

Impact of Limited Extensive Reading on Writing Performance of English Language Learners

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Abstract

Extensive reading has an essential role in learning a foreign language. It is generally considered as significant source of comprehensible input in the target language. Accordingly, the practice of extensive reading could improve other English skills. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the impact of limited extensive reading on the written work of learners of English as a foreign language. The empirical method was used to carry out this study. A sample of forty undergraduate students of English was subjected to an experiment where the written performance of the students was measured by a pre/post-test. An extensive reading program was designed to show the effect of practicing extensive reading on the writing performance of the experimental group as well as the impact of insufficient extensive reading on the written work of the control group. The data was analyzed with the statistical packages of social sciences. The study concludes that limited practice of extensive reading leads to poor written performance of the control group students, whereas engaging in extensive reading has greatly improved the written work of the experimental group students. The paper recommends the use of extensive reading as a way of improving the written work of the students as well as encouraging students to do extensive reading.

Keywords: extensive reading, comprehensible input, target language, writing performance

1. Introduction

Although a significant portion of the global population heavily relies on contemporary technology, reading as Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2000) confirm, is still considered a highly significant means for gaining information or expanding one's knowledge. This is because information in various fields of knowledge is still primarily available in written forms, which can only be accessed through reading. Wallace (1993) views reading as a fundamental aspect of daily life for individuals living in literate communities. As the perspectives mentioned above suggest, the need for reading is crucial. Navigating modern society without the ability to read is extremely challenging.

It is argued that in countries like Sudan, where English is taught as a foreign language, reading holds even greater significance. As Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2000) highlight, reading plays a crucial role in foreign language contexts, serving as the primary means through which learners are exposed to the target language. This perspective underscores that reading is the main source of linguistic input competence for students learning English as a foreign language as in Sudan.

When considering English as a global language or a medium of communication among people from diverse societies and cultural backgrounds, reading becomes increasingly important. Spratt (1985) highlights the necessity of developing appropriate reading skills to study textbooks in higher education and engage with specialized magazines or academic papers to stay informed about the latest developments in a given field.

Poor reading skills are considered a problem for learners of English in Sudan, but it is not a desperate one. To address the issue of slow and inaccurate reading, Yorkey (1982) suggests the use of careful reading instruction in order to achieve rapid and accurate reading skills. Indeed, careful teaching of reading may help learners to develop the skills needed to read English rapidly and accurately.

1.1 Literature Review

Before examining the relationship between extensive reading and writing skills, it is pertinent to distinguish between extensive reading and another extreme commonly called intensive reading. This distinction is crucial, as some researchers emphasize the need to integrate both approaches for more effective language learning (Tuğrul 2015, Carrell and Carson 1997, Nuttal 1982). Some researchers have argued that achieving sufficient proficiency in the target language is not possible through extensive reading alone (Paron 2003). Among other definitions, Hunt (1967) described extensive reading as uninterrupted, silent reading. This suggests that extensive reading is a continuous activity aimed at engaging with large amounts of language material. This feature of reading large amounts of texts is emphasized by Park (2017) who sees extensive reading as an approach designed to help learners enjoy covering a large volume of reading material. A key characteristic of extensive reading, as noted in the literature, is that it is a free-language task activity that prioritizes meaning over the formal features of the target language. Carrell and Carson (1997), who advocated for incorporating both intensive and extensive reading into an EPA reading curriculum, defined extensive reading

as reading for general understanding. Another notable distinction of extensive reading, frequently highlighted in the literature, concerns the nature of reading materials. For example, Park (2017:131), who investigated the impact of extensive and intensive reading approaches on reading rate and comprehension development, described extensive reading materials as enjoyable for language learners. The entertaining nature of these materials, is thought to have a crucial role in motivating learners and fostering their progress in extensive reading.

