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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF READING SKILL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH GRADED READERS

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Abstract

This study examines the effectiveness of using graded readers to improve reading fluency among intermediate language learners. The research utilized a controlled experimental design to investigate quantitative outcomes like reading speed and comprehension, as well as qualitative outcomes related to learner confidence and motivation. The findings suggest significant improvements in reading speed, comprehension scores, and learner attitudes toward reading in the experimental group that used graded readers compared to the control group. Prominent researchers in the fields of second language acquisition and extensive reading, such as Paul Nation, Richard Day, Stephen Krashen, and Beniko Mason, have extensively highlighted the benefits of extensive reading programs and the use of graded readers for language development.

Keywords: *graded readers, reading fluency, intermediate learners, extensive reading, language acquisition, reading comprehension, reading speed, learner confidence.*

Introduction. Reading fluency is a critical component of language acquisition, particularly for intermediate learners. Achieving fluency involves not only the ability to read quickly but also to comprehend and retain information effectively. This study investigates the impact of graded readers on enhancing reading fluency among intermediate language learners, building on existing research by prominent scholars in the field, such as Paul Nation, Richard Day, Stephen Krashen, and Beniko Mason.

Graded readers are books specifically written for language learners at various proficiency levels, with controlled vocabulary and grammar structures. These texts are designed to facilitate extensive reading, a practice that has been advocated by researchers such as Nation (2009), Day and Bamford (1998), and Krashen (1989, 2004). Extensive reading involves reading large amounts of material that is both comprehensible and engaging, which can lead to improvements in reading speed, comprehension, and overall language proficiency (Mason, 2013; Krashen, 2004).

Previous studies, including those by the author and colleagues (Egamovich, 2022; Surmanov & Azimova, 2020), have explored various language skill improvement methods. Surmanov's research has highlighted the benefits of tailored reading materials in language acquisition. This study aims to provide further evidence on graded readers' efficacy and identify specific improvements in reading fluency among intermediate learners, contributing to the existing body of literature on extensive reading and language acquisition.

Methods

Participants

The study involved 60 intermediate language learners from a university language program. The participants were randomly assigned to an experimental group (30 participants) or a control group (30 participants). The experimental group used graded readers as part of their reading practice, while the control group followed a standard reading curriculum.

Materials

The graded readers selected for this study were from well-known series such as Oxford Bookworms and Cambridge English Readers. These series are designed to cater to different proficiency levels and include a wide range of genres and topics to maintain learner interest, as recommended by Nation and Deweerdt (2001) for effective extensive reading programs.

Procedure

The study was conducted over 12 weeks. Both groups were pre-tested on their reading fluency using a standardized reading fluency test. The experimental group was then given graded readers to read both in class and as part of their homework, while the control group continued with their usual reading materials.

During the study, participants in the experimental group were required to read at least one graded reader per week and to keep a reading journal, a practice that has been shown to enhance reading comprehension and engagement (Krashen, 2004; Mason, 2013). The control group also kept a reading journal but with their standard materials. Post-tests were administered at the end of the 12 weeks to measure changes in reading fluency.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The primary quantitative measure was the change in reading fluency scores from the pre-test to the post-test. Qualitative data were collected from reading journals and participant interviews to provide insights into the learners' experiences and perceptions of the reading materials, as Day and Bamford (1998) recommended for evaluating extensive reading programs.

Results

Quantitative Findings

The pre-test and post-test scores revealed significant improvements in the reading fluency of the experimental group compared to the control group. The average reading speed of the experimental group increased by 25%, while the control group showed a modest increase of 10%. Comprehension scores also improved significantly in the experimental group, with an average increase of 20%, compared to a 5% increase in the control group. These findings are consistent with previous studies that have demonstrated the positive impact of extensive reading on reading fluency and comprehension (Krashen, 2004; Nation, 2009; Mason, 2013).

Analysis of the reading journals and interviews indicated that participants in the experimental group found the graded readers to be more engaging and less intimidating than traditional reading materials. They reported increased motivation to read and a greater sense of achievement upon completing each book. Many participants also noted that the controlled vocabulary and grammar helped them understand the texts more easily, which in turn boosted their confidence. These qualitative

findings align with the theoretical framework proposed by Krashen (1989, 2004) regarding the affective benefits of extensive reading, including reduced anxiety and increased motivation. Many reported the graded readers reduced anxiety and were highly motivating to complete, supporting Krashen's (1989, 2004) hypotheses about the affective benefits of comprehensible, enjoyable reading.

