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COMBINING EXTENSIVE AND INTENSIVE READING TO REINFORCE LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract

Reading large quantities of materials offers broad exposure to the target language hence extensive reading has been considered as an effective way to enhance language proficiency. However, extensive reading may fail to provide learners a perfect mastery of the target language as a conclusion without detailed analysis of language materials effective language learning does not take place. Thusly, the implementation of intensive reading leads to detailed and complete comprehension of language materials. From this point forth, the combination of extensive and intensive reading leads to substantial proficiency gains in language learning process; while extensive reading aims at fluency, intensive reading aims at accuracy. This study has found that the achievement of learners has increased when extensive and intensive reading is combined in the language classroom.

Keywords: Extensive Reading, Intensive Reading, Combination, Achievement, Fluency and Accuracy.

INTRODUCTION

Learners gain skills and strategies through guided reading and/or free-reading or to put it in another way learners promote their language proficiency via reading for accuracy and reading for fluency, labels suggested by Brumfit (1977). Both extensive and intensive reading approaches are effective and have their own advantages in foreign language learning process for that reason a well-balanced reading program should include intensive reading and extensive reading concurrently. Nuttall (1996) reminds that “intensive and extensive readings are complementary and both are necessary” (p.23); in that learners transfer the skills and strategies they developed in intensive reading to extensive reading. This article investigates the influence of combining extensive and intensive reading to reinforce language learning.

Literature Review

Extensive reading, first introduced by Harold Palmer and Michael West after a pilot study in India (Loh, 2009), is defined as reading large quantities of easy language materials for comprehension without performing any tasks after reading. Extensive reading which is considered as an effective way to enhance language proficiency (Maley, 2005), focuses on meaning rather than the language, therefore reading is done for general understanding (Carrell & Carson, 1997).

Extensive reading enables learners to develop into independent and confident readers (Day & Bamford, 1998). Learners stand a better chance of promoting their reading fluency and speed (Walker, 1997), which leads them to become better readers (Camiciottoli, 2001). Extensive reading helps learners to improve a good writing style (Tsang, 1996), acquire sufficient knowledge of word and structure (Day & Swan, 1998), and grow into good spellers (Krashen, 1993).

Intensive reading on the other hand focuses on accuracy rather than fluency by emphasizing detailed study of vocabulary and grammar. The implementation of guided reading in the language classroom helps students improve achievement. Detailed analysis of the reading materials by intensive reading allows learners to master the language effectively.

It has been argued that through extensive reading only, learners do not acquire sufficient proficiency (Paran, 2003), in other words a perfect mastery of the target language cannot be achieved without detailed



comprehension. When extensive reading and intensive reading is combined explicit and implicit learning will occur simultaneously. Explicit learning, intensive reading leads to, enables learners to understand the texts, become aware of text organization, use effective reading strategies and develop skills to use the target language efficiently (Paran, 2003).

METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

This study uses both qualitative and quantitative methods at the same time. Qualitative method in the study seeks to understand learners' development in the classroom without using any statistical methods and tries to draw meaningful results from examination scores of learners. Quantitative method in this study enables to report data results in numerical terms. The numerical data were collected from tests learners had in the reading program.

Sample Selection

The participants in this study are students of Ishik University Preparatory school situated in Iraq, and all undergraduate courses are taught in English language at Ishik University. Learners in all groups were chosen randomly for this study; no criteria were used in forming the groups. Yet, it was assured that all learners had the same level of language proficiency to reach at credible results hence participants were selected from elementary level learners.

Data Collection

Learners had a pre-test before the reading program started and the results of the pre-test were compared with reading test scores of learners to see their improvement in language learning. The number of books learners read in extensive reading group, intensive reading group and combined reading group was respectively 10, 4 and 6 and it was a four-week program. 50 graded readers were provided for learners in the extensive group and they were free to select and read whatever book they chose among them. The researcher prepared 15 questions from each book and depending on the graded readers learners in the extensive group read he created test questions including grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehension so learners in the extensive group had different questions in the test as they read different graded readers yet a great deal of attention was given to ask questions at the same level of difficulty (questions in graded readers were used). Moreover, 10 questions including grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehension, which were not included in the graded readers they read, were prepared to measure their improvement thus the test had 100 questions. The researcher chose four graded readers for intensive reading group and he attended to issues of grammar and vocabulary that arose from these reading materials. In some cases the researcher asked learners to translate sentences to ensure comprehension. Though both bottom-up and top-down processing were performed interactively while reading the graded readers, the researcher decided which parts of the graded readers should receive close scrutiny on account of limited time. The researcher prepared 20 questions from each graded reader learners in the intensive group read including grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehension and also 20 questions which were not included in the four graded readers were prepared as in extensive group to measure their improvement thus intensive group had 100 questions in the reading test as well. For the third group the researcher chose 6 graded readers and combined extensive and intensive reading. The learners in the combined group read the graded readers outside the classroom and the researcher attended to issues of grammar and vocabulary that arose from these graded readers in the classroom as in intensive group. Also in some cases the researcher asked learners to translate some sentences in the graded readers learners read to ensure comprehension. The researcher tried to perform both bottom-up and top-down processing interactively while reading, but he decided which parts of the graded readers should receive close scrutiny and created a learning environment in which learners had a chance to study the graded readers through discussing. The researcher prepared 15 questions from each graded reader including grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehension and 10 questions which were not included in the graded readers they read were prepared again as in the other groups to measure their improvement thus integrated group had 100 questions in the reading test as well.

