

The Effects of Extensive Reading on the Breadth and Depth of Vocabulary Knowledge and Reading Speed



Faisal A. AL-HOMOUD, and Moneera S. ALSALLOUM*

Majmaah University
faah26@googlemail.com

*Imam Mohammed Ibn Saud Islamic University
alsalloumm@gmail.com

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The study explored the effects of extensively reading graded readers on the depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge and reading speed. It compared the gains of 127 EFL female learners exposed to two different reading approaches for eight weeks. The results showed that both extensive and intensive reading groups made similar gains on the 2000, 3000, and academic word sections of the Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT), while the extensive group made better gains on the Word Associate Test (WAT) and on a reading speed test. We could conclude that extensive reading did a great job of improving students' abilities in the examined areas.

Extensive Reading (ER) has gradually grown into a world-wide accepted practice in both English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) reading instruction programs. Day and Bamford (1997) claimed that extensive reading offers learners many advantages, such as enhancing language learning in various areas including vocabulary knowledge, grammar, and spelling, with great enjoyment and a positive attitude toward reading, improved reading speed, and writing skills. Furthermore, there is a growing body of research on this subject around the world. However, it is pointed out in the study of Al-Homoud (2007) and Al-Homoud & Schmitt (2009) that very few studies have been conducted in Arab EFL contexts. Therefore, there is a need for Extensive Reading research in the Saudi EFL context in terms of quality and quantity. Moreover, in the area of this research, it is found that ER research tells us little about vocabulary-increasing effects and reading speed improvement when reading extensively in a second language. Therefore, the current study explores the effects of extensive reading in terms of vocabulary development and reading speed on some EFL Saudi female learners at the university level.

Methodology

Participants:

About 127 EFL Saudi female university students participated in this study. All students had been exposed to English since intermediate school,

however with a grammar-translation method, and with an intensive reading (IR) approach in particular. Participants were taking other skills courses in addition to the treatment carried out.

Procedures

Participants were divided into two groups: IR (n= 60) and ER (n= 67). For IR participants, one reading textbook was used as teaching material. For ER, about 188 graded readers were used. Both groups had the treatment for 8 weeks, three 50-minute classes a week. Both groups were pre- and post-tested via VLT (see Schmitt, Schmitt & Clapham, 2001), WAT (see Read, 1998), and a reading speed passage. An attitude-check questionnaire was also carried out on both groups after the treatment.

Results

VLT

Both IR and ER improved their vocabulary knowledge on the VLT 2000, 3000, and academic word sections to a significant degree. However, this improvement was not significant between the two groups. They are also illustrated graphically in Figures 1, 2 and 3.

WAT

Both groups scored significant gains on the WAT. However, the ER group had also shown a significant difference to the IR group as shown in Figure 4.

Reading speed

The Comparison of the differences of each group's pre- and post- tests of reading speed in words per

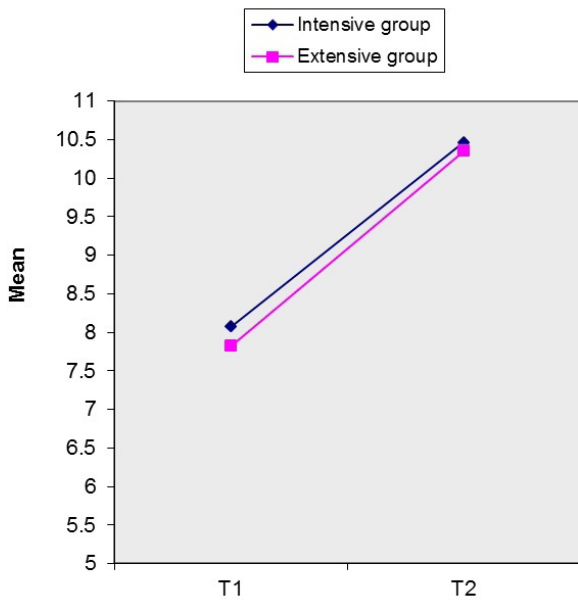


Figure 1: Vocabulary size improvement (2000 word level)

