

THE EFFECTS OF READING FOR PLEASURE ON EFL STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION

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ABSTRACT

Reading is one of the most significant skills, especially for EFL student. These days, many students do not have the reading skills needed to do effective work in their crosses. In this regard, pleasure reading helps students to communicate, listen, and most importantly, to express themselves freely and moreover, it allows them to acquire a specific language skill. This is why reading for pleasure is very important. This paper explores the importance and the impact of reading for pleasure on reading comprehension. This experimental study was conducted in a language institute with 21 English EFL students. The experimental group was given texts for their selection on various topics which they are interested in, while the control group has read texts which were in their book. The duration of the experiment was 15 sessions (5 weeks). Pre-test and post-test were implemented to identify the degree of improvement of the students' reading comprehension skill. Finally, the experimental group showed better improvement of comprehension skill.

Keywords: language acquisition, pleasure reading, reading comprehension

Introduction

As Floris & Dvina (2015) explain in their study, the importance of reading in foreign language acquisition is obvious. Reading is a source of information, it clears up inaccurate points, it is a solution of problems, and it is a target of language acquisition, culture awareness and academic success. Krashen states that "spending much time on reading is more fruitful and beneficial than the time is spent on teaching vocabulary" (2004). As he mentioned in his book, spending time on reading, motivates learners more than spending time on learning the words by rote memorization.

Even in the native language the learners who read in extensive mode have a richer vocabulary, use words more accurately in accordance with their meaning shades, collocation ability and register. If a student does not purposefully revise the studied words in order to maintain them in the long term memory is spending time on memorization words may be in vain. This can be avoided by reading regularly and in large amounts. In the time of reading, students randomly encounter the words that they have studied in the text. Reading regularly allows to maintain the words in the long-term memory. While coming across and familiar vocabulary in the reading text, the students has to find out their meaning, either by application of meaning elicitation or with the help of a dictionary.

Thus, reading both supports the acquisition of new vocabulary and helps retain obviously learned vocabulary. Reading for pleasure can provide students the language input which they need for further enhancement because through extensive reading, students are constantly exposed to foreign language. Those learners who are always engaged in the target language applications stand a better chance of learning. Furthermore, extensive reading enhances the overall competence of students. When students achieve overall competence, their ability to use the language skills advance too. language learning is a hard task, foreign language learners cannot easily develop their language skills and unless they are constantly involved in the learning process. In addition, pleasure reading enables students to be engaged in the learning process which takes place subconsciously without stress or special effort and it is a main point in the process of language learning which can help them enhance their language proficiency.

Because extensive reading is stress-free and also it has cognitive value, it can increase motivation of learners to master the target language. When students read more and begin to comprehend and learn, their attitude towards foreign language learning will become more positive as well. They will have self-confidence to accomplish more. In addition, pleasure reading prepare a learning environment for students where they can learn the target language in a natural way. Generally, students are engaged in reading not because they have to but because they satisfy the need in getting information and simply and having a good time.

Review of literature

Krashen (1989) believed that reading alone will increase encounters with new words, supplying learning occasions by inference. The learners are open to unfamiliar words especially contexts, which will allow the learner to infer the

meaning and formulate those words' definitions. As Dubin & Olsain (1977) believed, the advantages of reading for pleasure are:

- Improving an ability to gain pleasure and also satisfaction from reading.
- Students encounter the language in a less structured way and more natural way
- Impacting on other language skills such as writing and speaking.
- Assisting the learners in the development of language skills (listening, writing, and speaking), which make them to be successful in their EFL examinations.

Reading for pleasure can be regarded as extensive reading, extensive reading is mostly conducted outside the classroom. It is implanted for pleasure, and comprehension is checked by summaries. Both extensive and intensive reading enhance language skills. The difference is how they do it. Reading for pleasure wants to develop reading fluency rather than detailed comprehension, so language materials used for it may contain unfamiliar words, but not more than one or two such words per page, to let the students enjoy the process of reading instead of turning it into a hard task.

In extensive reading, because students are supposed to read for general understanding, easy and enjoyable texts (such as sports reports, humorous and adventure stories, etc.) are preferred in extensive reading. Generally, pleasure reading is conducted for pleasure, therefore, the more students read, the more fluency they gain. If students read a lot, their understanding of convention and vocabulary and grammar is acquired, not learnt, in other words, it becomes part of them.

Nishino (2007) reported that learners' literacy level in English improved as a result of the positive attitudes that they enhanced toward reading. Besides, Bell (2001) added that extensive reading causes increasing reading rate and general language proficiency.

