The Effect of Extensive Reading Exercise on EFL Learners’ Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition

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Abstract

The focus of this thesis was to examine whether extensive reading with vocabulary enhanced exercises could enhance Iranian EFL learners’ incidental vocabulary acquisition. It also monitors whether students have positive attitudes towards enhancing words incidentally through extensive reading. The subjects were 30 EFL female at a language institute in Mazandaran. Their ages varied from 13 to 14. They were randomly divided into a control group ($N = 15$) and experimental group ($N = 15$). The experimental group received an ER Plus treatment, whereas the control group experienced an ER Only treatment. In order to examine the thesis questions, a set of vocabulary tests and questionnaires were administered before and after the treatments (ER programs). The vocabulary test was used to measure the increases if any in the students’ vocabulary size, whereas the affective questionnaire was used to measure the learners’ attitudes and beliefs towards the incorporation of an ER program into their reading course. Results of independent samples $t$-test revealed that ER can enhance vocabulary acquisition both incidentally and when incorporated in vocabulary enhancement activities. Besides, results of one-sample $t$-test indicated that ER can promote positive attitudes toward reading in English and learning vocabulary through reading.

Key words:
Acquisition, Extensive Reading, Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition, Breadth Vocabulary, Depth Vocabulary

Introduction

For a long time, reading and second language development has been assumed to have a mutual relationship. Second language development allows students to read in the second language, but reading in the second language also fuels second language development. In other words, learners learn to read and read to learn. Most studies on reading (Coady, 1997; Bell, 1998; 2001) describe how reading aids in language development – specifically how reading helps learners to acquire knowledge, broaden understanding, and develop knowledge of vocabulary. Vocabulary is also a fundamental component in second language development. According to Grabe and Stoller (1997), vocabulary is an essential requirement for the necessary prerequisite for reading extensively in the target language.

EFL reading instruction at school level is usually presented in the form of intensive reading. This refers to “the careful reading of shorter, more difficult texts with the goal of complete and detailed understanding. Intensive reading is also associated with the teaching of reading in terms of its component skills” (Bamford & Day, 1997, p. 6). According to Susser and Robb (1990), “Such a pedagogic practice may be justified as a language lesson, but not as a reading lesson. Intensive reading is actually not reading at all.” This justifies the fact that most Iranian EFL students are not at all fluent
readers of English. They apply word-for-word processing of the reading texts, translate into their first language, and consequently, hesitate in their oral reading over even the simplest words they know. As a result, most Iranian students have negative attitudes toward L2 reading. In order to overcome all these drawbacks, students should be exposed to large quantities of reading materials that may help them develop fluency, speed, automaticity of word recognition, and positive attitudes toward L2 reading.

Moreover, students always want to read something different from the English language textbooks used by all teachers in Iran schools. Unfortunately, they cannot fulfill their desire since any extensive reading programs implement at any stage of their education. As far as they are concerned, and they think it is the case of all school and university students, extensive reading is integrated into the English language curriculum neither in school nor in higher education. Research indicates that extensive reading is an effective means of vocabulary development of language learners. Therefore, it is hoped that this research will find the effect of an extensive reading program on incidental vocabulary acquisition of Iranian EFL learners. The study will also examine their attitudes toward the extensive reading program and its impact on their attitudes toward L2 reading.

The major goal of this study is to explore the effect of an extensive reading program on Iranian students’ vocabulary knowledge. This study was conducted to help educators find different ways for developing their students’ vocabulary size and knowledge, and seeks more systematic and effective ways of learning incidental vocabulary through extensive reading. Specifically, by implementing an ER program, this study tried to find out whether involving students in an extensive reading program in an EFL context will lead to a better incidental vocabulary acquisition, and whether supplementing incidental learning with intentional one will make the former more efficient. In other words, whether incorporating extensive reading with vocabulary activities will result in better vocabulary acquisition.

The notion of extensive reading
The early part of the 20th century supported a resurgence of interest in extensive reading, perhaps due to visions from second language acquisition studies into the impact and nature of input in the learning process (Hedge, 2003). Pioneers such as Harold Palmer in Britain and Michael West in India (1968, as cited in Powell, 2005) founded the theory and practice of extensive reading as an approach to foreign language teaching in general, and to the teaching of foreign language reading in particular.

