EXTENSIVE READING: A STUDY OF ITS EFFECTS ON GRADUATE LEVEL STUDENTS' L2 VOCABULARY

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Abstract

The current study aims to observe the development of vocabulary through extensive reading at graduate level in Muzaffarabad. The research was directed with the assumption that individual tutoring in reading English material outside the classroom amplified the range of vocabulary. The current study used non-probability convenience sampling. Thirty students of graduate level were nominated from various departments and institutions affiliated with the University of Azad Jammu & Kashmir. They were observed as target group during four-week extensive reading program through pre and post-tests. Pre and post tests were operated to measure the development of vocabulary before and after the treatment and the results were examined and compared through SPSS. The paired samples t-test was applied to demonstrate the difference in the performance of the group in pre and post-tests. The results exhibited that the target group showed enhancement in vocabulary learning after the treatment in post- test. The findings suggest positive effects of ER on the students' vocabularyknowledge.

Keywords: Reading, Vocabulary, Extensive Reading (ER), Target Words, Pre-test, Post-test, Target Group (TG)

1. Introduction

The increasing requirement as well as the significance of the English language at the present day has made the attainment of the English language as an imperative need for today's learner. Irrespective of the prominence and prerequisite of the English language, it has largely been perceived in the emerging contexts particularly in the context of Muzaffarabad, AJ&K, Pakistan that the learners having strong language experiences certainly get entrance into higher institutions while such entrance is repudiated to those who have humble experience in the English language. Therefore, the significance of the English language is even more intense at graduate level as this transitional phase makes learners both as an earning member for the family through joining several occupations and to pursue their education from higher institutions with sound background.

Teaching English as an international language has come up in response to the global spread of English and subsequent needs of the learners. English is viewed as a significant foreign language and taught as a compulsory subject at all educational level in Pakistan. Within language study and teaching contexts, extensive reading is an important aspect of language learning and is also a helpful means of language instruction.

Regardless of the successful research and increasing interest in the role of extensive reading in order to enhance L2 vocabulary, ER has not been given proper attention. Extensive reading is an effective technique to improve their vocabulary in theEnglish language at graduate level. Reading is an important skill and every language teacher has to attempt to help the students enhance their vocabulary knowledge. In this regard, students will be able to get more benefits from school which is usually reading-based, particularly at secondary and higher secondary levels. Krashen& Terrell (1989) emphasize the significance of reading skills asanimperative source of intelligible input inthe target language. They further explain that reading contributes considerably to enhance understandability in a foreign language.He (2010) indicates that vocabulary plays a significant role in order to acquire the English language. Most of the students face problems in vocabulary learning that leads to their reduced reading comprehension.

Furthermore, Peter (2011) states that vocabulary is central in reading comprehension because it is part of background knowledge. According to Komachali&Khodareza (2012) we should bear in mind that vocabulary plays an extremely important role in the English language and it is an inseparable portion of any language learning.

Students of graduate level can usually converse in a better way because they have learnt all the fundamental structures of the language. Nevertheless, they need to expand their vocabulary to communicate effectively at a broader level. It is possible that learners might even have accessible information of various items of vocabulary such as to identify their grammatical category and their meaning as well. However, their creative utilization of an ample variety of vocabulary is usually inadequate and this area needsattention.

Conventionally, vocabulary teaching at graduate level is generally incidental, restricted to displaying new vocabulary items as they are stated in reading or sometimes listening texts. This indirect vocabulary teaching suggests that vocabulary development will occur during the practice of other language skills that have failed to ensure vocabulary development.

These days, it is widely acknowledged that vocabulary teaching is supposed to be an important component of the curriculum that must be taught in a well-organized way. Lewis (1997) claims that vocabulary is supposed to be a center of language teaching for the reason that language comprises of grammatical items and there are numerous aspects of grammatical items that require to be taken into consideration while teaching vocabulary.

Clarke and Nation (1980) suggest many strategies for L2 and L1 students in order to enhance vocabulary in the target language. They describe strategy as a procedure through which students would be able to utilize the available contextual hints. They also deduce that the strategies allow the students to pursue the central meaning in the reading passage and share different pieces of previous information to the reading passage. In addition, they put forward the strategy for guessing the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary items in written material in five steps: discovering the part of speech of the unfamiliar word, searching for the instant contextof the unfamiliar vocabulary items and shortening the context if required, exploring for the extensive context of the unfamiliar word in different sentences, deducing the meaning from the

context and verifying that the exact sense of word. According to them, guessing the meaning of unknown words from the context is a very important strategy and first language learners frequently increase their vocabulary in this way.