Intensive reading, on the other hand, is described by Carrel and Carson (1997) as a structured approach to reading that seeks a detailed understanding of the text through teacher-led close analysis. The primary focus of this analytical process, as clarified by Tuğrul (2015) is on grammar and vocabulary. Similarly, intensive reading was described by Erguvan (2016) as an activity that involves practicing specific reading skills, analyzing language features, and closely studying texts from a linguistic perspective. It is widely used in English language teaching around the world. Thus, it is evident that intensive reading is concerned with both comprehension and grammatical structures of written texts. Commenting on its purpose, Andrés (2020:71) emphasizes that intensive reading aims to develop a deep understanding of “content and grammatical structures”.

1.1.1 Extensive Reading and Writing Skills

The focus now moves towards studies that highlight the positive effects of extensive reading on the writing performance of language learners in EFL contexts. A significant body of research supports the positive correlation between extensive reading in a foreign language and improvements in various aspects of writing skills (Aida and Widiyati 2020, Ahmed and Rajab 2015, Al-Mansour 2014). As previously mentioned in this paper, English is taught as a foreign language in Sudan. Therefore, to ensure the relevance of the findings to similar language learning contexts, this discussion is limited to studies conducted in EFL settings, excluding those from other language learning environments.

In their 2004 book, Bamford and Day explore extensive reading as a language teaching approach, emphasizing the benefits of reading large amounts of material in the target language. They designed over 100 classroom activities that integrate extensive reading with various language skills, including grammar, listening, reading, and writing. Bamford and Day argue that reading extensively in a new language significantly enhances learners’ writing skills. This claim is supported by Fitriansyah and Miftah’s (2020:68) study, which found a positive correlation between extensive reading and writing fluency. In the study, thirty two students were provided with extensive reading materials, selecting from comics, novels, e-books, articles, magazines, and newspapers. Their reading time varied from less than an hour to three hours per day. Writing fluency test results showed a positive correlation between the amount of reading and writing fluency. It is significant to note that these studies did not specify which aspects of writing improved and which remained unchanged.

Moreover, it is important to emphasize another important point about the study of Fitriansyah and Miftah (2020). The reading materials provided in English were also available in another language called Bahasa Indonesia. Only 22% of the sample preferred English materials for extensive reading. Additionally, the study does not specify the improvement in writing fluency

for students who chose English materials separately.

Taha and Al Sukhon's (2023) experimental study demonstrated the positive impact of extensive reading on the written performance of freshmen students, with the experimental group showing noticeable improvement. It is important to note that these participants were not English majors. This finding aligns with Quafi's (2019: 121) study, which also highlighted the benefits of extensive reading for enhancing the writing skills of foreign language learners over three months. However, the two studies did not specify which aspects of writing had improved and which had not. Instead, the authors emphasized the overall significant effect of extensive reading on the student's written work.

Taking a completely different perspective, the paper presents one of the most intriguing studies that contradicts the findings discussed earlier. Conducted by Kirin (2010), this study explored the impact of extensive reading on students' writing skills in a foreign language class. Kirin's research found that four months of extensive reading did not lead to any improvement in students' writing ability. It is important to note, however, that the participants in this study were not English majors. That said, the primary aim of this article is to review the literature highlighting the positive effects of extensive reading on foreign language acquisition. Less emphasis is placed on the limited number of studies that report little to no impact or even negative effect of extensive reading on language learning.

2. Statement of the Problem

Reading is essential for foreign language learning, yet in Sudan as it was observed, reading for pleasure and personal growth in a foreign language is often not sufficient. This widespread lack of extensive reading is largely due to cultural, educational, and societal factors that do not promote reading as a lifelong habit. Students of English as a foreign language at Red Sea University reflect this broader trend and the situation could be considered as a clear example. Limited practice of extensive reading is believed to be one of the key factors contributing to the poor writing performance of freshmen students of English at Red Sea University. Consistent engagement in extensive reading is expected to enhance students' writing skills. Palmer (1985) for instance, links a learner's ability to convey precise meaning across different styles and registers to their reading experience.

The reality is that only through regular reading can undergraduate students of English at Red Sea University develop the ability to choose not only appropriate vocabulary but also effective sentence patterns and structures for their writing. Therefore, this paper aims to examine the impact of inadequate extensive reading on the written performance of freshmen students of English at Red Sea University.

