



Empowering Young Adult Second Language Learners through Extensive Reading Practices

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Abstract

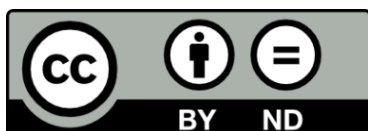
Although English as a second language learners identify linguistic forms, structures, rules, and functions in the classroom, they are not able to use them correctly in receiving and producing meaning due to a lack of exposure to the language. Second-language learners can be exposed to the target language through extensive reading. Extensive reading may help the learner to recognize the function of linguistic forms, structures, patterns, and vocabulary of the target language and facilitate the learner to receive and produce meaning independently. Therefore, this study investigated the viability and validity of incorporating the extensive reading component into second language (L2) programmes designed to develop receptive and productive skills. This quasi-experimental study was conducted with 70 undergraduate students of both genders divided into two groups: experimental and control. Both groups were taught the same syllabus by the same teacher. However, the participants of the experimental group (N =35) were engaged in extensive reading programme whereas the participants of the control group (N=35) were not. When the achievement results of the two respective groups were compared, the results of the experimental group indicated a significant increase in receptive and productive skills. Therefore, extensive reading can be considered an effective and useful instrument in developing L2 receptive and productive skills.

Keywords: English as a second language, Extensive reading, Productive skills, Receptive skills, Young Adult learners

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INTRODUCTION

Learning English has become a vital need for many people across the world. In the Sri Lankan context, English is taught as a second language (ESL) in primary, secondary, and tertiary level institutions. Tertiary-level ESL syllabi are designed to enhance learners' receptive skills: reading and listening, and productive skills: speaking, and writing. Enhancing second-language young adult learners' receptive and productive skills is a challenge for both the teachers and the learners. Although language elements such as grammar, sentence structures and vocabulary are taught in the classroom, it is difficult for learners to receive and produce meaning confidently and accurately in authentic situations until they identify the function of these elements in authentic communication. Additionally, it may be difficult for learners to use the target language accurately and fluently by memorizing grammatical structures and vocabulary. In addition to classroom instructions, language is acquired through real communication. In consistent with these claims, Krashen (2004) stated that learners who are exposed to different contexts acquire meanings of words through context clues alone and grammar is learned intuitively rather than through explicit instructions. According to the 'comprehension hypothesis' (Krashen, 2004), in the process of learning a language, the input needs to be abundantly available for the learners.

One of the effective ways to gain second language competence is to live with native speakers and be exposed to them (Feathers & Smith, 1983). This is endorsed by Nuttall (1996, p. 128) who stated "the best way to improve your knowledge of a foreign language is to go and live among its speakers. The next best way is to read extensively in it". However, this is not possible for the majority of L2 learners. Therefore, one of the strategies that L2 language teachers can use to expose learners to native speakers is extensive reading. Extensive reading can be defined as silent voluntary reading for pleasure. Extensive reading, on one hand, may give pleasure and new knowledge and on the other hand, it may help to develop target language proficiency. Through extensive reading, learners can independently experience the function of the target language with the help of linguistic knowledge gained in the classroom. They may be aware of the issues and positions of the target language contextually and enhance their linguistic skills. Extensive reading may help learners to identify text signals, enhance vocabulary and grammar knowledge, and develop productive and receptive skills independently. Independent learning and learner autonomy may motivate the teacher as well as the learner in ESL teaching and learning. In line with the above views, Krashen (1993) stated that extensive reading helps learners become good readers and spellers and develop an adequate vocabulary, a writing style and advanced grammar.



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In consistent with Krashen (1993), Elley (2001) emphasized that exposure to language excessively enables learners to learn different new language forms. Furthermore, Day et al., (1998); Grabe & Stoller, (2011); Sagagi (2007) suggested that extensive reading helps learners to acquire language in a stress-free environment. In the process of second language learning, extensive reading may give an authentic understanding of the target language and create autonomous learners so that they can get rid of language anxiety. Extensive reading can provide opportunities for L2 learners to experience the target language in pragmatic situations and makes them competent in using the language.

Importantly, ESL programmes mostly put stress on intensive reading and extensive reading is ignored. However, integrating extensive reading into the ESL programmes can enhance both the receptive and productive skills as learners have the opportunity to identify the behaviour of the target language in real communication. In consistent with these claims, Krashen (2004) suggests that through extensive reading, the learner acquires language in a non-stressful environment which makes a significant contribution to learners in ESL learning and extensive reading is a pedagogical task that gives the learners pleasure and at the same time it helps in language learning. In this context, this study aims to investigate whether extensive reading develops receptive and productive