From existing literature, it can be concluded that extensive reading facilitates EFL students' vocabulary because they get several chances to select the suitable text to read. During extensive reading, the learners come across new words in different contexts. This incidental vocabulary facilitates the learner to find out the meaning of new vocabulary items in context. Consequently, extensive reading is a proficient way to gain vocabulary.

The present study fills an important gap in research on utilizationof an extensive reading program by students at graduate level in the context of the University of AJK. The outcomes of this study are expected to give confidence to University students to read graded readers, articles, magazines and newspapers to increase their vocabulary.

2. Research Design

The research design employed in the present study is based on Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) action researchmodel which is still widely utilized by various experts in the field of education. This model is adopted for this research because it can be used to provide useful insights into understanding of a particular situation.

The present study employs individual action research which involves working independently and conducting research with students in classroom. The goal of this research was to improve the students' vocabulary in the classroom. The treatment which was given to the target group in this research was Extensive Reading (ER).

The cycle proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) includes four stages: planning, acting, observing and reflecting. In the first stage, the researchers arranged all things that were required during the ER program. In second stage, the researchers gave individual instructions to the target group as the treatment. The researchers used ER as a teaching strategy in order to improve vocabulary. In this study, the researchers attempted to create a classroom situation that was more natural. In doing the observation, the

researchers facilitated the ESL learners where they required help during the ER treatment. In reflecting, the researchers analyzed all the data and compared all of them to obtain the results required from this study.

2.1 Sampling

The present study employs a non-probability convenience sampling technique. A sample of thirty respondents was enrolled in ER program for four weeks. They were the regular students of the Department of Management Sciences, University of Azad Jammu & Kashmir. Hence, they were in touch with reading skills. The participants of the study were selected because of their availability and convenient accessibility. The researchers shared with the participants the details about four-week ER program such as: pre-test, post-test, reading material duration of ER program, timetable, etc.

2.2 Participants

The participants were 30 graduate-level students who were taken as a target group. They were all non-native speakers of the English language and had studied English as a second language through formal instruction at school for at least ten years. Participants in the target group (TG) comprised of 16 male and 14 female participants, ranging from 18 to 21 years in age. The participants of this ER program were not engaged during the time of their regular classes. Hence, the ER program was not influenced by any external aspects.

2.3 Research Tools

A questionnaire, pre-test and post-test were the data collection instruments used to evaluate the effects of ER on vocabularyenhancement.

2.4 Text Description

There were eighteen passagesadapted from newspapers to use in the experiment according to their interests. These passages were related to different themes according to the interest of the students. Most of the themes were related to educationfashion, sports, adventure, politics and social issues of daily life. Apart from passages from newspapers, some stories and articles were also provided to the students by the researchers. These stories and

articles related to common themes like friendship, unity, humanity and Down syndrome etc.

A list of books from graded readers was also provided to the students in order to select the books according to their interest. They selected three books. Apart from passages from newspaper, three books from graded readers were read by the students during this ER program. The titles of the books are *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank, *Prisoner of Zenda* by Anthony Hope, and *The Client* by John Grisham. These books were selected from Penguin's top 20 bestselling graded readers according to the level of difficulty of students.

A total of 230 words were selected from their course books to write the meaning and grammatical category of words in list. Three criteria of words difficulty were considered when choosing the target words. First, the vocabulary list had to be from their course books to determine the level of difficulty of words in the text. Second, the target words had to hold informative value and bear some inferring cues in the context. Third, the grammatical categories (parts of speech) of words had to be explored.

2.5 Research Questions

The study focuses on three research questions related to extensive reading and traditional instructions in classes taken by graduate students at university level.

1. What is the role of extensive reading in the enhancement of ESL learners' vocabulary?

2. How does the use of extensive reading increase L2 learners' participation in teaching and learning process?

3. What are the differences in the results of pre and post -tests in the performance of the target group's vocabulary before and after thetreatment?

2.6 Research Hypotheses

The hypotheses relating to the foregoing questions are:

H0: Extensive reading does not assist in improving ESL learners' vocabulary at graduate level.

H1: Extensive reading can assist in improving ESL learners' vocabulary at graduate level.

3. Procedure

For the present study, 30 graduate level learners were registered in four-week ER program. The main emphasis of current study was on Extensive Reading as a major teaching strategy to enhance ESL learners' vocabulary at Graduate level. The participants of the study were regular students of University of Azad Kashmir, Muzaffarabad. After taking permission from the chairman of Department of Management Sciences, the researchers visited the target class in order to discuss the whole scheme of this study. A questionnaire was given to the students in order to know their interest in reading and their consent to participate in four-week ER program.