2.1 Objectives of the Study

The current study aims to:

1. Examine the initial writing proficiency of EFL learners before exposure to extensive reading through a pre-writing test.

2. To analyze the effects of limited extensive reading on writing performance by comparing pre-test and post-test results.
3. To provide empirical evidence on the role of extensive reading in developing writing performance among EFL learners.

2.2 Questions of the Study

The paper tries to answer these questions.

1. What is the initial writing performance of EFL learners before the intervention, as measured by the pre-writing test?
2. How does insufficient extensive reading affect the writing performance of EFL learners, as reflected in the comparison between pre-test and post-test?
3. What evidence can be drawn from the study to demonstrate the role of extensive reading in enhancing writing performance among EFL learners?

2.3 Hypotheses of the Study

1. EFL learners have no significant writing performance before the study.
2. Limited extensive reading negatively impacts EFL learners' writing performance.
3. Empirical evidence supports the role of extensive reading in improving EFL learners' writing skills.

2.4 Method of the Study

The empirical method was used in this study where an experiment with a designed extensive reading program for students of English was conducted. A design of pre and post-tests concerning the extensive reading program was used to measure the writing performance of the experimental and control groups. For research purposes writing performance was defined as scores obtained by students on a researcher-prepared test of writing with six parts (sentence structure, punctuation, word choice, vocabulary, spelling, and paragraph organization). Each test has a total score of twenty marks.

2.5 Population of the Study

The population of this study was represented by freshmen students enrolled in the English program at Red Sea University, Sudan. All students in the program are Sudanese, as no international students are admitted. The students' population is predominantly female, with women comprising sixty five percent of the total enrollment and men accounting for forty five percent

2.6 Sample of the Study

The sample of this study was made up of forty freshmen students of English representing twenty percent of the total population of students. The students were randomly selected. The reason for selecting students at the same proficiency level is to isolate the impact of limited

extensive reading on their writing, ensuring that any differences observed are not due to varying linguistic abilities.

2.7 Limitations of the Study

A major limitation of this study was how to make the students read the suggested extensive reading materials for the post-test. To overcome this problem the students were continuously encouraged to read the suggested extensive reading materials by showing them the benefits of extensive reading in EFL contexts.

Another limitation was the selection of students for the experiment. Many students declined to participate, citing their busy schedules and heavy coursework. They argued that they did not have enough time to engage in extensive reading of the suggested materials. As a result, the experiment was conducted with a small group of students, consisting of only twenty students.

2.8 Procedure for Conducting Extensive Reading

A special extensive reading program was organized to make students practice extensive reading. A good learning opportunity was created through the extensive reading experience where the experimental group of students read extensively the suggested materials without any influence from the teacher. The experimental group was enlightened as to the objective of the extensive reading program. The extensive reading program is aimed at developing the student's written work. Texts from simplified readers were used as extensive reading materials. These texts were selected and made available to the students. The extensive reading program continued for one academic term. To control the effect of teaching, it was ensured that the students had no special instruction in writing during and before the study. Both the control and experimental groups were given a writing pre-test at the beginning of the study to measure their performance before doing extensive reading. The result of the pre-test was used for later comparison between the two groups. Then a group of twenty students joined the extensive reading program and formed the experimental group. The other twenty students did not join the program and formed the control group. At the end of the academic term, both the extensive reading group and the control group were post-tested to assess the impact of insufficient extensive reading on the control group as well as the effect of doing extensive reading on the writing performance of the experimental group. The pre and post-tests were prepared and conducted by the researcher. The time allotted for each test was forty minutes.

2.9 Procedure of Data Analysis

The scores of the two groups were compared. The correlations and the T Test were chosen as measures of students' performance in the two tests. Paired sample statistics were made to compare the output of the two groups in the two tests. Tables were used to display the scores of the two groups in the pre and post-tests.

2.10 Presentation and Analysis of Data

Since the study is concerned with the students' writing performance before and after doing extensive reading, the two tests have revealed the following results:

Remarkably, there are no significant differences in the written output of the two groups in the pre-test. The minimum score of the experimental group in the pre-test is seven, and the minimum score of the control group is six. The scores of the two groups in the pre-test are shown below.