We cannot disassociate storytelling from pleasure reading. Reading a story is essential to create a relaxed and secure atmosphere in order to involve the pupils in the reading activity by keeping their interest in the topic. In the Kita, Eshel, Mazor and Maron’s study (1995), it was found that the use of “a series of readers”, often familiar to the pupils in their first language kept them interested in the reading. The study also proved that storytelling sessions in English lessons improved the children’s motivation for extensive reading later on. More books were read by pupils between nine and ten years old who had been exposed to storytelling in their first year of learning English, and they scored better on reading comprehension tests. Pleasure reading is in a sense an extensive reading. It is completely voluntary; the teacher does not guide the learners from level to level, as their ability in reading develops. In doing pleasure reading, readers have the possibility of skipping whole sections they find either too difficult or less interesting.

Extensive vs. intensive reading
Palmer chose the term extensive reading to distinguish it from intensive reading (1968, as cited in Powell, 2005). Intensive reading often refers to the careful reading of shorter, more difficult foreign language texts with the goal of complete and detailed understanding. Texts are studied intensively in order to introduce and practice reading skills such as distinguishing the main idea of a text from the detail, finding pronoun referents, or guessing the meaning of unknown words. In Intensive reading, the teacher guides through a text slowly, explains new words and phrases, analyzes the grammatical structure, and makes sure students understand every sentence. On the other hand, ER aims at improving students’ reading skills and communicative competency and the ER teacher encourages students to read
as much and as fast as they can so long as they can grasp the main idea. Many advocates of ER have claimed benefits of ER, and learners are expected to gain a large recognition vocabulary through ER.

According to Palmer (1968, as cited in Powell, 2005), while ER can be implemented to assist implicit and incidental vocabulary learning, intensive reading (IR) can be utilized to promote explicit and intentional vocabulary learning. In order to reinforce the new words to stay in the learners' long-term memory, it will be extremely helpful if they encounter the same vocabulary in their real reading, i.e., ER. Vocabulary need to be learned through either intensive or extensive reading in which learners encounter the words in a meaningful way. In this sense, combining intensive and extensive activities will be an excellent approach in promoting SLVA. Nation (2001) claims that intentional learning of vocabulary and incidental learning are complementary activities, each one enhancing the learning that comes from the other. Rashidi and Piran (2011) found the following: 1) both IR and ER are effective, 2) intermediate students benefitted more from IR, and 3) advanced students benefitted more from ER. Pigada and Schmitt (2006) found more vocabulary acquisition (spelling, meaning, and grammatical function) is possible through ER.

Extensive reading & L2 vocabulary acquisition
Being an essential component of second language learning, vocabulary has been the center of many researches that investigated its influence in all four skills; listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The interrelationship between vocabulary and reading has received ample research attention. A number of studies during the last two decades have confirmed the widespread belief that second language learners can acquire vocabulary through extensive reading. Further, Pigada and Schmitt (2006) noted that previous studies had exclusively focused on word meaning, not paying proper attention to partial learning of words. Thus, Pigada and Schmitt (2006) used a one-to-one interview as a measurement procedure because it was sensitive to partial knowledge of words. It was found that vocabulary knowledge was more enhanced as a result of extensive reading practices than previous studies had suggested.

Grabe and Stoller (1997), another case study, also concluded that vocabulary knowledge significantly developed through extensive reading. However, what complicates matters is that there is some negative evidence against L2 vocabulary acquisition through extensive reading. Although most scholars seem to agree that L2 learners can incidentally learn vocabulary through reading at least to some extent (for a succinct survey of incidental vocabulary acquisition, see Huckin & Coady, 1999), quite a few studies claim that it is only a small amount of new words that L2 learners can acquire through extensive reading. For example, Waring and Takaki (2003) indicated that the gains in L2 vocabulary acquisition through extensive reading shown by the past studies were positive but modest and “not much better than random guessing” (p. 131). Waring and Takaki (2003) went on to suggest that extensive reading can have more positive impact on consolidating already known vocabulary than on acquiring new words.

Moreover, Rott (1999) found that new words were more effectively learnt when readers engaged in a sufficient practice with the new words to internalize their meanings. She also found that 2-6 exposures of a new word in meaningful contexts can produce a significant gain in making that word a part of a person’s vocabulary. Clearly, from a pedagogical point of view, this implies that an effective reading program which includes vocabulary learning as one of its goals must provide repeated encounters with the same words over reasonably short periods of time.