skills of young adult second language learners. The study discusses the empirical support for extensive reading and explores its pedagogical applications in L2 teaching and learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As languages are complex (Joseph & Newmeyer, 2012), in the process of learning a language, the identification of linguistic elements is not sufficient enough to construct meaning from the target language. In order to receive and produce meaning in real communication confidently, awareness of the behaviour of language elements such as grammar, sentence structures and vocabulary in authentic situations is necessary. This awareness can be acquired through extensive reading as it helps the learner to recognize the internal textual structure, language patterns, vocabulary associated with particular text types, idioms, organizational flow, and cultural assumptions of native speakers of the target language. More importantly, extensive reading may help learners to check the correctness and appropriateness of their language proficiency level. In consistent with these views while Nuttall (1996) stated that the more the learners read, the more they learn, Krashen (1989) stated that extensive reading gives a vast amount of benefits for second-language learners. Furthermore, Schmidt (2000) claimed that extensive reading builds up the knowledge of the vocabulary and linguistic structure of the target



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language whereas Raines (1983) claimed that when learners read extensively, they engage actively in the new language and culture which gives them access to an unlimited amount of the language. In line with this view, Bell (1998) suggests that extensive reading can empower L2 learners by enhancing learners' general language competence, increasing students' exposure to the target language, increasing knowledge of vocabulary, leading to improvement in writing, motivation to read, consolidating previously learned language, encouraging the exploitation of textual redundancy, building confidence and facilitating the development of prediction skills. Thus, it can be argued that extensive reading may empower L2 learners by enhancing their overall proficiency in the target language.

Extensive reading can produce a positive impact on L2 language development (Jeon & Day, 2016; Nakanishi, 2015). Although extensive reading is important in developing L2 receptive and productive skills, it seems that this is rarely used in ESL programmes, particularly, tertiary-level ESL programmes. In these programmes, extensive reading can be taken as integrative learning which helps learners to grasp a more authentic understanding and apply skills and practice various settings, understand issues and positions contextually. Extensive reading may facilitate learner autonomy and develop positive attitudes towards

language learning and enriches their learning experiences boosting their motivation and enjoyment. It may make learners empowered in terms of making decisions on how to learn and evaluate their own learning and apply their own learning strategies (Penaflores (2002). They become independent learners and construct meaning from the target language with the help of direct experience (Benson, (2001).

In the process of developing receptive and productive skills in L2, extensive reading helps learners to enhance spelling, vocabulary, knowledge of grammar and text structure, knowledge of the world, and reading and writing skills (Day and Bamford 1998; Krashen 1993; Nation 1997). In consistent with these views, while Krashen, (1993); Elley and Mangubhai (1983) argued that extensive reading enhances receptive and productive skills and vocabulary acquisition, (Ells, 2005) suggested that extensive reading is one of the easiest ways to implement an input-rich learning environment in a pedagogical setting. Furthermore, Day & Bamford, (1998); Grabe, (2009); Grabe & Stoller, (2011) pointed out that extensive reading is an approach to reading pedagogy that encourages learners to engage in a large amount of reading and an instructional option has been steadily gaining support and recognition in the field of second language (L2) reading pedagogy. Thus, it can be argued that when the extensive reading programme is

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integrated into the ESL programme, the programme creates for the learner, a stress-free, autonomous environment that encourages life-long learning and empowers the learner by enhancing the target language competency. In line with this view, (Krashen, 1982) stated that in second language learning, learners need large amounts of comprehensible input in order to enhance their competency level in that language.

Many second language studies (Mason & Krashen, 1997; Smith, 1983; Nation, 1997; Elley, 1991; Linuwih, 2021; Fu, 2022; Lituanas, Jacobs, & Renandya, 2001; Azizi, Tkáčová, Pavlíková, & Jenisová, 2020; Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding, 1988; Hafiz and Tudor, 1990; Lekawael, & Ferdinandus, 2021; Huynh, 2022; Peterson, 2022) have demonstrated the impact of extensive reading on the development of second language learners' productive and receptive skills. For example, Azizi et al., (2020) investigated the impact of extensive reading on developing writing skills of Iranian students and the results of the t-test indicated that extensive reading has an impact on developing writing skills. Furthermore, Lituanas, Jacobs, & Renandya (2001) conducted a study with secondary school students in the Philippines and reported that their reading skills were considerably improved during six months of the extensive reading programme. Moreover, while Janopoulos, (1986) found a significant correlation between L2 reading and L2

writing proficiency, Nuttal, (2005); Aida & Widiyati, (2020) found that students' speaking ability can be improved by integrating extensive reading into language programmes. In the same way, while Day & Bamford, (2004) argued that extensive reading increases vocabulary knowledge and discourse exposure, Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding (1988) showed that extensive reading enhances verbal fluency, general information, and vocabulary knowledge. Additionally, empirical evidence from studies suggested that utilizing extensive reading can improve reading comprehension (Hitosugi and Day (2004); Ruzi, 2019; Hidayat & Rohati, 2020), vocabulary and spelling (Soltani, 2011, Liu & Zang, 2018), learners' positive attitudes towards reading and learning the target language (Ferdila, 2014; Kreshan, (1993), and pronunciation and writing ability (Sari, et al. 2019) and academic language competence (Kreshen, 2004).

