improvement of vocabulary knowledge.

According to the research questions, the present study is divided into two parts: quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative part includes one major concern: the impact of extensive reading on the students' vocabulary recognition. Therefore, a vocabulary test was used to collect data. The qualitative part deals with the study of the students' attitudes towards reading. The instruments used in data gathering were a questionnaire with four choices, and the semi-structured interviews.

In terms of evaluating the students' vocabulary recognition, the vocabulary recognition test comprised 50 questions with four multiple-choice options was used. To investigate the students' attitudes toward reading, a questionnaire with four choices and the semi-structured interviews were used. The questionnaire allowed the subjects to reflect on their thinking metacognitively and express their own attitudes. The other instrument used in the study was the semi-structured interview to elicit their attitude on the treatment received by them. In effect, 6 students were interviewed at the end of the experiment to have access to their in-depth attitudes on their extensive reading experience and how their vocabulary learning improved, as a self-assertion procedure.

Data Analysis

In the quantitative analysis, the data collected from the subjects' performance on the post-test are analyzed in terms of mean (\bar{X}), standard error of measurement (SEM), standard deviation (SD), t-test, and a two-way ANOVA using the Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS) program. Regarding the qualitative analysis, the data collected through a questionnaire concerning the values of reading was analyzed in terms of the percentage and presented.

The data collected from the semi-structured interviews was transcribed, coded and checked with cooperation of an expert to verify the data about learners' attitudes towards learning with an inter-rater reliability of 0.94.

Results and Discussion

This part shows the results of the quantitative and qualitative analysis. The first part of the analysis deals with data collected from the ten-week experiment with the EFL learners. The second part of the analysis deals with the effects of the extensive reading program on the students' attitudes towards extensive reading.

Results of the Quantitative Analysis

Table 1 shows the vocabulary posttest scores of the upper-intermediate learners between the experimental and control groups. The mean of the posttest scores of the experimental group was 50.8, while that of the control group was 44.2. The t-value for the vocabulary posttest scores between the experimental and control group was 5.43. The significant difference between the vocabulary posttest scores of the control and experimental groups was at the significance level of 0.05. This means that there was found a significant difference between the experimental and control group at $p < .05$. The critical value for t at the 0.05 level of significance is 2.021. Since the t-value calculated for the difference between the experimental and control groups was 5.43 and that value is greater than the critical value at 0.05, which means that there is a statistically significant difference between these two groups at $p < .05$. In the other words, this result means that the experimental group' mean was significantly higher than the control group's mean scores. As it was mentioned before in the first hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the experimental and the control group of upper-intermediate level in vocabulary learning; therefore, based on these results this hypothesis was rejected. So, learners in the experimental group, those who read the story, knew significantly more vocabulary than those learners, control group, who hadn't read the story.

Table 1. Results of t-test between Experimental and Control group of Upper-intermediate level

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	df	p
Experimental	20	50.8	2.37	5.43	38	.001
Control	20	44.2	4.88			

* $P=0.001 < .05$

Table 2 shows the vocabulary posttest scores of the upper-intermediate learners between the experimental and control groups. The mean of the posttest scores of the experimental group was 47.58, whereas that of the control group was 42.9. The t-value for the vocabulary posttest scores between the experimental and control group was 3.63. The significant difference between the vocabulary posttest scores of the control and experimental groups was at the level of 0.05. This means that there was found a significant difference between the experimental and control group at $p < .05$. The critical value for t at the 0.05 level of significance is 2.021. Since the t-value calculated for the difference between the experimental and control groups was 5.43, and that value is greater than the critical value at .05 which means that there was found a significant difference between these two groups at $p < .05$. In the other words, this result means that the experimental group' mean was significantly higher than the control group's mean scores. This statistical difference seems to be accounted for the treatment applied to the experiment, the extensive reading method as the independent variable. Based on this result, the second hypothesis which was stated that there is no significant difference between the experimental and control group in vocabulary learning of lower-intermediate learners was rejected. According to this data, learners in the experimental group learnt more vocabulary than that of the control group.

Table 2. Results of *t*-test between Experimental and Control group of Lower-intermediate level

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	df	p
Experimental	20	47.85	4.55	3.63	38	.001
Control	20	42.9	4.05			

* $P=0.001 < .05$

Peripheral findings

As the data in table 3 indicate, there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups of learners, Experimental and Control, regardless of their proficiency levels ($F=40.01$, $P=0.001$). Meanwhile, it was found from the same data that there is a statistically significant difference between the two proficiency levels, Lower-intermediate and Upper-intermediate, regardless of groups, Experiment and Control ($F=5.023$, $P=0.001$). Of course, the interaction between the pooled proficiency levels, Lower-intermediate and Upper-intermediate, and the pooled groups, Pooled Experimental groups and Pooled Control groups, showed no significant difference ($F=0.818$, $P=0.369$).

