



From Extensive Reading to Expository Paragraph Writing: Focusing on Advanced EFL Learners' Grammatical Accuracy

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Abstract

It is generally suggested that exposure to language through extensive reading can enhance the learners' language competence. This study aims at exploring the effect of extensive reading (ER) on advanced EFL learners' expository paragraph writing. A total of 42 advanced-level students were concentrated on in the study who belonged to three groups, namely the extensive reading group, intensive reading group and a control group, the latter one of which was mainly engaged in oral activities during the research. For extensive reading, three prose fictions, i.e. *Animal Farm*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and *A Farewell to Arms* were chosen. Towards the end of the study, which took two semesters, the participants were asked to write four expository paragraphs on four topics already chosen based on brainstorming and random selection. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and the complementary tests indicated that the grammatical accuracy in terms of Mean value of Error-Free T-Units (EFTUs) differed significantly between extensive and intensive reading groups but not extensive and control or intensive and control groups. Also, the data obtained from a 5-point Likert-type scale showed that the participants mostly favored extensive reading as a generally useful task; however, they did not agree that grammatical points are teachable exclusively through extensive reading. Implications of the study are discussed.

Key words: extensive reading, advanced EFL writing, expository writing, accuracy

INTRODUCTION

It is generally believed that the ability to write fluently and expressively is a goal pursued in EFL at large and for academic achievement in particular. It is one of the dominant ways in which language learners can ensure academic credentials among other things.

Writing is a powerful means of communication by which students learn better to express themselves. Teaching and learning to write in any language is essential area that influences students' performance and language learning. Moreover, learning to write in English as a foreign language has been an essential professional educational issue that serves various educational purposes and meets certain learning needs upon

which the foreign language learners' progress depends. (Al-Mansour and Al-Shorman, 2014, p. 248)

A major challenge faced by foreign language learners is to produce good-quality writing. Language learners, especially at higher levels of proficiency, are burdened by demanding, time-consuming writing tasks for general as well as academic purposes. This is partly due to the fact that writing is, in essence, an outgrowth of perhaps a long-term stock-taking in terms of other language skill areas such as reading, vocabulary learning, grammar, etc. Alqadi & Alqadi (2013) believe that

As a productive skill, writing can represent an obstacle in the process of L2 development since it requires that formal, content, and cultural schemata are obtained and presented appropriately, cohesively, and accurately (p. 106).

Writing is also assumed to enable the learners to develop their experiences into text and the processes of thinking (Zainal and Husin, 2011), develop thinking skills (Al-Mansour and Al-Shorman, 2014), and externalize and reshape thinking (Applebee, 1984; Emig, 1977).

FROM READING TO WRITING

Learners' rich record of engagement in reading is a fundamental way in which writing quality improvement is assumed to take place (see Alkhawaldeh, 2011). In literature, reading is presented as intensive and extensive. The former refers to a type of "... reading that focuses closely on the linguistic text itself and the practice of particular reading skills" (Atligan, 2013, p. 53). The latter, however, is a term to denote a rapid, large-scale, free reading of books after books for leisure (see also Susser & Rob, 1990; Grabe and Stoller, 2002, among others). The dichotomy, thanks to Harold Palmer in the late 1960s, inaugurated the distinction between a microscopic text-centered vs. macroscopic meaning-centered reading activities in language pedagogy. Extensive reading (ER) has, over the years, been the focus of a wealth of studies within SLA centered around input to the learners, source of exposure to L2, implicit learning, task-based language learning, etc (Bell, 2001; Day & Bamford, 1998; Leung, 2002; Nation, 1997; Takase, 2007; Yamashita, 2008, to name a few).

Janopoulos (1986), in an investigation of university ESL students, found a significant relation between pleasure reading and proficiency in written English. Elley and Mangubhai (1981) reported that the young children made significant improvements in learning written English structure through reading.

Day and Bamford (1998) present examples on some studies on the reading – writing connection in which the influence of extensive reading goes into writing, supporting the widely held notion that we learn to write through reading. Among these studies they present Hafiz and Tudor (1989) in English where they were impressed by the gains their subjects made in writing in English, even though they were not given any particular

writing tasks in the United States. As Hedgcock and Ferris (2009) put it, extensive reading makes the background knowledge accessible for learners as helpful and essential aspect of writing. They (ibid) add that whereas successful writing may not contribute to good reading, high-quality writing is, in fact, attributable to good reading. Lee & Hsu (2009) could show that extensive reading could mean beneficial gains in terms of skill areas including grammar with extensive reading programs; nevertheless, students were not very much certain about self-improvement in writing and grammar as they were about other skill areas.