Although numerous studies have investigated the relationship between extensive reading and L2 learning, these studies only focused on individual elements of language learning. It is difficult to find studies that have focused on the role of extensive reading in developing both skills: receptive and productive skills together particularly in the Sri Lankan context. Additionally, although many studies have focused on the role of extensive reading in developing L2 skills in secondary-level learners, only



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a few studies have focused on the role of extensive reading in developing L2 skills in tertiary-level learners. In this context, this intervention study aims to investigate whether extensive reading plays a significant role in developing both receptive and productive skills of tertiary-level L2 learners.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

After reviewing the current literature on extensive reading and second language development, two research questions were identified with the purpose of attempting to fill gaps in what had been previously studied.

Does extensive reading improve the receptive skills of young adult second language (English) learners?

Does extensive reading improve the productive skills of young adult second language (English) learners?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Participants

This study was conducted with 70 undergraduate students of both genders divided into two groups as experimental and control. The participants were English as second language learners. They were following two different degree courses in the medium of English at a Sri Lankan state university. Although they were following two different degree courses, they were taught the same second language syllabus by the same teacher.

These students had been learning English as a second language for about 13 years before entering the university.

The English language course was offered for these students as a compulsory course in four semesters and this investigation was conducted in the first semester. As the attendance of the learners was high in this semester, this semester was selected for the study. The semester consists of 15 weeks and during the semester, students were taught 45 hours. Although the experimental group (EG) students were assigned to read extensively, the control group (CG) students were not. They did not participate in any other ESL courses during the semester when the study was conducted. Therefore, the extensive reading provided in their classes was their major reading experience in English. Both groups were taught the respective grammar-oriented syllabus.

Instruments and Procedure

Extensive reading was integrated into the second language programme of the experimental group. Discussions, pair work, and group work were conducted and, pre-tests and post-tests were administered during the program. The study extended over a period of one semester. At the beginning of the semester, the benefits of extensive reading in learning a second language were discussed with learners of the experimental group in order to motivate them to be engaged actively in



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extensive reading and offer them a strong rationale for engaging actively in the programme. Here the difference between intensive reading and extensive reading was discussed and the learners were instructed that a large amount of reading would likely help them in empowering language competency. They were then asked to read materials from a variety of subjects that would appeal to their personal interest and match their level of English. As asserted by Day and Bamford (2002), students were instructed not to choose a material/book that would exceed their level of English as it would be a discouraging factor. All readings were done outside of class. The amount of reading was decided through negotiation. Every week students were required to present a report on what they read to make sure that learners were engaged in the assigned task. The report included information such as the title, author, summary, linguistic aspects that learners identified while reading and their opinions about the content. Then, classroom discussion on learners' reading was carried out and they were given opportunities to share their experiences acquired through reading with peers. During the discussion, the learners shared not only the content of reading materials but also the cognitive and affective response to them. The weekly record allowed the teacher and learners to regularly check on learners' progress towards their reading goals. If learners were not engaged in reading, they were

encouraged constantly to keep up with reading.

A post-test survey was conducted parallel to the pre-test survey to assess the learners' receptive and productive skills. Pre-tests were set by the researcher based on the structure and the administrative process of the post-tests, which were designed by a panel assigned by the University Grants Commission of Sri Lanka (UGC) and moderated by an ELT expert. Based on the comments, the tests were revised and piloted with 10 students in order to ensure the validity (face, content, and construct) and reliability of the tests. These tests assessed four skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Before the programme, pre-tests were administered, and results were analyzed and compared to find out whether any differences occurred between the two groups in terms of receptive and productive skills. However, a significant difference was not found between the two groups in terms of the four skills. At the end of the semester, both groups were required to sit for a common test which is called the University Test for English Language (UTEL), a national test conducted in all the state Universities in Sri Lanka, funded by the World Bank. More importantly, both groups were not given classroom instructions in relation to this test. Both receptive and productive skills were tested. Reading and listening were conducted as online tests whereas writing and speaking were conducted physically. The online



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tests were designed by a panel assigned by the University Grants Commission of Sri Lanka (UGC) and results were given on the spot. The writing test paper was also set and evaluated by a panel assigned by the UGC. The speaking test was conducted by examiners who came from Departments of English Language Teaching (DELTs) of different state universities. These skills were evaluated based on common band descriptors prepared for the UTEL examination. The band scores ranged from 0 (the lowest) to 9 (the highest). Below band 05 was considered weak while band 9 was considered the best.