Also, Elley (1991) had some studies referred to as the 'Book Flood' studies. These studies showed enhancement in second language acquisition. He proposed five reasons why reading extensively results in development in proficiency. As he believed, extensive reading includes extensive input of meaningful prints giving rise to substantial incidental language input. Elley noticed that the reader focuses more on meaning rather than on form, accordingly, coming to acquire a high intrinsic motivation if the content interests him.

Moreover, Saragi et al. (1978) have also had research on the benefits of reading in acquiring second language. They concluded that extensive reading results in a substantial increase in the vocabulary of the students which is acquired by grasping the meanings of words in context. They emphasize that extensive reading is essential for increasing students' repertoire of vocabulary in context, which cannot be acquired even by referring to the dictionary. Classroom activities do not provide a wide enough scope for learning of vocabulary in context. They believed that unless the student is immersed in an English speaking environment, he/she has to read extensively to learn a usable level of vocabulary in context.

Contrarily, in intensive reading, using Krashen's terms, language learning or consciously working on the language elements through rules, explanations and drills takes place. The main aim of intensive reading is to enhance language skills through reading, hence, students are supposed to read texts involving challenging language items.

Researches demonstrate the value of both intensive and extensive reading, especially highlighting the value of extensive reading. Guo (2012) study administered with 50 freshman EFL students in Taiwan proved the positive relationships between extensive reading and vocabulary.

A one-yearlong research with 89 Japanese university students whose major was human science was conducted by Nakanishi and Ueda (2011). It illustrated a considerable improvement in reading comprehension skills as result of extensive reading intervention.

Mukundan, Mahvelati & Nimehchisalem (2012) realized that a four-week program of intensive reading aided 30 16-year-old Malaysian students having problems with English language learning considerably enhanced their English skills (mean results grew from 49.5 to 79.17).

Methodology

In this experimental research, a quantitative research design was implemented with control and experimental groups, to find out the influence of reading for pleasure on EFL student’s reading Comprehension. Experimental and control groups were chosen from Arman Gerayan language institute. The duration of the experiment was 15 sessions (5 weeks). During that time, the students in experimental group were doing reading for pleasure, while the other students who were in the control group did not do any reading for pleasure, they just had usual intensive reading. Both groups were given a pre-test and post-test in order to determine the level of enhancements of their reading comprehension skills. The tests involved reading comprehension questions and they were of the same format and difficulty level. Before the experiment, students’ interest area was investigated via direct talk to them. Regarding the language level and the interests of students, the materials were selected, like detective short stories, pop-culture, pets, etc. During the experiment, the participants of experimental group had this ability to choose any topics they want, so that the reading they did was not only extensive, but also pleasurable.

Participants

Totally 21 English Philology freshmen students participated in this experiment. Participation was on a volunteer basis. participants were placed to the experimental and control group randomly, almost 10 students in each group. Students’ age was between 18 to 20 years old.

Procedure

At the beginning of the semester, both experimental and control groups were given a reading pre-test. After pre-test, the advantages of reading for pleasure and the focus of the project were explained to the students of experimental group. In the class no reading occurred, only discussions of the read materials were held and the extensive reading was done out of class.

In the control group, participants were just studying the texts which are in the reading book called “Real Reading 3”. They also answered the exercises related to learning vocabulary and grammar besides reading comprehension, speaking and writing tasks based on the reading texts.

Results and Discussion

As it is indicated at the Tables 1 and 2, prior to the intervention the results of the pre-test indicated that both control and the experimental groups obtained almost similar mean scores for their performance. As illustrated in Table 1, participants’ pre- and post- test results are almost same. While there is a little increase on several participants’ post-test results, most of the group- members’ post- test results either were same or a little lower. This change influences the average results with just one point (initial mean was 78.29 and final mean is 79.48).

Table 1. Test Results of Control Group Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-test	21	78.28	9.87999
		57	
Post-test	21	79.47	10.23533
		62	
Valid N (listwise)	21		

Table 2. Test Results of Experimental Group (Descriptive Statistics)

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-test	21	77.33	10.82743
		33	
Post-test	21	84.95	11.05204
		24	
Valid N	21		

As it is explicitly shown in Table 2, post-test mean result of experimental groups was 84.95, while their pre-test mean result was 77.33. Moreover, there was significant change in their post-test (by 7.62 points). These results support the hypothesis of the research – pleasure reading better stimulated the enhancement of reading skills via motivation and language acquisition through incidental encounters than intensive reading by purposeful working on language elements.