Another support is provided by Hu and Nation (2000). They emphasized that the usefulness of extensive reading depends on the density of unknown words, which should not exceed 1 for every 50 words of text. Also, vocabulary should recur at regular intervals to promote retention. For L2 learners, graded or simplified readers with controlled vocabulary may be the best choice.

There are two main ways of learning new vocabulary: incidental vocabulary learning and intentional vocabulary study. According to Nation (1997), incidental vocabulary learning can happen in two ways. For new or unfamiliar words, the reader can guess the meaning from the context. As for the words the
reader has already seen or met before, there will be “a gradual process of one meeting with a word adding to or strengthening the small amounts of knowledge gained from previous meetings” (p. 15). He adds, however, that incidental vocabulary learning is fragile and “if the small amount of learning of a word is not soon reinforced by another meeting, then that learning will be lost” (Nation, 1997, p. 15).

However, Nassaji (2003) believes that guessing from context is a good way to consolidate known vocabulary. Actually, there are investigations and discussions of how vocabulary may be learned incidentally while reading. Some of these studies investigate ways of making incidental learning more efficient by supplementing it for example with intentional learning. Although recent research has focused on incidental vocabulary, it has also suggested that learners gain vocabulary knowledge through extensive reading, especially when reading is accompanied by vocabulary building activities (Paribakht & Wesche, 1997; Wesche & Paribakht, 2000; Rosszell, 2006).

As Nation (2005) argues, research has not supported the claim that focusing on meaning and the number of encounters with new words in context are the best way to learn vocabulary. Instead, they highlight that the opposite approach is probably more effective; that is, deliberate attention to decontextualized words is more likely to lead to learning. However, they encourage reinforcing new vocabulary by integrating it in other L2 skills such as reading, writing, or speaking. In other words, to result in learning, activities with new words have to meet the following conditions: “interest, repetition, deliberate attention, and generative use (the use of a word in a new context)” (Nation, 2005, p. 585).

The notion of incidental vocabulary learning

In incidental learning, the assumption is that new vocabulary will be picked up “incidentally”, through exposure to dialogues, reading passages and other materials without deliberate memorization being involved (Singleton, 2001). According to Schmidt (2000; cited in Singleton, 2001), incidental vocabulary learning is learning through exposure when one’s attention is focused on the use of language, rather than on learning itself. Context, then, plays a very important role in assisting such learning. The general argument in favor of the notion that we acquire SL vocabulary without “special teaching” or any planned work is the same as that proposed by Nelson (1981; cited in Singleton, 2001) which is in relation with first language vocabulary acquisition. He posited that the amount of vocabulary we assimilate “by chance” doing something else than really learning is much greater than the one we are taught. Hatch and Brown suggest assuring success of incidental learning. According to them, it is essential to encounter new words; that is having a source for words. This source can be any kind of material learners are used to, but what is important about it is that it has to be of interest and related to the actual need of the learners. It is also proposed that there must be variety in material: learners need various encounters with the same word in multiple sources in order to ensure its learning. However, Hulstijn (1992) supports the view that a very small number of words seemed to be acquired incidentally from any given context on any given occasion.

Method

Research questions

This study tried to find out whether involving students in an extensive reading program in an EFL context will lead to a better incidental vocabulary acquisition, the following questions are addressed:

RQ 1: Does providing vocabulary exercises through extensive reading enhance EFL students’ incidental vocabulary acquisition?

RQ 2: Do students have positive attitudes towards enhancing words incidentally through extensive reading?

Participants

The participants in this study were 30 EFL Shokouh institute students enrolled in their reading course. The participants were girls, aged from 13 to 15, with an elementary level of English proficiency. All the participants were native speakers of Persian. The participants were homogeneous in respect of
educational background. Formal English language education in Iran’s schools begins in junior high school, when learners have completed five years of elementary school and are usually 12 years old. In the first year, they become familiar with the alphabet, basic words, and simple question and answer sentences. In the next two years, they gradually learn the basic structure of English. The textbooks are highly structure-based and consist of dialogues, patterns, and readings. Beginning their second semester as English majors indicates that they have the sufficient knowledge that allows them to read easy English texts written for L2 learners at the beginning stages of reading in a foreign language. The sample of the study consisted of two classes of English course, with thirty students. The class was randomly assigned to control and experimental groups.