In addition to the UTEL examination and the semester-end examination, learners of both groups (EG & CG) had to submit two assessments: one was based on writing and the other was based on reading comprehension, and they were given 40 marks (20 for each) out of 100 for the final examination. A questionnaire was also used to collect the demographic information about the participants (sex, age, educational background, amount of exposure to the English language, and amount of time spent reading in English). The findings are reported in the results section.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This study aimed to investigate whether extensive reading facilitates second-language (English) young adult learners to improve their receptive skills and productive skills. The pre-

test and the post-test results of the two groups: experimental and control, indicated significant differences in the development of productive and receptive skills. In addition to pre-test and post-test results, assessment results also demonstrated that extensive reading significantly contributed to the development of the productive and receptive skills of young adult second language learners. The following bar charts and line charts provide a detailed view of the results the learners obtained from the pre-tests, post-tests and assessments for each component.

The bar chart 01 illustrates the band obtained by each learner of the control group for all the components: reading, listening, writing and speaking at the pre-test. It can be seen that the majority of learners have gained below band 5 which is considered weak.

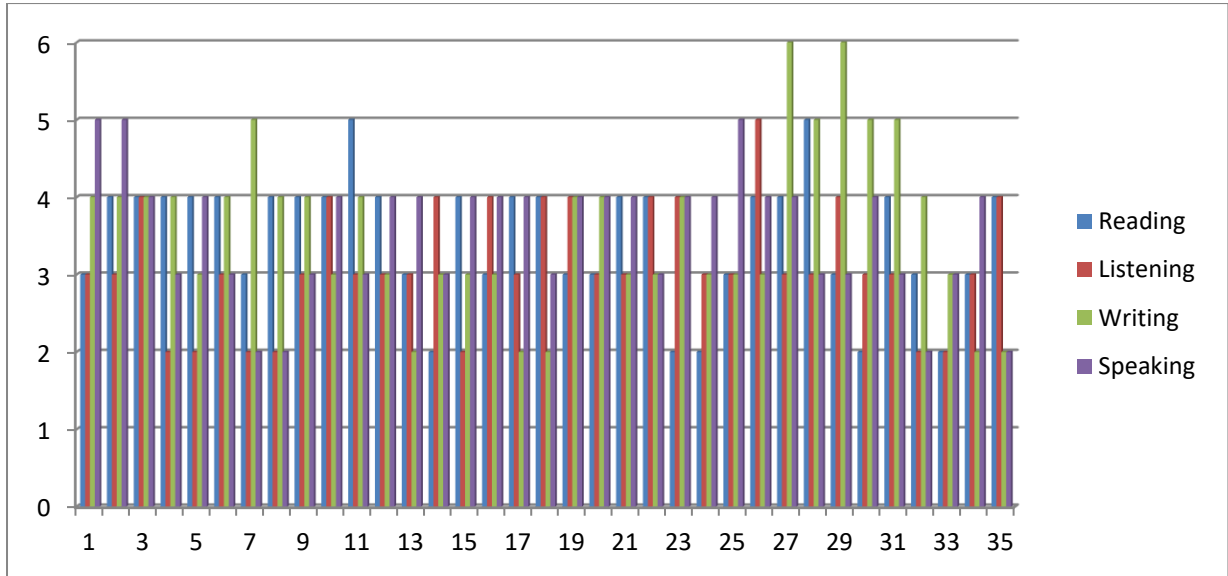
The bar chart 02 illustrates the band obtained by each learner of the experimental group for all the components: reading, listening, writing and speaking at the pre-test. Similar to the students of the control group, the majority of this group also obtained a band below 5 which is considered weak.

Overall, it can be seen that the learners of both groups have obtained similar bands for all the components and there are no noticeable differences between the two groups in productive and receptive skills. These results indicate that the learners of both groups had a similar level of English language