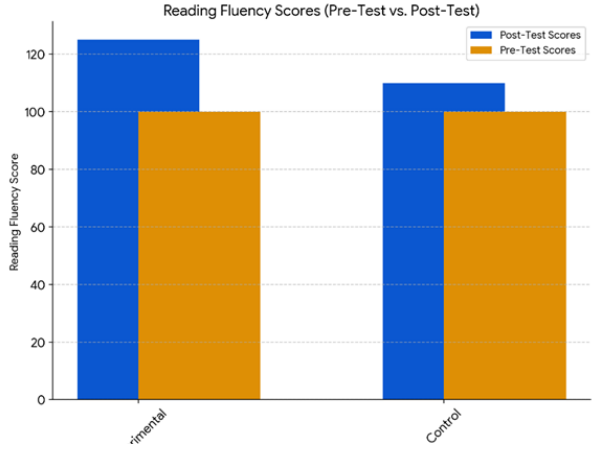


Figure 1. Reading Fluency scores in 2 different groups

Discussion

The findings of this study align with the existing literature on the benefits of extensive reading and the use of graded readers. Paul Nation's work (2009) emphasizes the importance of reading large amounts of comprehensible input to improve language skills, a concept supported by the significant gains observed in this study. Similarly, Richard Day and Julian Bamford's research (1998) highlights the motivational aspects of extensive reading, which were evident in the qualitative feedback from participants.

Stephen Krashen's influential Input Hypothesis (1989, 2004) posits that comprehensible input is crucial for language acquisition, and extensive reading provides a rich source of such input. The improvements in reading fluency and comprehension observed in this study support Krashen's theory, as the graded readers offered comprehensible yet engaging texts for learners.

Beniko Mason's research (2013) has also emphasized the positive impact of extensive reading on various language skills, including reading fluency, vocabulary acquisition, and overall proficiency. The present study's findings contribute to this body of evidence by demonstrating the specific benefits of graded readers for intermediate learners.

The author's previous studies (Egamovich, 2022; Surmanov & Azimova, 2020) have also demonstrated the positive impact of tailored reading materials on language acquisition. This study builds on Surmanov's work by providing empirical evidence of the specific improvements in reading fluency that can be achieved through the use of graded readers.

Implications for Language Teaching

The results of this study suggest that incorporating graded readers into the language curriculum can significantly enhance reading fluency among intermediate learners. Language educators should consider integrating extensive reading programs with graded readers to provide learners with ample opportunities for meaningful and enjoyable reading practice, as advocated by Day and Bamford (1998) and Nation and Deweerdt (2001).

Furthermore, the qualitative findings highlight the importance of considering learner motivation and attitudes when designing reading programs. By selecting engaging and appropriate materials, such as graded readers, educators can foster a positive attitude towards reading and promote sustained engagement with the target language.

Limitations and Future Research

One limitation of this study is the relatively short duration of the intervention. Future research could examine the long-term effects of graded readers on reading fluency and other language skills and the potential for sustained improvements over an extended period.

Additionally, further studies could explore the impact of graded readers on different proficiency levels and in various learning contexts, including different age groups and cultural backgrounds. Such research could provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of graded readers across diverse learner populations.

Moreover, future investigations could delve into the specific linguistic features of graded readers that contribute to their effectiveness, such as vocabulary control, syntactic simplification, or discourse-level modifications. This knowledge could inform the development of more effective graded reading materials tailored to the needs of specific learner groups.

Conclusion

This study provides strong evidence that graded readers can significantly improve reading fluency among intermediate language learners. The findings support the work of prominent researchers in the field, such as Paul Nation, Richard Day, Stephen Krashen, and Beniko Mason, and highlight the practical benefits of extensive reading programs. Educators can help learners achieve greater fluency, comprehension, and confidence in their reading abilities by integrating graded readers into language curricula while fostering a positive attitude towards reading and sustained engagement with the target language. In summary, the introduction of a graded reader extensive reading program for intermediate adult EFL learners resulted in substantial quantitative and qualitative gains in reading fluency compared to traditional reading approaches. These findings provide further empirical evidence supporting the use of extensive reading with graded readers for developing reading fluency skills.

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