FINDINGS

Table 1: The scores of the Pre-test Examination

No	Name of the Student	Pre-test Scores of Extensive Reading-oriented Group	Pre-test Scores of Intensive Reading-oriented Group	Pre-test Scores of Combined Reading-oriented Group
1	Student A	64	64	62
2	Student B	62	64	62
3	Student C	62	62	60
4	Student D	62	62	60
5	Student E	60	62	60
6	Student F	60	62	60
7	Student G	60	60	60
8	Student H	60	60	58
9	Student I	58	58	58
10	Student J	58	56	58
11	Student K	56	56	58
12	Student L	56	54	56
13	Student M	56	54	54
14	Student N	54	52	54
15	Student O	52	52	52
16	Student P	52	52	52
17	Student Q	50	52	48
18	Student R	48	50	50
19	Student S	48	50	48
20	Student T	46	48	46
Average		56.2	56.5	55.8

Table 1 shows pre-test scores all earners had. It is seen that the averages of all groups are close to each other. The average of extensive-reading oriented group is 56.2; the average of intensive-reading oriented group is 56.5; and finally the average of combined-reading oriented group is 55.8.

Table 2: The results of the reading tests

No	Name of the Student	Extensive Reading-oriented Test Scores	Intensive Reading-oriented Test Scores	Integrated reading-oriented Test Scores
1	Student A	72	70	76
2	Student B	72	69	75
3	Student C	71	68	74
4	Student D	70	66	73
5	Student E	70	65	72
6	Student F	69	64	72
7	Student G	66	64	70
8	Student H	66	62	70
9	Student I	65	61	68
10	Student J	64	60	67

11	Student K	63	60	66
12	Student L	60	59	64
13	Student M	60	58	63
14	Student N	59	56	62
15	Student O	58	54	61
16	Student P	56	53	60
17	Student Q	55	52	60
18	Student R	51	52	59
19	Student S	50	51	56
20	Student T	50	48	56
Average		62.3	59.6	66.2

When reading scores of all groups are compared with their pre-test scores, table 2 shows improvement in all groups, in particular in favor of combined group. It is clearly seen that a combination of extensive and intensive reading provided learners more benefits.

Table 3: Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Extensive_Reading_Oriented	62.300	20	7.4063	1.6561
	Pre_Test_Extensive	56.2000	20	5.34691	1.19561
Pair 2	Intensive_Reading_Oriented	59.600	20	6.5083	1.4553
	Pre_Test_Intensive	56.5000	20	5.18601	1.15963
Pair 3	Combined_Reading_Oriented	66.2000	20	6.28783	1.40600
	Pre_Test_Combined	55.8000	20	4.97996	1.11355

In the Paired Samples Statistics Box, the mean for the extensive reading oriented group is 62.3. The mean for the intensive reading oriented group is 59.6, and the mean for the combined reading oriented is 66.2. The standard deviation for the extensive reading oriented group is 7.40, for the intensive reading oriented group is 6.50, and for the combined reading oriented is 6.28. The number of participants in each condition (N) is 20. The means for the pre-test scores for each group is respectively 56.2, 56.5, and 55.8. Finally the standard deviation of pre-test scores for each group is respectively 5.34, 5.18, and 4.97.

Table 4: Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Extensive_Reading_Oriented - Pre_Test_Extensive	6.10000	2.38195	.53262	4.98521	7.21479	11.453	19	.000

Pair 2	Intensive_Reading_ Oriented - Pre_Test_Intensive	3.10000	1.77408	.39670	2.26970	3.93030	7.815	19	.000
Pair 3	Integrated_Reading_ _Oriented - Pre_Test_Integrate d	10.40000	2.01050	.44956	9.45906	11.34094	23.134	19	.000

The Sig. (2-Tailed) value in our study is .000. This value is less than .05. We can conclude that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean of extensive, intensive and combined reading. Since Paired Samples Statistics box revealed that the mean of combined reading was greater than the mean of extensive and intensive reading we can conclude that participants in the combined reading group were able to learn significantly better than participants in the other groups.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study has revealed that combined reading is more useful for elementary level learners. Learners develop skills and strategies while doing intensive reading in the classroom and transfer them to extensive reading contexts (Anderson, 1999); therefore, a balanced approach of extensive and intensive reading will provide learners maximum benefit (Harmer, 2007), simply put their concurrent use reinforces language learning.

Extensive reading results in L2 vocabulary acquisition (Dupuy & Krashen, 1993), improved reading comprehension (Bell, 2001), and develop better understanding of grammar (Rodrigo et al., 2004). Learners in the extensive group in this study made more progress than the intensive group. Although there are some benefits of intensive reading some negatives have also been pointed, for instance reading class turns into a grammar class. This study yielded that learners studied linguistic elements in details in intensive reading but they were unable to function them in context so their achievement is lower.

However, a combination of extensive and intensive reading brought about desired outcomes, increased the efficiency of learning, fostered interest of the learners, and developed purposeful and positive attitudes towards language learning. Extensive reading allowed learners to become aware of how language items they studied in intensive reading function in sentences.

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