**Instruments**

An attitude questionnaire and a vocabulary levels test were used in the current study. Each of them described in details below:

**Vocabulary levels test (pre-test and post-test)**

The students in both groups need to take the reading test as a pre-test, and a post-test, adopted from General English Proficiency Test (GEPT). However, only the reading test of the intermediate level was utilized. It consisted of four parts with twenty-two items including multiple choice questions with six items, fill the blanks with three items, match the words with seven items, and translate words with three items. In addition, the time of the reading test was sixty minutes.

**Attitude questionnaire**

The questionnaire was compiled by the researcher. It was created and modified using selected items from previous studies (Al-Hammad, 2009) to describe the students’ attitudes and approaches towards L2 reading and an acquisition of incidental vocabulary through extensive reading. The questionnaire has been modified to fulfill the objectives of the study. Basically, the first two parts of the questionnaire were designed to collect data about the subjects’ attitudes toward L2 reading and their beliefs about reading and vocabulary relationship. Besides, the third part of this questionnaire attempted to investigate the participants’ vocabulary strategies they employ when they encounter a new vocabulary item while reading. These three parts were addressed to participants in the experimental group (in which ER program was implemented), in order to collect data about their attitudes toward the ER program they received (the treatment).

The reason for designing the questionnaire items to be of this type, i.e. to choose from a range of possible responses, is that this type of items yields responses which can be easily collated and analyzed. Support for the questionnaire’s validity has been obtained from feedback by three language experts who approved the form (face validity) and content (it measures what it is supposed to measure). Meanwhile the Cronbach’s Alpha reliability index of the questionnaire was assessed 0.83 in the pilot study carried out with 25 intermediate EFL learners who share almost similar features with the main sample of the study.

After the adaptation of the questionnaire, and in the light of the experience of the pilot study, it was important to translate the survey into Persian, the participants’ first language. This step was taken to ensure that the subjects completely understand the items on the questionnaire, and as a result, provide reliable responses of what they think. As an English- Persian translator, the researcher first translated the adapted survey into Persian, then, she consulted several bilingual experts who praised and approved the translation.

The entire survey is written in English accompanied by Persian translation to help the students understand the meaning. All the items fit into four categories representing different dimensions of reading and L2 vocabulary: general L2 reading; L2 reading and vocabulary; L2 vocabulary strategies; and, ER reading attitudes. For each item there were the following five possible choices: (1) Strongly Agree; (2) Agree; (3) Undecided; (4) Disagree; (5) Strongly Disagree (Appendix B).
Procedures
The participants in the experimental group attended an eight-week intervention program which involved the linear instruction of four vocabulary strategies. The participants attended the intervention program twice a week, each lasting for about 60 minutes. Each section met twice a week for 8 weeks (a semester). All sections of extensive reading used the same story book, covered the same materials, and took the same pretest and posttest examinations at the same times.

The researcher decided to carry out the experiment in the regular reading classes in order to introduce the ER program (the treatment) as part of reading course. The researcher, who in turn became the teacher of the reading course, asked to teach at least sixteen sections in order to apply the treatments (ER) respectively, and to use the second one as a control group. The first experimental group received ER treatment, i.e. practice reading extensively, about intermediate graded story of their interest accompanied by vocabulary enhancement activities. Both groups adopt the same stories as treatment for two months. Further, only the experimental group was instructed with extensive reading and vocabulary-enhanced exercises after finishing every reading text. The treatment classes were held at the Shoukoh institute and the experiment was successfully conducted in these classes. Below is a more detailed description of the procedures followed to carry out the current experiment.