Wang (2010) could show that in uncontrolled experiments, ER could improve accuracy while in the controlled experiments all the effects on language skills areas were moderate and grammatical accuracy failed to improve. Chuenchaichon (2011) employing a reading – into – writing method examined the effect of ER on paragraph writing skills of ESL learners. The study demonstrated a positive effect with writing at a paragraph level with experimental group learners tending to use more complex structures. Johansson (2014) reported that extensive reading could not contribute to grammatical accuracy in a cause and effect relationship. Alzu'bi (2014) in EFL Jordanian context found that extensive reading contributes to learners' achievement regarding all skills including grammar. With this background in mind, the following research questions were set for the study:

- Does extensive reading' contribute to grammatical accuracy of advanced EFL learners' expository writing?
- How do learners react to extensive reading as a source for improving their language skills?

METHOD

Participants

Participants in the study were 42 male upper-intermediate learners of English doing their spoken English courses in a private language institute in Tabriz, Eastern Azerbaijan Province in Northwest of Iran. They belonged to three classes (groups). Experimental group (class A) contained 14 participants, and Control Group 1 (class B) and control group 2 (class C) numbered 11 and 17 in participant size, respectively. Their ages ranged between 19 and 27, and their native language was mostly Azerbaijani with the exception of two who spoke Persian due to their upbringing in Persian-speaking towns or by native Persian parents. None of the learners had ever been to English-speaking countries, nor had he resided anywhere abroad.

Procedures

Although learners were selected on the basis of accidental sampling due to rigorous structure of the institute (the context of the study), oxford placement test (OPT) was administered to the three groups (classes) to make sure that they are of the comparable proficiency level. OPT results indicated homogeneity of all three groups. Furthermore, a standardized grammar test was given to the participants to ascertain their level. The

classes were actually two ordinary classes and one free discussion group organized within the framework of conventional classes to serve the purpose of the control group. The teachers who taught the classes were different; therefore, they spent a few hours of briefing on how to handle the classroom procedures during the study. Teachers during the two semester that took 4 months (June to September 2014), exposed the experimental group learners to extensive reading motivating them to give oral reports of their readings in return for extra points. The learners in the experimental group were instructed to use three novels, namely *Animal Farm* (by G. Orwell), *Grapes of Wrath* (by J. Steinbeck) and *A Farewell to Arms* (by Ernest Hemingway). As the purpose of extensive reading is not skimming for particular information, the participants were encouraged to read for meaning and avoid too much dependence on dictionary. The second group was not assigned any reading at all since they were supposed to be engaged in intensive reading which their textbooks and learning materials were assumed to involve. The third group, as mentioned above, did not have any exposure to either intensive or extensive since they were, in fact, doing free discussion during the study. Concerning the topics for expository paragraph writing, a great many topics were initially chosen based on brainstorming with the classroom teachers. Subsequently, the topics were shortlisted to 20, and finally 4 topics were randomly chosen using draw-from-a-hat method.

Towards the end of the study, they were given the four topics for expository writing. Each topic was given in one class meeting allotting 30 minutes for each and the entire paragraph writing sessions. The students were not allowed to use a dictionary, a grammar reference source, or a grammar textbook. Drafting was allowed provided that they handed in the draft along with the final version of their paragraph. The topics for writing were:

- Nowadays, parents and their teenagers differ greatly in their attitude to life.
- Computer crimes are changing into big threats.
- Educational systems in developing countries are largely ineffective;
- Marriage laws must change in my country.

At the end of the course, the participants were given a 15-item questionnaire the reliability of which had already been established through a pilot study (Cronbach alpha = +0.87).

Measurement & instrumentation

Analysis of writing for grammatical accuracy was done by the researcher and a colleague, who was the teacher in the same institute but was not involved in teaching any of the three groups. The inter-rater reliability proved to be high enough to yield a good level of confidence for consistency of ratings (Kappa coefficient = 0.94).

Writings were corrected for accuracy using the ratio of error-free T-units (EFTUs) such that the ratio of EFTUs for each expository paragraph was calculated. Since each student had produced four expository paragraphs, the mean ratio of EFTUs of the four writings

was calculated. For the questionnaires, the mean of the responses to each Likert-type items was obtained.

Results

The collected data comprised 168 expository paragraphs written by the students and 10 and 42 questionnaires completed by the participating teachers and students, respectively.