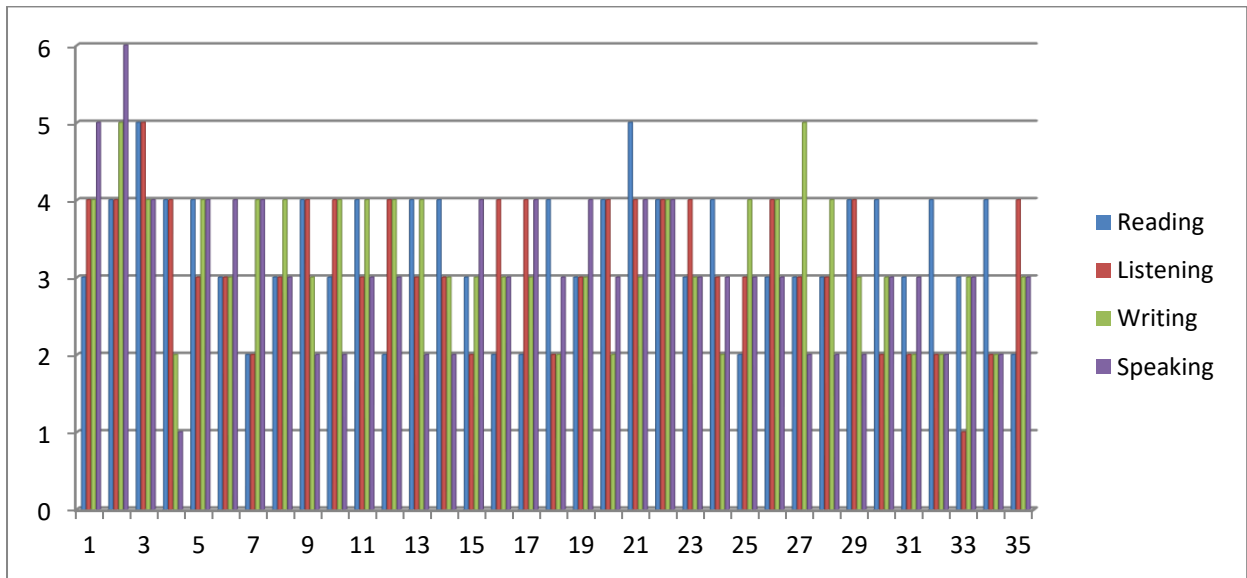


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proficiency at the beginning of the semester.



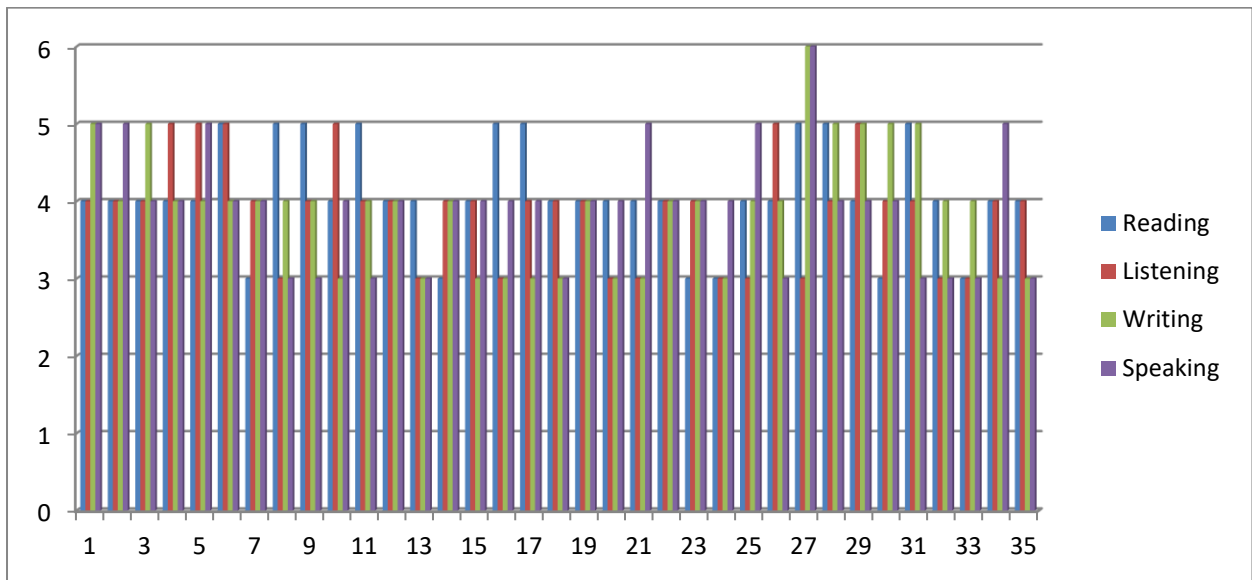
Bar Chart 01: Control Group - Pre -Test Results



Bar Chart 02: Experimental Group - Pre -Test Results



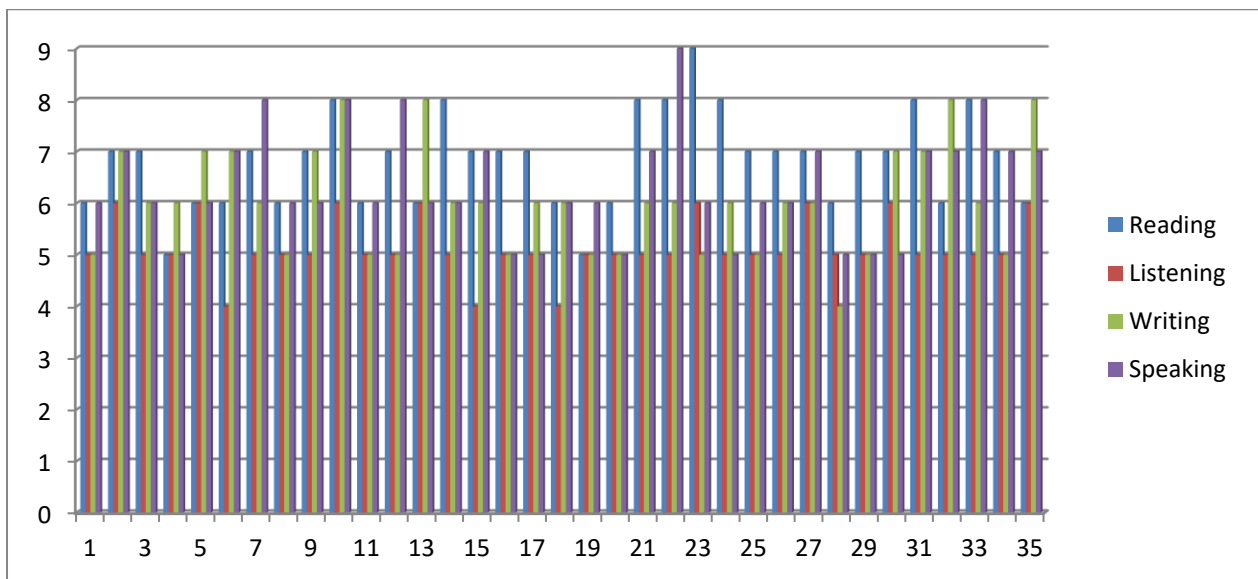
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Bar Chart 03: Control Group - UTEL Examination Results (post-test)