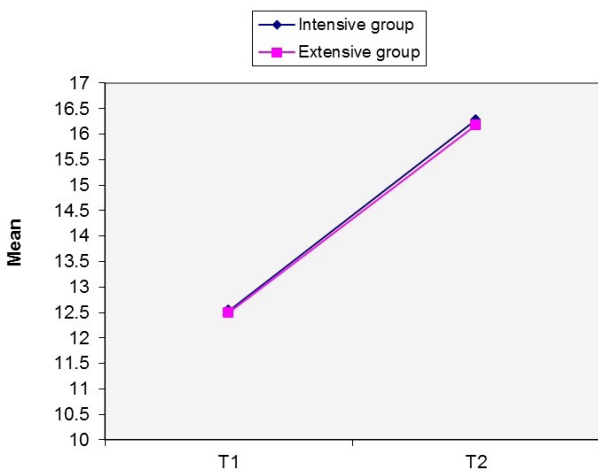


Figure 2: Vocabulary size improvement (3000 word level)

minute indicated that the group’s post-test reading increased. The results of both paired and individual t-tests revealed significant improvement that occurred due to the treatment and indicated that the ER group made a superior gain (Figure 5).

Attitude:

A questionnaire surveying the attitudes of participants of both groups was distributed. It surveyed participants' attitude towards their ability to read in English, reading faster, vocabulary knowledge development, purpose of reading, freedom of choice of the reading material, the in-class reading activity, and if they like to be taught by the same way next time. All of these sections were favorably answered by the ER group (Figures 6 to 11).

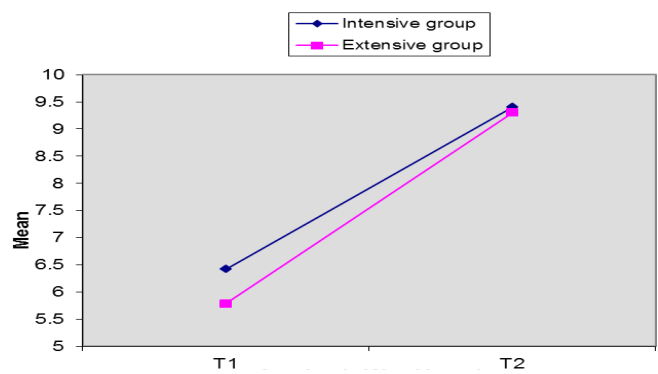


Figure 3: Vocabulary size improvement (Academic word level)

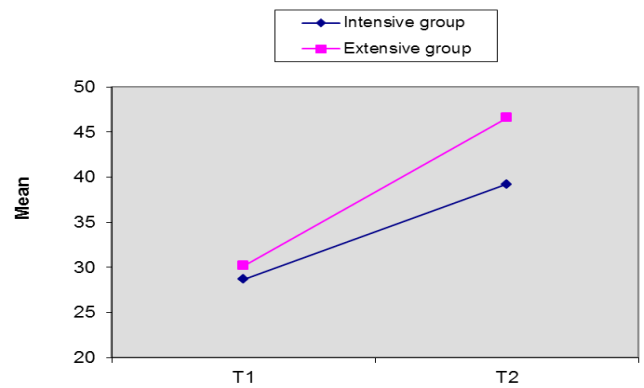


Figure 4: Vocabulary depth improvement (WAT)