Results
Addressing research question 1
The first research question of this study sought to see if providing vocabulary exercises through extensive reading enhance EFL students’ vocabulary acquisition?" In order to answer this research question, independent sample t-test was used. Before discussing the results of t-test, the related descriptive statistics are represented in Table 1. The table shows the mean and standard deviation of the control (\( \bar{x} = 6.67, SD = 1.98 \)) and experimental (\( \bar{x} = 7.07, SD = 2.05 \)) groups on the pre-test and the mean and standard deviation of the experimental group (\( \bar{x} = 16.60, SD = 2.16 \)) and control group (\( \bar{x} = 14.13, SD = 2.82 \)) on post-test of vocabulary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.67</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>.467</td>
<td>.644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7.07</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14.13</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>2.684</td>
<td>.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16.60</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Independent t-test results, as appeared in Table 1 above, indicated that there was not any statistically significant difference (\( t (28) = .46, p = .64, p > .05 \)) in vocabulary scores for control (\( \bar{x} = 6.67 \)) and experimental (\( \bar{x} = 7.07 \)) groups, in which the t-observed was below the t-critical of 2.04. So, we concluded that the students in the two groups have the same knowledge of vocabulary and therefore are homogeneous regarding vocabulary knowledge before facing any special instruction. In addition, on the basis of Table 1, independent t-test detected a statistically significant difference (\( t (28) = 2.68, p = .01, p < .05 \)) in vocabulary scores for control (\( \bar{x} = 14.13 \)) and experimental (\( \bar{x} = 16.60 \)) groups, in which the t-observed (2.68) was above the t-critical of 2.04. Therefore, we can claim that providing vocabulary exercises through extensive reading enhances EFL students’ vocabulary acquisition. In fact, the students in the experimental group have performed better than the control group due to learning vocabulary via extensive reading by the experimental group with the mean difference of 2.47.

Figure 1 below is a bar graph that graphically illustrates the results. A quick look at Figure 1 reveals that the students in the experimental group have performed significantly better than those in the control
Addressing research question 2
The second research question of this study aimed at investigating whether students have positive attitudes towards enhancing words incidentally through extensive reading or not. In order to answer this research question, one sample t-test was used. It must be mentioned here that the results of the questionnaire were measured on the interval data ranging from strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 5. The related descriptive statistics are given in Table 2. The table is a display of the mean score and standard deviation for "total attitude" ($\bar{x} = 3.97$, $SD = .29$), and its four components i.e., "general L2 reading" ($\bar{x} = 4.16$, $SD = .63$), "L2 reading & vocabulary" ($\bar{x} = 3.50$, $SD = .82$), "L2 vocabulary strategies" ($\bar{x} = 4.08$, $SD = .39$), and "ER attitude" ($\bar{x} = 4.16$, $SD = .81$).

The results of one sample t-test, as shown in Table 2 above, revealed that the one sample t-test was significant for total attitude ($t (14) = 12.61, p = .000 p< .05$), and its three components of "general L2 reading" ($t (14) = 7.04, p = .000 p< .05$), "L2 reading and vocabulary" ($t (14) = 2.38, p = .03 p< .05$), "L2 vocabulary strategies" ($t (14) = 10.49, p = .000 p< .05$), "ER attitude" ($t (14) = 5.51, p = .000 p< .05$) in which the $t$-observed below above the $t$-critical (2.17) for all of them. Accordingly, we can claim that students have positive attitude towards enhancing words incidentally through extensive reading.

Figure 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 are histograms that demonstrate the scores obtained on the ER attitude questionnaire and its four components.

As it can be seen obviously in Figure 2, almost most of the scores are greater than “3” implying positive “total attitude” toward learning vocabulary through ER. Also Figure 2 shows that the minimum and maximum scores are 3.30 and 4.60 respectively by one student each.
Based on Figure 3 below, the majority of the students agree with “General L2 reading” component through ER since most of the scores are higher than 3. In addition, Figure 3 indicates that the minimum and maximum scores are 2.60 by one student and 4.80 by three students respectively.

As it is shown clearly in Figure 4, almost most of the scores are larger than “3” revealing positive perception toward the component of “L2 reading & vocabulary” toward learning vocabulary through ER. Besides, the figure indicates that the minimum score is 2.40 by three students 4.80, and the maximum score is 4.80 by two students.
Figure 4. L2 Reading & vocabulary scores toward enhancing words through ER

Figure 5 demonstrates the participants’ responses to the ER perception questionnaire. As can be seen in Figure 4.5, the majority of the students concur with “L2 vocabulary strategies” component through ER as most of the scores are above “3” (Undecided choice). Also, the figure displays that the minimum and maximum scores are 3.40 and 4.80 respectively (by one student each).

Figure 5. L2 vocabulary strategies scores toward enhancing words through ER

And finally, Figure 6 shows that most of the scores are more than 3 reflecting positive perception toward the component of “L2 ER attitudes” toward learning vocabulary through ER. Further Figure 6 reflects that the minimum and maximum scores are 2.20 (by one student) and 5.00 (by two students) respectively.
The frequency and percentage of the students’ responses to all 20 items of the attitude questionnaire are given in Table 3 below. A quick look at the table reveals that the majority of the students have selected “Agree” choice expressing their agreement with learning words incidentally through extensive reading. Furthermore, the table reflects that the average mean score is above “3” (Undecided choice) of the questionnaire except for Item 10 “I find reading frustrating when texts contain many new words” with the mean score of 2.93.