Table 3. Results of One-Way ANOVA test on the Experimental and Control groups of both Upper and Lower- intermediate levels

Source	SS	df	MS	F	P
Group	667.01	1	667.01	40.01	.001
Level	90.31	1	90.31	5.41	.023
Group*Level	13.61	1	13.61	.817	.369

 $P < .0$

Results of Qualitative Data Analysis

This section presents the qualitative data analysis of the students' attitudes on extensive reading in semi-structured interview and its comparison with students' profile before the experiment.

The data collected from EFL learners' interview at the end of the program and its comparison with learners' profile before the experiment showed that they were agreed that extensive reading enhanced their vocabulary knowledge and it also changed their attitudes toward reading in a positive way. They enjoyed reading and because of its benefits they recommended it to their friends. Therefore, these results indicated that extensive reading could enhance positive attitudes toward reading.

Discussion

4.6.1 In response to research question 1: Does extensive reading enhance vocabulary learning? The data which was collected from experimental and control groups of upper-intermediate level showed that the mean of the experimental group was 50.8 while that of control was 44.2. The t-value for these groups was 5.43 and the significant difference was at the level of 0.05. For the experimental and control groups of lower intermediate level, it showed that the mean for the experimental group was 47.85 and that control group was 42.9 and the t-value was 3.63. The significant difference was at the level of 0.05. So, these results showed that extensive reading could improve vocabulary learning.

The results of the current research are in line with Gatbonton and Segalowitz (2005); Pigada and Schmitt (2006), regarding the contribution of the extensive reading to increasing reading comprehension and vocabulary learning. Moreover, it was shown that the extensive reading strategy could lead to substantial vocabulary learning and learners' development in spelling and vocabulary knowledge.

4.6.2 In response to the research question 2: Does extensive reading enhance positive attitude towards extensive reading? The data collected from EFL learners' interview at the end of the program and its comparison with learners' profile before the experiment showed that they agreed that extensive reading increased their vocabulary knowledge and it also changed their attitudes toward reading in a positive way. They enjoyed reading and because of its benefits they recommended it to their friends. Therefore, these results indicated that extensive reading could enhance positive attitudes toward reading.

Furthermore, the findings of the present study are supportive of those of the following: extensive reading has also been reported to enhance learners' affective domain, such as motivation and attitude to read (Lai, 1993). In Susser and Robb's (1990) study, the Attitude Questionnaire between the Extensive group and the Skills group it was shown that the Extensive group felt their homework to be of more interest, and students could enjoy studying in English when they had chosen the materials which were of particular interest to them.

Conclusions

The present study was conducted to investigate the effect of extensive reading on the students' vocabulary learning and positive attitudes toward reading. The results of the research can be summarized as follows.

1. The result of the study shows that there was a significant difference in vocabulary learning at the level of 0.05 ($p < .05$) between the experimental and control groups relevant to the upper-intermediate proficiency level. In the case of the lower intermediate level, there was a significant difference in vocabulary learning at the level of .05 ($p < .05$) between the experimental group and the control group. In other words, the students in the experimental group of each level could recognize the meaning of vocabulary far better than those in the control group at each level. These findings are in line with the previous research studies by Hafiz and Tudor (1989) and Raemer (1996) as reviewed in the literature review. The significant difference is due to the impact of the extensive reading program because the experimental group was given more reading practices for a period of ten weeks, while the control group at each level only received the conventional reading lesson. The reason for this might be that the readers in the experimental groups had more

reading practices than those of the control groups. Consequently, it can be concluded that the students had increased their vocabulary knowledge through extensive reading while they were participating in the extensive reading program for ten weeks. Nishino (2007) concluded from their studies that extensive reading, unaccompanied by any analytic study or practice can provide second or foreign language learners with the vocabulary necessary for reading. Hsueh-chao and Nation (2000) also concluded that implicit vocabulary learning could occur through extensive reading. Following the models in the literature, during the extensive reading program in this experiment, the students in the experimental group at each level were exposed to the wide range of vocabulary in the reading materials they read. That is why Nation (1997) and Day and Bamford (2002) recommended that for extensive reading program to be effective, the students have to do large amount of reading. That is, the more they read, the better reader they become proficient in reading. While reading, the students on experimental groups learnt new vocabulary from guessing meaning from the context and by using the dictionary. According to Laufer (2003) and Helgesen (1997), to be able to guess meaning from a given context, the reader need to know more vocabulary at least 95% of the text to be able to infer the meaning of the new words and this is practicable via reading extensively. Therefore, since the experimental group at each level has higher language proficiency in terms of reading comprehension and lexica knowledge in the posttest, it can be concluded that they could infer meaning of the new words better than the control groups.