Table (1) the students' performance in the pre-test

No	Experimental Group	Control Group
1.	10	6
2.	9	6
3.	11	7
4.	9	8
5.	8	9
6.	8	10
7.	7	11
8.	9	11
9.	10	10
10.	7	10
11.	7	11
12.	8	9
13.	11	9
14.	11	9
15.	7	7
16.	8	8
17.	10	11
18.	9	10
19.	8	9
20.	7	8
Total	174	179

Regarding the performance of the two groups in the post-test, it is evident that there is a general improvement in the writing performance of the experimental group students. The total score of the experimenters has greatly increased in the post-test as compared to that of the control group. The minimum result of the experimental group has also increased from seven in the pre-test to sixteen in the post-test indicating that students of the experimental group performed well in the post-test after they had practiced extensive reading. It is also remarkable that none of the results of the experimenters declined in the post-test.

With respect to the written output of the control group, it is obvious that the students got poor scores in the post-test in comparison with the scores of the experimental group. This indicates that there is no improvement in the performance of the control group students in the post-test. The performance of the two groups in the post-test is illustrated below.

Table (2) the students' performance in the post-test

No	Experimental Group	Control Group
1.	16	7
2.	19	6
3.	20	8
4.	20	7
5.	20	8
6.	20	9
7.	19	10
8.	18	11
9.	19.5	10
10.	18	9.5
11.	20	9
12.	18.5	8
13.	19	8
14.	20	9
15.	19.5	6
16.	18	7
17.	20	10.5
18.	20	9.5
19.	19	7
20.	18.5	6.5
Total	382	166

3. Results

The study revealed that insufficient extensive reading leads to poor writing proficiency in students of English at Red Sea University. Furthermore, the extensive reading program proved that the practice of extensive reading improves the written work of the students. From the performance of the experimental group in the post-test and after reading extensively, the researcher has concluded that the learners' ability to use appropriate vocabulary items and sentence structures for their written work has greatly improved. It also appears that extensive reading provides learners with the opportunity to understand the proper use of punctuation while also enhancing their spelling proficiency. A close look at the experimental group's responses reveals a noticeable improvement in student's ability to organize paragraphs effectively and select appropriate words. This progress suggests that their writing skills are becoming more structured and precise.

4. Discussion of Results in Relation to the Hypotheses

To discuss the findings in terms of the research hypotheses, it is worth emphasizing that the findings presented in this paper almost confirm the hypotheses. The scores of the two groups in the pre-test indicate that students had no significant writing proficiency before the study.

Moreover, the comparison of the two groups' written output in the post-test reveals that the experimental group performed better than the control group. This result is highly significant and provides strong support for the hypothesis that limited extensive reading negatively impacts the writing performance of EFL learners. Besides, this superior performance of the experimental group in the post-test suggests that extensive reading contributes to improved writing skills among EFL learners.

5. Conclusion

The present paper attempted to examine the impact of limited extensive reading on the written performance of freshmen students of English at Red Sea University, Sudan through an empirical approach, using pre-and post-tests. The study provides compelling evidence on the positive impact of extensive reading on the writing performance of learners of English as a foreign language at Red Sea University, Sudan. The experimental group, which engaged in extensive reading significantly outperformed the control group that did not participate in extensive reading activities. This superior performance of the experimental group suggests that extensive reading plays a crucial role in developing writing skills. Through exposure to a variety of texts, students in the experimental group were likely able to internalize correct grammar usage, expand their vocabulary, and develop a more natural understanding of sentence structure and paragraph organization. In contrast, the control group, which did not engage in extensive reading, had limited exposure to such linguistic input, which may have contributed to their comparatively weaker writing performance. These findings suggest that incorporating extensive reading into the curriculum can enhance writing skills, likely by exposing students to diverse vocabulary, varied sentence structures, and different writing styles. The improvement observed in experimental group underscores the importance of providing ample reading opportunities to develop better writing competencies among learners. Future research could further investigate the optimal extent and duration of reading intervention to maximize these benefits and support the broader academic achievement of foreign language learners in similar educational contexts.

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