The venue of ER program was city campus of AJK University, Muzaffarabad. At the first day of program, a consent form was filled by the students. Students were already informed about pre-test in the first week of the program, post-test in the last week of program and different activities during four-week ER program. The students who signed consent form were taken as the participants of the study. In the first week of the program pre-test was taken from the students. Three days were allocated for the target group: Monday to Wednesday. Students took 02 hours' class per day. Therefore, the students of target group took 06 hours per week. Clarke and Nation (1980) suggest different strategies for teaching vocabulary. Some of them are: discovering the part of speech of the unfamiliar word, looking at the instant context of the unfamiliar word and guessing the meaning of new words in context. These strategies were practiced during four-week ERprogram.

The selected group met for 120 minutes every day from Monday to Wednesday for 4 weeks. Each day, the participants were assigned two to three chapters during first two weeks and four to five chapters of the book to read from week three onward at home. They were assigned different tasks like underline unfamiliar words, phrases, idioms, guessing the main idea, summarizing the chapters (read at home) and informed to share (what they

read) in groups or pairs etc. in next session. In this regard, they read different chapters at home while keeping the assigned activities in their minds. The students were divided into four groups of five or six students and a leader was chosen. After the group discussion, group leaders came on stage and reported what they had discussed about their topics. Group leaders were not fixed but changing in every activity so, everyone got opportunity to perform as a group leader.

Main focus of this ER program was on vocabulary but sometime students were encouraged to discuss theme or main idea of the passage or chapter which was being practiced. Therefore, they got opportunity to use different words according to context. Meaning and grammatical category of new words were discussed daily in different group discussions and they were facilitated regularly. The participants of the target group identified some prefixes and suffixes to change word category such as ness, tion, sion, tyfor noun, al, ivefor adjective, lyfor adverb in most of cases and enas prefix for verb apart from the use of different vocabulary items in context. They performed various activities in groups and pairs to improve their vocabulary. Some activities were constructed by the researchers while some were downloaded from internet and modified to use in classroom according to the contents.

The students read three books and different passages from newspapers with various activities during four- week in order to increase vocabulary. In the last week of ER program post-test was taken from the participants of target group. The difference lied in the nature of the treatment. The main aim was to increase vocabulary of graduate level students through extensive reading. Thus, to examine the effect of extensive reading on vocabulary learning different passages from English newspapers and four books (graded readers) were given to students in the target group.

4. Data Collection and Data Analysis

The data were collected in the form of scores to examine the performance of the participants during both tests and obtained scores were presented in form of statistical tables. Pre-test was administered in the first week of ER program before treatment while post-test was conducted after four-week of ER program. The results were analyzed through descriptive statistics to exhibit the difference of minimum, maximum range, mean score and SD.

The paired samples *t test* was also used to show the difference between before and after treatment. It computes the difference between the two variables for each case and examines to see if the average difference is considerably different from zero. In present study, SPSS was used to analyze the data obtained during four- week ER program. It was used to find out the descriptive statistics to highlight the differences in the performance of the students (TG) before and after the treatment. The paired samples *t test* was applied to observe the difference before and after the treatment of targetgroup.

5. RESULTS

The results were analyzed in terms of minimum, maximum, mean score and standard deviation (SD) by using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) program version 13.0 for Windows. Moreover, paired samples *t test* was used to measure the difference in pre-test and post-test scores of the group. The results were shown with the help of descriptive statistics and paired sample *t test*.

Table 1:Comparison of Pre and Post Test Results for Noun
Paired Sample Statistics

Noun	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Pair 1 Correct in English– Pre Test	13.1000	30	6.51444
Correct in English-Pos*t test*	24.4333	30	7.08901

Paired Sample Test

	Paired Differences			T value	df	P value
	Mean	95% Confidence Interval ofthe Difference				
		Lower	Upper			

Pair1	Correct in English– Pre Test Correct in English-Pos*t* *Test*	-11.33333	-12.64652	-10.02014	-17.651	29	.000

Table1 shows mean score and SD of target group in pre and pos*t*- *test*s. The mean difference is -11.33333 which is statistically very significant. The calculated value of t is - 17.651 with 29 degree of freedom and its p value is (0.00) which is less than level of significance (0.05).

Table 2:Comparison of Pre and Post Test Results forVerb
Paired Sample Statistics

Verb		Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Pair1	Correct in English– Pre Test	14.8333	30	7.80399
	Correct in English-Pos*t* *test*	27.5667	30	9.53644

Paired Sample Test

		Paired Differences			T value	df	P value
		Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
			Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Correct in English– Pre Test Correct in English- Pos*t test*	-12.73333	-14.51722	-10.94944	-14.599	29	.000

Table 2reveals mean score, SD and the outputs of paired samples *t test*. The mean difference is 12.73333 which is highly significant statistically. The calculated value of t is -14.599 with 29 degree of freedom and its p value is (0.00) which is less than level of significance (0.05).