Since the extensive reading materials consisted of a wide range of short stories, the students learnt a wide range of vocabulary. The students could recognize the meaning of the learnt vocabulary well when they came across the new vocabulary many times in the stories. Moreover, every time a word was repeated and this helped them fix the meaning of vocabulary in their mind. Above all, they also learnt the use of vocabulary in context. According to Pigada and Schmitt (2006), as the reader come across new words in appropriate extensive reading materials, the reader can infer the context-based meaning provided by the text, which are not generally found in dictionaries such as connotation, collocations and referential meaning. So, when a word is repeated, it is in a slightly difficult context. Therefore, the repetition of words in the reading materials helps the readers of experimental group at each level develop a deeper and more accurate understanding of word meaning and foster vocabulary learning.

Even though there were significant differences in vocabulary learning between the experimental group and the control group at each level, the mean of the posttest scores of vocabulary learning were slightly different. This might be that the amount of extensive reading was not large enough. The students at the experimental group of each level only read five books with the length between 1050 to 2300 headwords per two weeks. This amount of reading may not be enough to help improve higher degree of vocabulary learning among the readers in the experimental groups. Nation (1997) concludes that the teacher needs to be serious about extensive reading program to ensure that the students do a large amount of reading. The benefits of extensive reading do not come in a short term.

2. Regarding the students' attitudes toward extensive reading, the analysis of semi-structured interview showed that the students had positive attitude towards extensive reading in terms of reading enjoyment and vocabulary knowledge improvement. Reasons for the positive attitude of the students result from various factors. First, the reading materials were appropriated for their level of language proficiency as there were not many

new words in the story, so the students could read without having much problem in understanding the meaning of the word. With reference to the students' interview, the positive attitude of the students could result from the benefits of extensive reading, which the students had gained during the experiment and one of the strong feedbacks received from the students was that extensive reading was an interesting learning activity. Therefore, it enhanced their reading attitude. One of the students reported that he did not like reading but after reading the short stories, he wanted to read more books because it was exciting for him to understand the end of the stories. The second factor that could enhance good attitude toward reading was that the student had increased their vocabulary through extensive reading. Thus the development of vocabulary knowledge helped the students to read and understand better. The students reported that they had started to find out more books to read. Consequently, the benefits gained from extensive reading could enhance positive attitude toward reading. Richards, Platt, and Platt (1999) report that extensive reading is "intended to develop good reading habits, to build up knowledge of vocabulary and structure, and to encourage a liking for reading and make positive attitudes towards extensive reading."

In addition to positive attitude, the students also reported the enhancement of vocabulary learning from extensive reading as the stories were not difficult and there were not many difficult words in the stories. So, they could learn more vocabulary from their reading. Gatbonton and Segalowitz (2005) conclude from his study that the readers could acquire implicit vocabulary gain from extensive reading both quantitatively and qualitatively as well as improve their attitudes toward reading. One of the students reported when he came across the new words many times in the story, he began to understand the meaning of the new words better than before. As a result, the students could understand better and could gain more reading confidence from their interviews. Such students reported that they had started to find out more books to read. Therefore, it may be concluded that extensive reading gives students a chance to follow up more intensive classroom work in order to develop their vocabulary knowledge. Moreover, some of the students in the interview stated that because they enjoyed extensive reading and their language has been improved, so they decided to read more reading materials for pleasure. As Krashen (2004) concludes, learners acquire language through extensive reading. According to him, learners who do free voluntary reading make better progress in reading comprehension and vocabulary development. He strongly believes that learners who read for pleasure are better readers, better writers and have more grammatical competence. In this term, the results of the current study are supportive of Krashen's views (2004) on the effect of reading extensively.

Therefore, it may be concluded that extensive reading program can be a positive factor to develop EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge, attitudes towards reading, and other language skills.

Pedagogical Implications

Reading is one of the four language skills that second or foreign language learners should acquire in their language learning process. The ability to read is seen as the most stable and durable for the second or foreign language skills (Rivers, 1981). However, the importance of reading is not reflected in the teaching curriculum in Iran. Iranian EFL learners are frequently observed not to put their noses to work seriously to get involved with reading comprehension their courses. Most Iranian EFL learners see English as an obligatory part of curriculum. Therefore, they do their best to prepare themselves to pass the tests, but most of the students are not well- motivated to read in foreign language because they don't think they will ever use it after their graduation. So, the importance of reading is so axiomatic that Davies (1995) said: "every day, with the wide available of audiovisual devices and materials, reading remains the major avenue of learning."

Therefore, the results of the present study revealed the effectiveness of reading, especially extensive reading, on vocabulary development, attitudes, and other language skills. According to the results of this research, the researcher does not propose to replace the current curriculum with extensive reading. Rather, extensive reading should be an addition to the curriculum, providing the students with a rich input of natural language by which most textbooks are not able to provide them with. However, the current curriculum does not pay the way for the students to master the language well. It is felt that extensive reading, in addition to the current curriculum will allow students to acquire fuller knowledge of the foreign language. Furthermore, there should focus more on extensive reading because it can prepare students for the examination less painfully.

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