To answer the first research question, i.e., '*Does extensive reading contribute to grammatical accuracy of Advanced EFL learners' expository writing?*', One-way ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) for three independent samples was employed. The descriptive and inferential statistics appear in Tables 1 and 2, respectively.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the three groups in the study

	ERG*	IRG**	CG***
N	14	11	17
Sum	1131.01	595.64	1017.88
Mean	80.78	54.14	59.87
Variance	260.76	279.05	332.10
Standard Deviation	16.14	16.70	18.22

* Extensive Reading Group; ** Intensive Reading Group; *** Control Group

Table 2. ANOVA results for mean comparison of the three groups

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between groups	5225.56	2	2612.78	8.87	0.00*
Within groups	11494.25	39	294		
Total	16719.82	41			

* Significant at $p < 0.05$

Table 2 can clearly demonstrate that there is a significant difference among the means of the extensive reading group, intensive reading, and control group. However, ANOVA cannot possibly go any further. To obtain a detailed account of the differences, the complementary tests of the One-way ANOVA, i.e. Independent Samples T-test. Since three groups are included in the study, three complementary tests were run to see the differences. Table 3 demonstrates the Independent Samples T-test comparing Extensive Reading Group (ERG) and Intensive Reading Group (IRG).

Table 3. Independent Samples T-test comparing ERG* and IRG**

Mean Difference	df	Observed t-value	Significance
26.63	23	4.03	0.00*

* Significant at $p < 0.05$

Table 3 clearly indicates that the mean difference between the Extensive Reading Group and Intensive Reading Group (26.6) is big enough to outrun the random variation (null hypothesis). Now that the mean differences are significant, one can look at the means to see which group performed better. Figure 1 shows that the mean of the ERG (Extensive Reading Group) was 80.78 which was higher than that of the IRG, that is 54.14 (Intensive Reading Group).

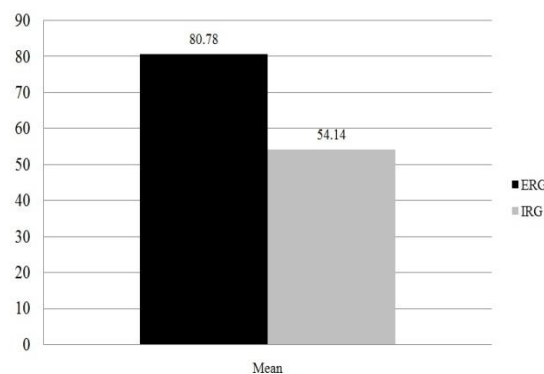


Figure 1. Mean Error-free T-Unit Ratio of ERG and IRG groups

ERG = Extensive Reading Group; IRG: Intensive Reading Group

The second complementary test for the ANOVA employed here involves comparing ERG and Control Group means employing Independent Samples T-test. Results appear in Table 4.

Table 4. Independent Samples T-test comparing ERG* and CG**

Mean Difference	df	Observed t-value	Significance
15.52	30	1.97	0.06 (n.s)

* Extensive Reading Group; ** Control Group

It can be understood from Table 4 that the mean difference between Extensive reading group and control group is not significant at $p < 0.05$.

Last of all, the mean comparison between Intensive Reading group and Control Group can complete the whole picture of cause and effects within the ANOVA results. The output of Independent Samples T-test of the two groups mentioned above appears in Table 5.

Table 5. Independent samples T-test comparing IRG* and CG**

Mean Difference	df	Observed t-value	Significance
5.73	26	0.84	0.41 (n.s)

* Intensive Reading Group; ** Control Group;

Following Table 5, the difference between Intensive reading group and control group was not significant either.

As for the second research question 2, '*How do learners react to extensive reading as a source for improving their language skills?*', the frequency values from a 5-point Likert type scale (questionnaire) were obtained. Tables 6 through 20 represent the items and the corresponding frequency of responses.

Table 6. Frequency of the responses to the item No.1 of the questionnaire

Item	Question	SA	A	U	D	SD
1.	Extensive reading is generally beneficial to the language learning.	21	14	6	1	0

SA = Strongly agree; A = Agree; U = Undecided; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly disagree

It is clear from Table 6 that the learners showed more agreement with the idea that ER is beneficial to language learners.

Table 7. Frequency of the responses to the item No.2 of the questionnaire

Item	Question	SA	A	U	D	SD
2.	Reading a lot can give the learners a 'feel' for the right language use.	13	11	4	7	7

SA = Strongly agree; A = Agree; U = Undecided; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly disagree

Again, the respondents (participants) according to Table 7 demonstrated more agreement with item No. 2 though the rate of disagreement is more than that with the previous item.