The bar chart 03 illustrates the band obtained by each learner of the control group for all the components: reading, listening, writing, and speaking at the UTEL examination (post-test). The chart

shows that the majority of the learners have gained below band 5 which is considered weak. However, a slight development in all four skills can be seen as they followed a General English course for one semester.



Bar Chart 04: Experimental Group - UTEL Examination Results (post - test)

The bar chart 04 provides information about the band obtained by each

learner of the experimental group for all the components: reading, listening,



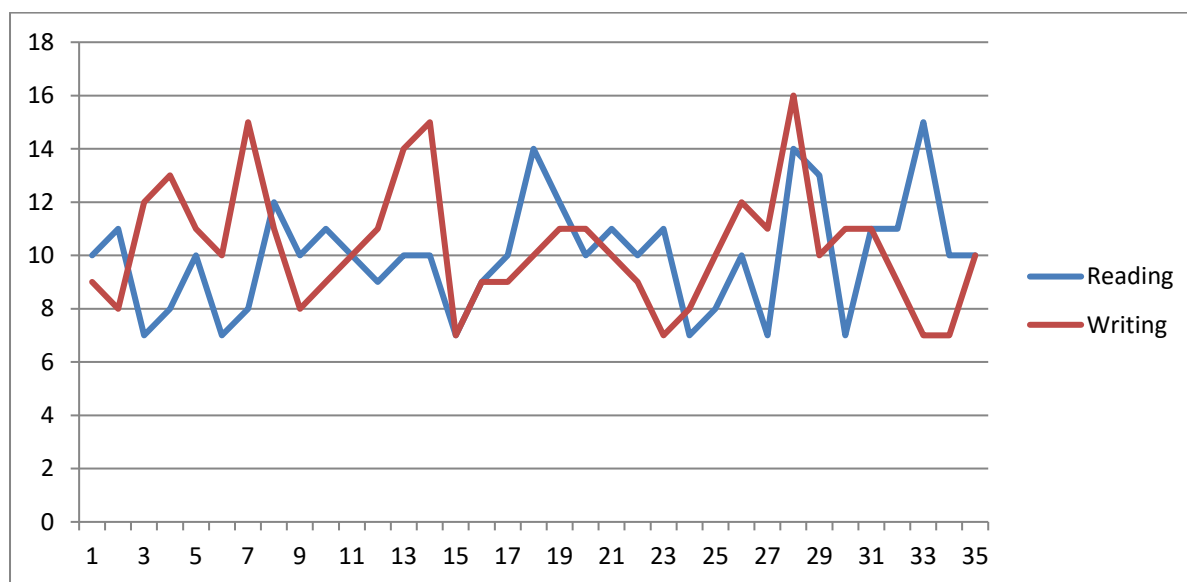
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writing, and speaking at the UTEL examination (post-test). The chart shows that the majority of the students have gained band 5 or above which is considered good and excellent. The findings indicate that receptive and productive skills can be developed through extensive reading as it supports learners' exposure to the target language and develops contextual and conceptual knowledge.

All in all, the results indicate that the majority of the experimental group obtained band 5 or above for all the components, reading, writing,

listening, and speaking whereas the majority of the control group obtained the band below 5 for all the components. Therefore, it can be argued that extensive reading has a profound effect on the development of the productive and receptive skills of young adult second language learners.

In addition to the pre-test and post-test results, the assessment results displayed in the following Line Charts indicate that extensive reading supports second language learners to improve their reading and writing skills.