The items that received the most positive responses of the participants were Item 12, “I keep a vocabulary notebook to learn new words from my reading” and Item 13, “When I face a new word while reading, try to guess its meaning from contexts” (\(\bar{x} = 4.40\)), followed by Item 1 “I enjoy reading English books”, and Item 20 “I recommend ER as a means of language improvement” (\(\bar{x} = 4.40\)), and then Item 2 “I read for pleasure to improve my English”, Item 3 “Reading is important to broaden my views”, and Item 4 “I am reading English books because it is required” (\(\bar{x} = 4.27\)).

Besides, as Table 3 manifests, one sample t-test was significant \((p = .000)\) for most of the items except for Item 7, 9, 10, and 15. This means the students have positive attitude towards enhancing words incidentally through extensive reading.

Table 3. Frequency and percentage of students’ responses to all items of the attitude questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>(\bar{x})</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. General L2 Reading</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I enjoy reading English books.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>4.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I read for pleasure to improve my English.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>4.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Reading is important to broaden my views.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I am reading English books because it is required.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>86.7</td>
<td>4.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I read English books, comics, newspapers, etc. outside of class.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>66.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B. L2 Reading &amp; Vocabulary</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.032</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I regard vocabulary as one of the most important factors in language learning. I don’t know many English words. Reading courses help me to learn new vocabulary. I avoid reading texts when I feel that they contain difficult words. I find reading frustrating when texts contain many new words.

C. L2 Vocabulary Strategies
11. I memorize new words that I find in books. 12. I keep a vocabulary notebook to learn new words from my reading. 13. When I face a new word while reading, try to guess its meaning from contexts. 14. I write the meaning of the new words on pages that I read. 15. When I face a new word while reading, I leave it and continue reading.

D. ER Attitudes
16. According to my experience, I think ER is an effective means of vocabulary development. 17. I believe that ER I did in this course improved my English. 18. I will continue ER after the course. 19. I recommend ER as a way of vocabulary development. 20. I recommend ER as a means of language improvement.

Discussion
The first research question investigated the impact of extensive reading on incidental vocabulary acquisition on Iranian EFL learners. The first finding was that the participants in the experimental group showed a significant increase in their incidental vocabulary gains due to the ER Program implemented in their reading course. Such an increase was not observed in the control group. Based on the results, it is concluded that the participants’ performance in the experimental group improved more than the participants’ performance in the control group. This finding is line with the Hunt and Beglar (2005) who found that learners' comprehension of reading texts was significantly dependent on their vocabulary knowledge. High relationship between depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension was also found in Qian's (1999) study on Chinese and Korean EFL learners. However, most of students still have difficulty in keeping vocabulary in mind and feel frustrated. Brown (2001) stated that EFL teachers often highlight the delivery of language to students, but they ignore whether students know how to internalize it. Similarly, they often just explain word meaning and analyze syntax, but they neglect whether students know how to store words in long-term memory in a
proper way. On the other hand, incidental vocabulary learning through reading is a main factor for vocabulary growth.

Some studies seem to be in line with the findings of this study. For instance, Pressley (2001) proposed that students who read widely and frequently have greater opportunities to expand vocabulary than those who spent little time reading. Many researchers have paid attention to the extensive reading due to the fact that enormous vocabulary growth and better academic performances were observed form L1 learners (Nation, 2001). Although incidental vocabulary learning via extensive reading can bring about some advantages, it is not always effective, especially for EFL learners. Hulstijn, Hollander, and Greidanus (1996) stated that there were several reasons why the use of extensive reading on vocabulary acquisition failed. First, learners tended to skip a large rate of unknown words that they thought unrelated to the main idea. Next, the long contextual information might direct learners’ attention to the meaning not to the unfamiliar word form. Third, learners’ guessing might be imprecise and their wrong inferences led them to learn the unknown words incorrectly. Last, the non-reoccurrence of newly met words made incidental vocabulary inefficient. Thus, EFL learners still need more guidance and instruction to ensure that vocabulary acquisition occurs.