Table 3: Comparison of Pre and Post Test Results forAdjective
Paired Sample Statistics

Adjective		Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Pair 1	Correct in English–Pre Test	7.0333	30	2.73525
	Correct in English-Pos*t* test	13.6667	30	3.30447

Paired Sample t-Test

		Paired Differences			T value	Df	P value
		Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
			Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Correct in English–Pre Test Correct in English-Pos*t* test	-6.63333	-7.33007	-5.93659	-19.472	29	.000

Table 3 describes mean score, SD as well as results of paired samples *t test*. The mean difference is -6.63333 which is very substantial statistically. The calculated value of T is -19.471 with 29 degree of freedom and its p value is (0.00) which is less than level of significance (0.05).

Table 4: Comparison of Pre and Post Test Results forAdverb
Paired Sample Statistics

Adverb		Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Pair 1	Correct in English– Pre Test	5.7000	30	2.23066
	Correct in English-Pos*t test*	13.5667	30	3.39049

Paired Sample Test

		Paired Differences				T value	df	P value
		Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
			Lower	Upper				
Pair 1	Correct in English– Pre Test Correct in English-Pos*t test*	-7.86667	-8.73678	-6.99655		-18.491	29	.000

Tables 4 displays mean score, SD and the results of paired samples *t test*. The mean difference is -7.86667 which highlights very important difference between pre and pos*t test* results. The calculated value of t is -18.491 with 29 degree of freedom and its p value is (0.00) which is less than level of significance (0.05).

6. DISCUSSION

The data reflected that the target group performed better in post-test results. In other words, they improved their score more in post-test. The purpose of

the post-test was to demonstrate if there was any significant difference between the performance before and after the treatment. The figure below demonstrates the difference in terms of mean scores before and after treatment during four-week ERprogram.
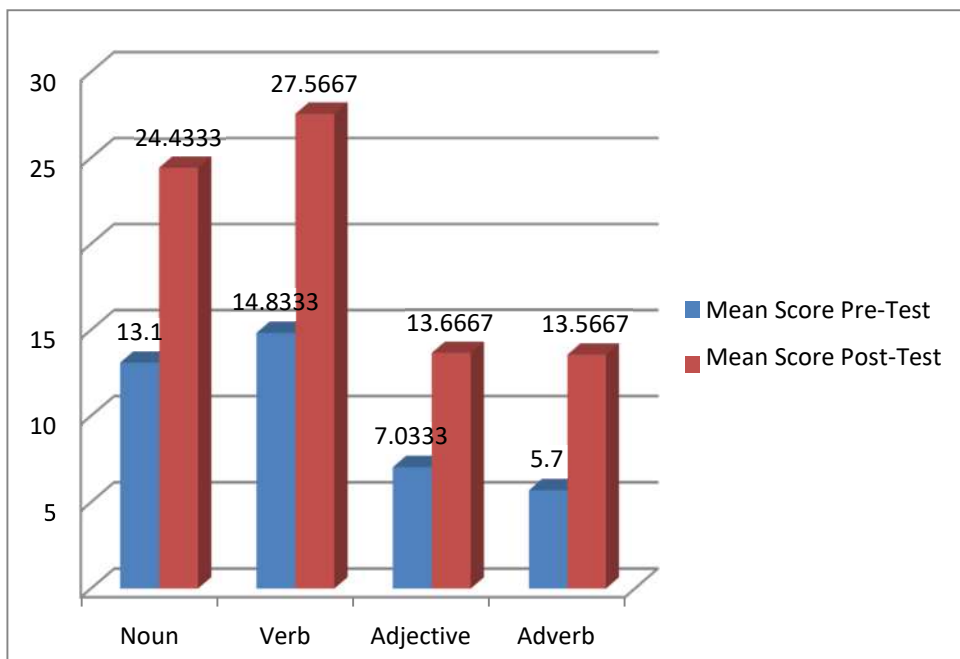

Figure5: Comparison of the Mean Scores in Pre-Test and Post-Test

The above figure presents the mean scores of target group during pre and post-tests. Blue color reflects pre-test and maroon color reveals post-test mean scores. The mean scores for noun, verb, adjective and verb are 13.1000, 14.8333, 7.0333, and 5.7000 respectively in pre- test. While in post- test, the mean scores for noun, verb, adjective and adverb are 24.4333, 27.5667, 13.6667, and 13.5667. Consequently, descriptive statistics shows highly significant difference between the mean scores of the target group before and after the treatment.