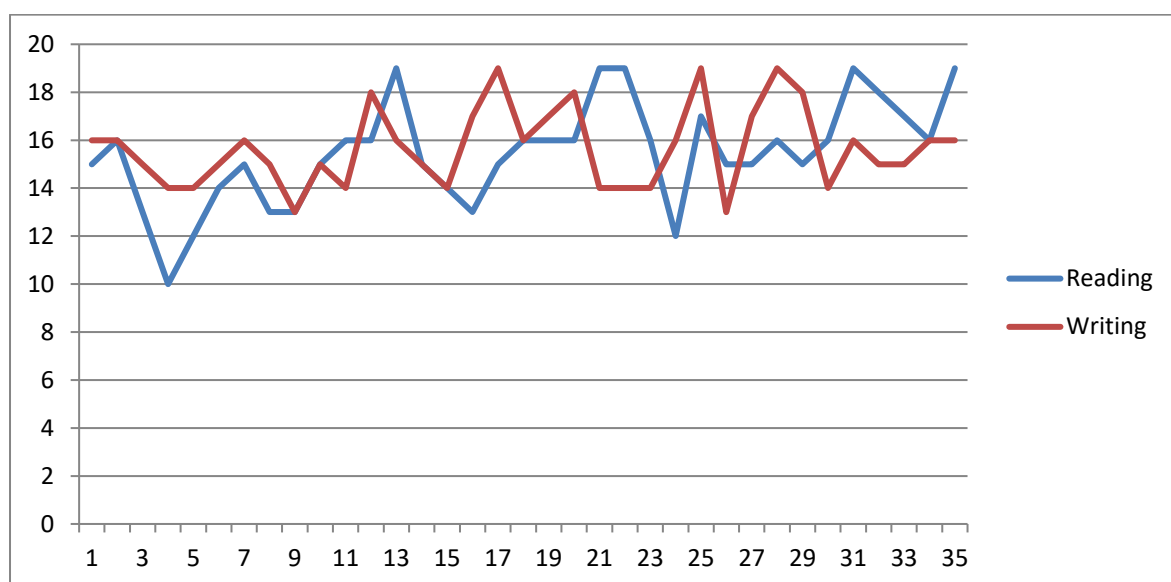
Line Chart 01: Control Group - Assessment Results

The line chart 01 displays the marks obtained by each learner of the control group for their reading and writing assessments. The chart demonstrates that

the majority of the students have gained marks between 7 and 12 out of 20 marks for each assessment.



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Line Chart 02: Experimental Group - Assessment Results

Line chart 02 illustrates the marks obtained by each learner of the experimental group for their reading and writing assessments. The chart demonstrates that the majority of the students have gained marks above 15 out of 20 for each assessment. The results indicate that there is a striking difference between the two groups in terms of developing productive and receptive skills and extensive reading significantly impacts the development of reading and writing skills.

Similar to post-test results, the assessment results of the experimental group indicate that extensive reading can improve the productive and receptive skills of second-language young adult learners.

Overall, the results indicate that extensive reading can improve the receptive and productive skills of second-language young adult learners. The results suggest that students with

more exposure to reading can improve their productive and receptive skills than students with less exposure to reading. It was indicated that the amount of exposure to reading would be reflected in their productive and receptive skills. These findings will be discussed in the discussion section with supporting evidence.

DISCUSSION

This study aims to investigate whether extensive reading facilitates the development of productive and receptive skills of young adult second language learners. Answering the research questions, the findings demonstrate that extensive reading significantly contributes to the enhancement of the productive and receptive skills of young adult second language learners. The results are consistent with Azizi, et al. (2020); Sari, et al. (2019); Hidayat & Rohati (2020),

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Rodrigo, Krashen, & Gribbons (2004) and Krashen (2009). For example, while Azizi, et al. (2020) investigated the impact of extensive reading on developing writing skills of Iranian students and the results of the t-test indicated that extensive reading has an impact on developing writing skills, Lituanas, Jacobs, & Renandya (2001) conducted a study with secondary school students in the Philippines and reported that their reading skills were considerably improved during six months of the extensive reading program. Moreover, while Janopoulos (1986) found a significant correlation between the L2 reading and L2 writing proficiency, Nuttal (2005) and Aida & Widiyati (2020) found that students' speaking ability can be improved by integrating extensive reading into language programs. In the same way Day & Bamford (2004) argued that extensive reading increases vocabulary knowledge and discourse exposure whereas Anderson, Wilson and Fielding (1988) argued that extensive reading enhances verbal fluency, general information, and vocabulary knowledge. Additionally, empirical evidence from studies suggested that utilizing extensive reading can improve reading comprehension (Hitosugi and Day (2004); Ruzi,(2019); Hidayat & Rohati (2020), vocabulary and spelling (Soltani, 2011, Liu & Zang, 2018), learners' positive attitudes towards learning (Ferdila, 2014) and pronunciation and writing ability (Sari, et al. 2019).