In addition, our results confirmed Zhang and Annual’s (2008) findings. In Iran, this finding was in line with Kavianpanah and Zandi’s (2009) study on the role of depth of vocabulary knowledge in reading comprehension of male and female EFL learners. They found that the better the learners were at breadth of vocabulary knowledge the better they could perform at reading comprehension. The research on incidental and explicit vocabulary learning, attention to learning, and cognition is important for the present study. However, any overview of such research is incomplete if it does not address the principles of activity theory.

Teachers and learners should be aware of this fact and not to overestimate the vocabulary gains that might accrue as a result of extensive reading since these gains are limited to receptive or breadth knowledge. However, students should be encouraged to read extensively for other enjoyable aspects of L2 reading as well as many language and affective benefits provided by extensive reading.

As important as resources for vocabulary learning are, some researchers have argued they may be of little use without student attention to learning. Specifically, Schmidt (1994), among others, has maintained that learning cannot occur without attention. In other words, in the context of vocabulary learning, students who have not been directed to attend to the form of a word or who do not notice and/or negotiate the meaning of a word will not learn a word. However, the attention students can give to their learning depends on several factors.

In a vocabulary study, then, the greater the number of unknown words to which a student is exposed at one time, the greater the demands placed upon working memory, and the higher the likelihood that learning was hindered and long-term retention blocked. If the demands placed upon working memory are reduced, learning should improve, inasmuch as such a reduction will facilitate increased information storage in long-term memory.

Therefore, the present study filled an important gap in research on the use of extensive reading programs by EFL learners and its effect on L2 incidental vocabulary acquisition. In addition, the researcher think that the most convenient way for EFL learners to be exposed to a variety of English reading texts is through ER programs. Further, the lack of experience in choosing the appropriate English reading materials might result in negative.

The second research question of the current study dealt with students’ attitudes towards enhancing words incidentally through extensive reading. One sample t-test results ($t(14) = 12.61, p = .000 \ p < .05$) showed that the students possess positive attitudes towards enhancing words incidentally through extensive reading. This finding correlates with Wang and Guthrie (2004, as cited in Grabe & Stoller, 2011) that reading a large amount of materials for pleasure is intrinsically motivating and fosters more positive attitudes toward reading.
Conclusions & implications

This study set out to investigate whether vocabulary enhancement instruction in combination can facilitate incidental acquisition of L2 vocabulary through extensive reading by EFL learners. A variety of factors affect L2 vocabulary acquisition through reading. Repetition, explanation, and L1 translation support more effective vocabulary acquisition. Dictionary use and marginal glosses help a learner better grasp a word meaning. Visual input and oral input additionally presented with the target words positively affect the gain and retention of words. Personal variables such as the level of text comprehension, motivation, and L2 proficiency may affect the acquisition of words. The model of vocabulary acquisition through reading proposed in this article shows how those factors interact and affect each other.

Vocabulary is a key dimension to define the level of reading competency. The more vocabulary words one has, the faster and more effectively one reads (Webb, 2008). Then, where does a learner acquire vocabulary words? Reading, as revealed through the previous studies, is one of the most effective sources to acquire new words. Huckin and Coady (1999), however, pointed out that “extensive reading for meaning does not lead automatically to the acquisition of vocabulary” (p.183). This idea tells us that successful vocabulary acquisition during reading takes place when it is well planned with clear goals and strategies. Thus, reading without strategies has limited effects on vocabulary acquisition.

Reading without attention and elaborative strategies for acquiring vocabulary words gives a message about the reading material. However, reading with clear attention to grasp the meanings of unfamiliar words gives a learner not only the message about the reading material but also more vocabulary power, which will contribute to an increased comprehension of the reading material. This is why learners and educators should keep in mind what factors make the reading more effective in intake and retention of words. Regarding students’ attitudes toward extensive reading programs, several research studies have shown that they have many advantages. As students become successful in reading, they start to enjoy language learning and value their study of English.

To conclude, as far as the literature review is concerned, it is noticed that most previous research which was conducted on learners focused on the students’ beliefs about and approaches to ER. However, students’ vocabulary gains through reading extensively have not been measured in such a context. To my knowledge, no research has integrated an ER program into the English language curriculum in a context and measured its effectiveness on the students’ vocabulary development. As for the literature concerned, only Alshamrani (2003) conducted a qualitative research on the usefulness of ER programs in vocabulary acquisition, but the program was completely independent and the study was conducted on ESL students.