As shown in Tables 1 and 2, the initial mean results in the two groups were almost the same (77.33 in the experimental group and 78.29 – in the control group), the post-test results demonstrated better enhancement in the experimental group (the control group mean post-test result is 79.48, however, the average post-test result of experimental group is 84.95).

Chart 1. Comparison of Control and Experimental Groups

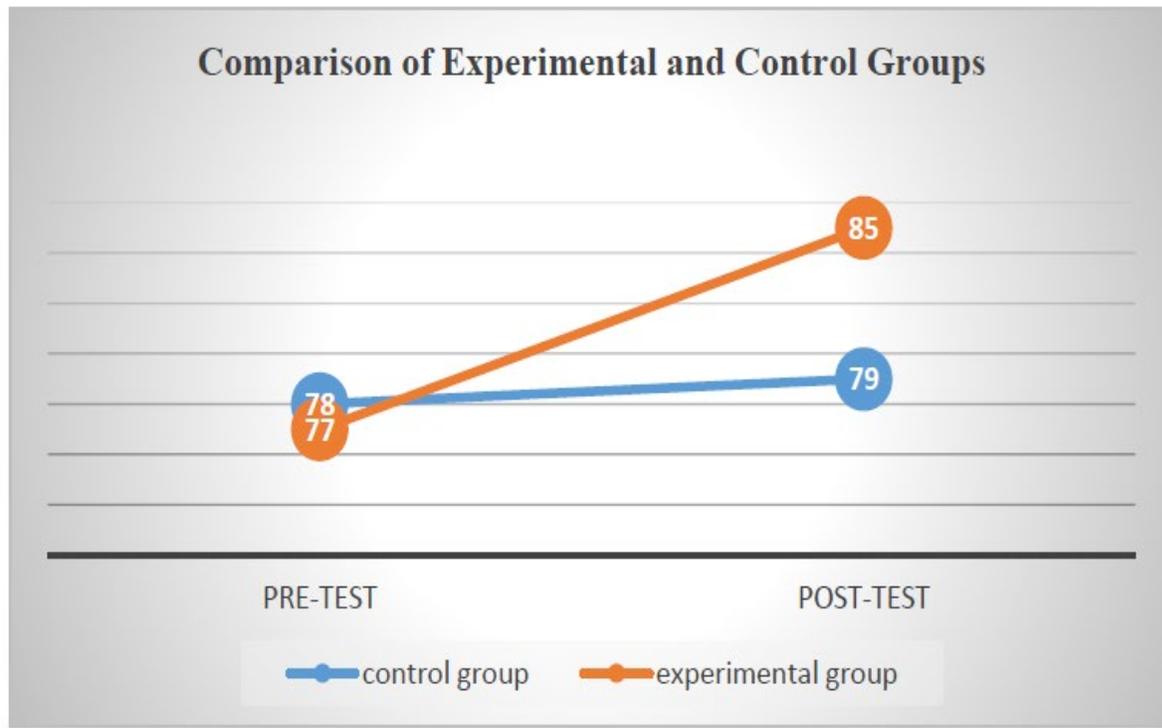


Chart 1 clearly illustrated the difference between the control and the experimental group. Although pre-test mean result of control group was higher than experimental group's result, after the employment of the pleasure reading, the

experimental group got significantly higher scores than the control group. However, we cannot conclude that the intensive reading classes were useless because the participants control group maintained the level of skills and even increased them. We have to say that both kinds of reading contribute to reading skills' enhancement, but the contribution of pleasure reading is more.

Conclusion

This research investigated the impacts of pleasure reading on EFL students' reading comprehension. The study showed a measurable positive influence of reading for pleasure on learners' language acquisition. From the analysis of pre-test and post-test results of the experimental group reading extensively and the control group reading intensively, it is possible to see that both groups benefitted from learning, however, extensive reading (although it was not done in class with teacher explanations and feedback) provided a more significant improvement of reading skills than intensive reading.

By reading for pleasure, EFL students do not only learn new words or grammar structures but also acquire the language naturally and holistically. Also diverse and free range of materials urge the learners to read more and more. During pleasure reading, students meet unfamiliar words and structures and through making predictions, they enhance their lexical and grammatical knowledge. In other terms, reading for pleasure forms positive attitudes towards learning a foreign language. When students read large amounts of materials, they develop automaticity and improve meaning construction.

Limitations of the Study

The survey was just implemented in one private language learning institute. For the further study, it is desirable to include some other institutes.

Another limitation of the research study is its small sample size with 2 groups (20 participants), which might not be representative for all the EFL students in Iran. Future studies with a larger group of participants may be needed to confirm the consistence of the study.

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