Through extensive reading, learners can be exposed to a new culture and actively engage in the new language. They can identify the behaviour of the target language in authentic situations. This identification helps them believe in their own experience and build their language competence and confidence. In line with this claim while Hedge (2000) stated that learners who read extensively build their language competence, develop their reading skills, acquire cultural knowledge, and have a sense of self-confidence and motivation, Maley (2009) pointed out that through extensive reading the learners view and review unknown words in specific contexts, enjoying cognitive freedom to infer their meanings and proceed in their acquisition of language. In consistent with Nuttall (1996); Krashen (1989); Sagagi (2007); Schmidt (2000); Raines (1983) it can be argued that extensive reading may help learners to learn more and check the correctness and appropriateness in their target language ability and build their knowledge of vocabulary and the target language structures.

Given that extensive reading gives a number of benefits for second language learners, it can be argued that these learners can be empowered through extensive reading so that they can face any communicative challenges in the world of communication. In line with this claim, Bell (1998) Jeon and Day (2016),and Nakanishi (2015) suggest that extensive reading can empower L2



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learners as it can help them enhance their exposure to the target language, general language competence, knowledge of vocabulary, writing skills, motivate them to read, build confidence and facilitate the development of prediction skills. Through extensive reading, learners may gain large amounts of comprehensible input and identify linguistic elements of the target language and their behaviour in real communication. In consistent with this while Krashen and Gribbons (2004) argued that comprehensible input-based approaches are more effective than traditional approaches in enhancing language skills, Krashen (2009) suggested that language acquisition can be greatly enhanced by extensive reading, which exposes one to the target language. Additionally, learners can identify the linguistic elements of the target language and realize the function of these elements in the language. Extensive reading may liberate the learner and learning takes place under the learner's control. They may solve the target language usage-related issues independently. It can be argued that exposure to the target language through extensive reading may have a number of benefits for second language learners and as a result they are empowered by extensive reading.

However, although extensive reading helps learners to improve production and receptive skills, only extensive reading may not be sufficient enough to develop second language skills. As

Nation, (2007) suggested, four equal strands: meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency activities need to be incorporated into a language programme to make it a well-balanced language course. In addition to these strands, explicit instruction also may support the development of receptive and productive skills in these learners. Both intensive and extensive readings serve language learning. Furthermore, it can be argued that in addition to extensive reading, intensive reading also should be incorporated into the ESL programme as through intensive reading, learners' semantic, grammatical and syntactical contents may be formally and consciously learnt whereas in extensive reading the learners may view and review unknown words in specific contexts, enjoying cognitive freedom to infer their meanings, and proceed in their acquisition of language (Maley, 2009). In intensive reading, learners work with short texts under the guidance of the teachers whereas in extensive reading, learners identify main ideas and text signals, enhance vocabulary and grammar knowledge and construct detailed meaning independently from the texts. In a traditional class, the learners practiced intensive reading answering multiple-choice or open-ended questions. Intensive reading supports learners to improve their reading comprehension skills whereas extensive reading may support learners to be innovative learners and divergent thinkers. However, both intensive and



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extensive reading may serve language learning. Although learners are required to sacrifice time, energy and resources in extensive reading, the benefits they get through extensive reading in terms of language skills are significant. With the help of extensive reading, learners are exposed to the target language repeatedly and they may become independent learners and as a result they enjoy making decisions for being empowered with language proficiency. The extensive reading programme can provide effective platforms for promoting ESL skills in tertiary-level learners. Therefore, in order to empower L2 tertiary-level learners with target language skills, this intervention study suggests extensive reading as a key strategy.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study focused on the benefits of extensive reading in developing productive and receptive skills of second language young adult learners and discussed the importance of incorporating extensive reading in ESL programme. In supporting the previous studies, this study suggests that exposure to the target language through extensive reading is one of the major sources of empowering young adult ESL learners in receptive and productive skills and extensive reading is a potentially effective language development opportunity for ESL young adult learners.

The study offers practical suggestions for the ESL authorities. As extensive reading occurs under the control of the learner, learners may have a tension-free, independent learning environment. In this environment, learners can repeatedly be exposed to massive quantities of written texts, identify linguistic elements in the target language and its authentic behaviour, and use it confidently and competently. Therefore, in addition to classroom instruction, extensive reading is important in the process of developing the productive and receptive skills of young adult learners as it is likely to facilitate them to be empowered in language skills. Given that extensive reading significantly supports ESL young adult learners, the extensive reading programme needs to be incorporated into their ESL programme so that they can be exposed to the target language through extensive reading and develop their language skills. Additionally, learners can identify the target language elements through extensive reading and apply them in receiving and producing meaning in authentic situations. In order to establish extensive reading as a habit, the teacher has the responsibility to monitor the learners' language capacity almost every day and suggest suitable learning materials with appropriate levels of linguistic complexity and themes appealing to their level of language competency. Thereby the development of productive and receptive skills



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through extensive reading can be turned into a rewarding pastime. Therefore, this study recommends extensive reading as a key strategy in empowering ESL young adult learners in both the productive and receptive skills.

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