With regard to attitudes of students, it was only Alrajhi’s (2004) study which aimed at investigating the readers’ attitudes towards and beliefs about ER, but he focused on online reading. Alshamrani’s (2003) study also aimed at finding the students’ attitudes about reading authentic texts, but the subjects were ESL students. Therefore, the present study aimed to fill an important gap in research on the integration of extensive reading in the English language curriculum at the university level in Iran and to investigate the role of ER when integrated in a language course on L2 vocabulary development and on the EFL students’ attitudes toward L2 reading.

The pedagogical cycle applied in this study is in alignment with Nation and Wang’s (1999) research that recommends large amount of reading (a book a week at the student’s level of comprehension) in order to get the benefits of ER. The data also support their contention that graded readers might be best used for recycling already known vocabulary than for introducing new words.

For example, spelling is a type of word knowledge that is especially sensitive to exposure to comprehensible input, whereas prepositions of verbs are not. Therefore, when teachers try to decide which type of learning (intentional or incidental) is more effective, they should first consider which language feature they want to focus on.
Besides, the second research hypothesis of the current study predicted that students do not have positive attitudes towards enhancing words incidentally through extensive reading. Analyzing all 15 Students’ responses to the ER perception questionnaire showed that majority of the participants expressed their positive perceptions toward teachers’ providing vocabulary exercises through extensive reading.

The second sign that confirmed that the participants promoted a positive attitude toward L2 reading, regardless of their short experience with ER, was their positive responses to questionnaire. According to these research, it can be concluded that the participants’ confidence as well as their excitement toward reading grew gradually as they were able to identify vocabulary appearing in various texts and figure out meanings of words or sentences that they had never learned before. This conclusion is consistent with previous research such as Leung (2002) and Alansari and Bulaila(2004). The desire to read certain story or about certain topic also motivated them to improve their reading proficiency in order to comprehend the essence of the story or the topic read. Asking them to read as part of the course requirements provided them with the opportunity to read. These benefits perceived by all respondents in the experimental groups are what other researchers (e.g. Holden, 2003; Renandya, 2007) have indicated to accrue to students who read extensively, and this was encouraging. Many students agreed that reading something interesting and within their level of proficiency motivated them to read more. Similarly, reading something uninteresting or beyond their level might have negatively impacted their confidence in reading.

In short, extensive reading did promote a positive attitude toward reading when appropriate reading materials were accessible. As the percentage of students who plan to continue reading shows, reading extensively helped them to develop a habit of reading.

While the study reported here clearly indicates that both reading and reading accompanied by text-based vocabulary exercises lead to substantial vocabulary knowledge gains, the latter leads to more favorable outcomes. However, the processes by which these occur are not clear. By shedding some light on the way acquisition of incidental vocabulary knowledge takes place through extensive reading and doing vocabulary exercises, it may be possible to enhance these processes and make instruction more efficient.

The findings indicate that treatment (ER Approach) were very effective in incidental vocabulary acquisition and in promoting positive attitudes toward English reading. This result will encourage educators to review their beliefs about foreign language teaching and how to use ER programs. Specifically, educators who insist on using vocabulary activities as part of their ER programs may find that the ER approach would be satisfactory to their goals. Accordingly, it can be concluded that choosing between the approaches depends on the purpose of the ER program. If receptive knowledge of the words is the aim, i.e. to expand receptive vocabulary size, then, ER is efficient. ER Plus is more effective when productive knowledge is needed.

The pedagogical implications that can be derived from this study are immense. The most significant of these stress the necessity to develop constructive ER programs and incorporate them into the reading curriculum. It is clear that the best way to incorporate ER into the EFL curriculum is through implementing a program in which students read and report on the IR reading to the teacher and other students. In order to make the program more successful, it needs to be integrated into the reading course currently offered as homework or extra credit. A record of reading should be kept to keep track of learners’ progress or reading speed. Day and Bamford(2002) believe that the first step to approach reading positively is to change the ways in which EFL reading is commonly taught. Traditional approaches and classroom practices that focus on translating, answering comprehension questions, or practicing skills such as finding main ideas, tend to ignore the majority of students’ attitudes toward reading and the IR motivation to read. The result is that students have little or no interest in reading English.

**Conflict of interest**
The authors declare no conflict of interest.
References


