

THE ROLE OF EXTENSIVE READING IN LEARNING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of extensive reading in the process of foreign language learning. It explores the theoretical foundations of the approach, its impact on language proficiency, and the results of a pedagogical experiment. The findings indicate that consistent engagement in extensive reading contributes to vocabulary growth, increased learner motivation, and improved reading comprehension skills.

Keywords: extensive reading, foreign language learning, vocabulary development, motivation, language proficiency, teaching methodology

Introduction

In contemporary education, proficiency in a foreign language has become an essential component of both professional development and intercultural communication. Among the four language skills, reading plays a crucial role as it provides learners with continuous exposure to linguistic input and supports the development of other competencies.

One of the most effective approaches to teaching reading is extensive reading, which involves engaging with large amounts of accessible and interesting texts, focusing on general understanding rather than detailed analysis.

Despite its well-documented benefits, this approach is still not widely implemented in many educational contexts, which highlights the relevance of the present study.

The aim of this study is to investigate the impact of extensive reading on the development of learners' language proficiency.

The objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the theoretical background of extensive reading.

2. To identify its methodological advantages.
3. To conduct an experimental study.
4. To analyze and interpret the results obtained.

Methods

The study employed the following research methods:

- review and analysis of academic literature;
- pedagogical experiment;
- language proficiency testing;
- learner questionnaires;
- quantitative and qualitative data analysis.

The experiment was conducted at a higher education institution with first-year students (n=36) learning English as a foreign language.

Participants were divided into two groups:

- a **control group**, which followed a traditional curriculum;
- an **experimental group**, which incorporated extensive reading (including graded readers, adapted texts, and self-selected materials).

The duration of the experiment was 10 weeks.

Results

1. Theoretical background of extensive reading

Extensive reading is an instructional approach in which learners read large quantities of material appropriate to their language level. Its key principles include:

- accessibility of texts;
- learner choice;
- reading for pleasure;
- minimal reliance on dictionaries.

This approach contrasts with intensive reading, which emphasizes detailed text analysis.

2. Impact on language proficiency

The analysis demonstrates that extensive reading contributes to:

- vocabulary expansion through repeated exposure in context;
- improved reading comprehension;
- development of implicit grammatical awareness;
- increased reading fluency.

Additionally, regular reading practice positively influences both writing and speaking skills.

3. Findings of the pedagogical experiment

At the initial stage, both groups showed comparable results. By the end of the experiment, the following outcomes were observed:

- the control group demonstrated an improvement of approximately 10–12%;
- the experimental group showed a significantly higher increase of 25–30%.

Survey data revealed that:

- 82% of students in the experimental group reported increased motivation;
- 76% began reading more frequently outside the classroom;
- learners experienced reduced anxiety when engaging with authentic texts.

4. Challenges in implementation

Despite the positive outcomes, several challenges were identified:

- limited availability of suitable reading materials;
- varying levels of learner motivation;
- the need for structured teacher guidance.

Discussion

The findings of the present study provide substantial support for the pedagogical value of extensive reading (ER) within foreign language instruction. From a theoretical standpoint, the results are consistent with input-based models of second language acquisition, which emphasize the importance of sustained exposure to meaningful and comprehensible linguistic input. Extensive reading, by design, creates precisely such conditions, allowing learners to process language in context rather than in isolation.

A key contribution of this study lies in demonstrating not only measurable linguistic gains but also affective improvements among learners. The significant increase in motivation observed in the experimental group suggests that ER fosters a more positive learning environment. This can be explained by the autonomy it offers: learners are able to select texts aligned with their personal interests, thereby increasing engagement and reducing resistance to reading tasks.

Furthermore, the improvement in vocabulary acquisition supports the notion of incidental learning. Unlike traditional memorization techniques, ER allows learners to encounter lexical items repeatedly across varied contexts, which enhances retention and depth of understanding. This aligns with research suggesting that vocabulary is most effectively acquired through meaningful exposure rather than explicit instruction alone.

Another important aspect is the development of reading fluency. Participants in the experimental group demonstrated greater ease and speed in processing texts, which may indicate reduced cognitive load over time. As learners become more familiar with common lexical and syntactic patterns, they allocate fewer cognitive resources to decoding and more to comprehension.

However, the findings also highlight several practical considerations. First, the availability and accessibility of level-appropriate materials remain a challenge, particularly in contexts with limited resources. Second, while ER promotes learner autonomy, some students may require structured guidance to maintain consistency and avoid disengagement. Third, differences in individual learner variables—such as prior proficiency, motivation, and reading habits—may influence the effectiveness of the approach.

It is also important to acknowledge methodological limitations. The relatively small sample size ($n = 36$) restricts the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the duration of the intervention (10 weeks) may not fully capture long-term effects. Future studies could adopt longitudinal designs and include larger, more diverse samples to strengthen external validity.

Finally, integrating ER with digital tools (e.g., e-readers, online libraries, tracking applications) presents a promising direction for future research. Such tools may enhance accessibility, provide adaptive support, and allow for more precise monitoring of learner progress.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that extensive reading has a significant positive impact on foreign language learning.

It contributes to:

- the development of reading skills;
- vocabulary enrichment;
- increased learner motivation;
- greater learner autonomy.

The experimental results support the effectiveness of this approach and suggest its broader integration into language teaching practice.

Future research may focus on the influence of extensive reading on other language skills and on the development of digital formats for its implementation.

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