As compared to pre-test results of the target group, post-test result is higher which reflects significant level of improvement in L2 vocabulary. Therefore, it shows that the target group improved significantly after four-

week ER program which has proved the claim that ER increases L2 vocabulary.

To test this hypothesis that ER does not support to improve L2 learners' vocabulary at graduate level, paired t test was used. The table below exhibits the outputs of samples t test.

Table 6: Comparison of Paired Sample t Test of the Target Group in Pre and Post Tests

	MD	95% Confidence Interval		t Value	df	p-value
		Lower	Upper			
Noun	-11.33333	-12.64652	-10.02014	-17.651	29	.000
Verb	-12.73333	-14.51722	-10.94944	-14.599	29	.000
Adjective	-6.63333	-7.33007	-5.93659	-19.472	29	.000
Adverb	-7.86667	-8.73678	-6.99655	-18.491	29	.000

The above table demonstrates the mean difference, 95% confidence interval difference (lower and upper limits), t value, degree of freedom and p value of target during both tests (pre and post). Statistically, target group shows very significant difference in post- *test* during four- week ER program.

The p value is greater than level of significance which is 0.05. As compared to pre-test scores the target group shows much difference in pos*t-test*. They (students of TG) showed highly significant difference in pre and pos*t- test*s. Their p value is less than level of significance (0.05). The 95% confidence interval is also calculated. Moreover, the confidence limits are also shown in above table. So, the null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, it is proved statistically that the target group enhanced their vocabulary during four-week through extensive reading program.

Different strategies for teaching vocabulary such as discovering the part of speech of the unfamiliar word, looking at the instant context of the unfamiliar

word and guessing the meaning of new words in context were practiced in pair work and group work. These strategies such as pair work, group work, discussion and presentation were experienced during four-week ER program. Several other stimulating points came out of the post-test outcome. For example, the participants did not use a dictionary, but they tried to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words from the context. Furthermore, the silent and shy participants of the class performed better in groups. Additionally, Participants of the target group felt comfortable and confident in tension free environment.

On the basis of these outcomes; we assume that ER essentially leads to improvement of the students' vocabulary knowledge. One explanation is that the target group has been exposed to a number of interesting books chosen by them and they read those books during the period of treatment. Another explanation is that the recommended books and passages from newspapers were suitable and easy to understand. It is worth to mention that this finding is not a new one; in fact, it goes in line with what previous researchers have found while carrying studies about the effect of extensive reading on vocabulary knowledge. The outcomes of the present study are in proportion to Horst (2005); Pigada& Schmitt (2006), concerning the contribution of the extensive reading to enhancethe vocabulary the target language L2 context.

7. CONCLUSION

The primary focus of the present study was to observe the enhancement ofvocabulary through extensive reading at graduate level in Muzaffarabad, AJK University during four- week ER program. It was proposed that there would be difference on vocabulary enhancement through extensive reading in the performance of the target group before and after treatment. This study explored and revealed that extensive reading is a very advantageous practice to enrich vocabulary of the students at graduate level in L2context.

The analysis of the data exposed that there was an enhancement in the vocabulary of the target group that was exposed to extensive reading. There are different reasons underlying such a result. First, the development in vocabulary knowledge of the target group is due to the fact that the students were given individual instructions since the beginning of the experimental period. Second, they worked in groups and pairs which promoted cooperation

among students and peer tutoring. This communication allowed them to read more outside the classroom. Third, it provides support to Krashen's Input Hypothesis, signifying that ER in a comfortable situation can add considerably to the improvement of students' L2 skills particularly vocabulary.

These gains of the present study are equivalent to those achieved in the A Clockwork Orange exploration conducted by Saragi et al. (1978). The results of the study also support the outcomes of two studies (Nation and Wang, 1999; Wodinsky and Nation, 1988). They advocate that graded readers are an imperative resource of enhancing vocabulary in the target language. Therefore, the results of the study prove that ER through graded readers and newspapers are significant sources to enhance vocabulary in the target language. The outcomes of the study have proved that extensive reading is a motivating phenomenon for learners, researchers and teachers to increase vocabulary at graduate level.

The outcomes of the present study have filled an important gap in research on the practical use of extensive reading program by the learners at graduate level in L2 context. Furthermore, it is proved that the results of the study positively give confidence to the University students to study graded readers, articles, magazines and particularly newspapers to enhance their vocabulary. The results of the study also demonstrate how different activities such as guessing the meaning, scanning, skimming, puzzle words and word wall can be integrated in learning L2 vocabulary throughER.

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