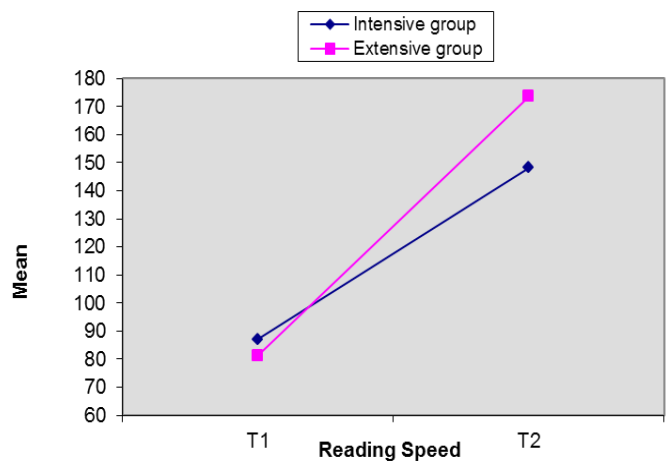


Figure 5: Reading speed improvement

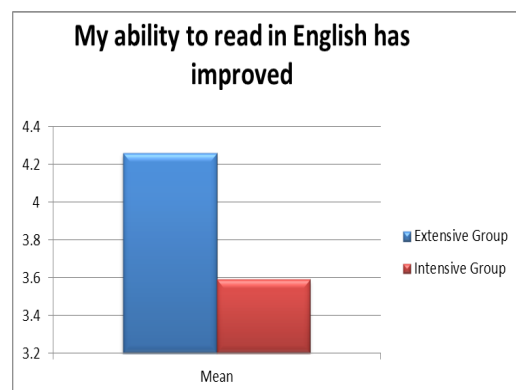


Figure 6: Improvement in reading ability

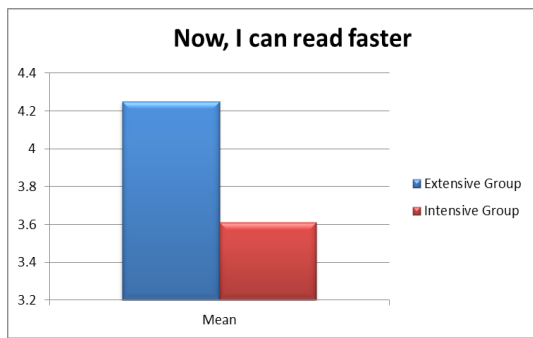


Figure 7: Reading speed

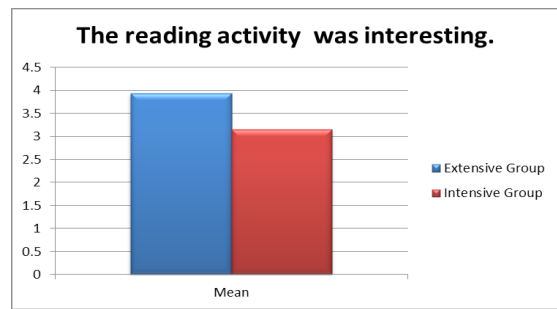


Figure 11: Interest in reading

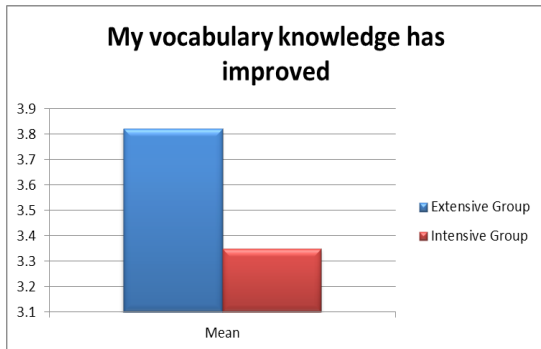


Figure 8: Vocabulary knowledge

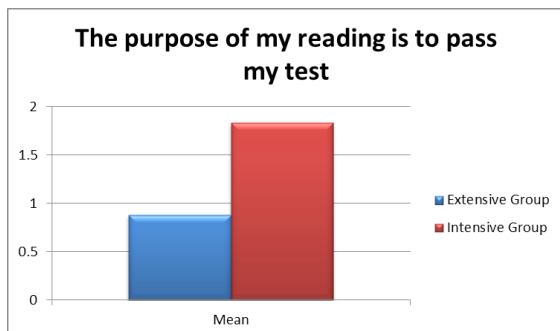


Figure 9: Test-focused reading

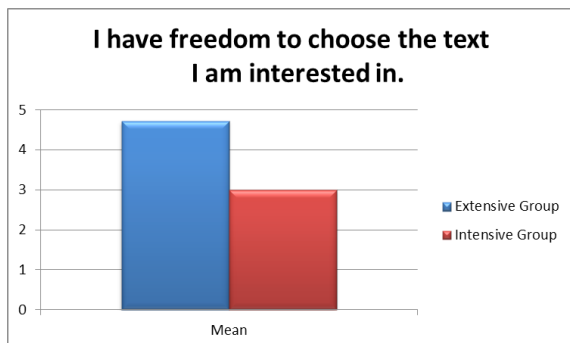


Figure 10: Freedom to choose texts

Conclusion

ER is as effective as IR in improving learners' breadth of vocabulary knowledge. It is more effective than IR in improving learners' depth vocabulary knowledge and their reading speed. ER is better in changing learners' attitudes towards learning a new foreign language.

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