Table 8. Frequency of the responses to the item No.3 of the questionnaire

Item	Question	SA	A	U	D	SD
3.	Learning from texts can be maximized when it takes place for pleasure.	10	19	10	2	1

SA = Strongly agree; A = Agree; U = Undecided; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly disagree

The pattern of responses to the item No. 3 as Table 8 shows is that learners agreed with the item but they were also more undecided than against it.

Table 9. Frequency of the responses to the item No.4 of the questionnaire

Item	Question	SA	A	U	D	SD
4.	Text reading can enrich the learners' active vocabulary.	16	18	3	5	0

SA = Strongly agree; A = Agree; U = Undecided, D = Disagree; SD = Strongly disagree
With Item No. 4, still the agreement was much higher than disagreement and only 3 respondents were undecided.

Table 10. Frequency of the responses to the item No.5 of the questionnaire

Item	Question	SA	A	U	D	SD
5.	Extensive reading can enhance integrative motivation (interest in language for the sake of knowing more about the culture, people, etc).	16	18	3	5	0

SA = Strongly agree; A = Agree; U = Undecided, D = Disagree; SD = Strongly disagree

As shown in Table 10, responses to item 5 shows that the participants in general were in favor of ER as a predictor of integrative motivation.

Table 11. Frequency of the responses to the item No.6 of the questionnaire

Item	Question	SA	A	U	D	SD
6.	Text reading can expand the range of passive vocabulary.	11	19	3	8	2

SA = Strongly agree; A = Agree; U = Undecided, D = Disagree; SD = Strongly disagree

Table 11 indicates that respondents were generally supportive of the idea contained in item No. 6, whereas the disagreement rate was much lower.

Table 12. Frequency of the responses to the item No.7 of the questionnaire

Item	Question	SA	A	U	D	SD
7.	The learners who read a lot are more likely to be good writers as well.	7	20	5	6	4

SA = Strongly agree; A = Agree; U = Undecided, D = Disagree; SD = Strongly disagree

Again, as is the case with most of the items, there were more supporters of the idea in item 7 than those who refuted the idea or were not determined.

Table 13. Frequency of the responses to the item No.8 of the questionnaire

Item	Question	SA	A	U	D	SD
8.	I like classroom tasks that involve extensive reading.	5	12	15	2	8

SA = Strongly agree; A = Agree; U = Undecided, D = Disagree; SD = Strongly disagree

With item 8, as the Table 13 clearly illustrates that there was a slightly higher number of the people who agreed with the idea contained in the item than those who disagreed; however, the number of the respondents who are not decided on the inclusion of ER in the classrooms is quite considerable.

Table 14. Frequency of the responses to the item No.9 of the questionnaire

Item	Question	SA	A	U	D	SD
9.	There are so many grammatical structures that I can use simply because I have seen them occur in texts.	18	3	11	6	4

SA = Strongly agree; A = Agree; U = Undecided; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly disagree

As far as item 9 is concerned, most respondents seemed to 'Strongly agree' with the idea that grammatical structures can be the source of implicit learning while at the same time the number of the respondents disagreeing is almost as high as the number of those who are not determined about any effect.

Table 15. Frequency of the responses to the item No.10 of the questionnaire

Item	Question	SA	A	U	D	SD
10.	It is possible to teach grammar indirectly through extensive reading in classes.	4	7	7	14	10

SA = Strongly agree; A = Agree; U = Undecided; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly disagree

As Table 15 indicates, unlike the majority of the items, respondents to item 10 tended to express more disagreement than agreement with the idea of teaching grammar through extensive reading. In addition, there was numerically a slim margin of differences between those who agreed and those who were undecided. The number of the respondents who chose 'Strongly agree' is smaller than the ones who chose other items.

Table 16. Frequency of the responses to the item No.11 of the questionnaire

Item	Question	SA	A	U	D	SD
11.	Punctuation can be taught in classes more effectively if teachers assign short stories and novels as classroom tasks.	4	5	13	10	10

SA = Strongly agree; A = Agree; U = Undecided; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly disagree

According to Table 16, the number of the respondents who disagree with punctuation teachability exceeds that of the participants who agreed with the idea. Also, the highest frequency is represented by those who are not decided about the efficacy of teaching punctuation through extensive reading. The pattern of responses is even more than item 10 is diametrically opposed to the overall trend of responses.

Table 17. Frequency of the responses to the item No.12 of the questionnaire

Item	Question	SA	A	U	D	SD
12.	Extensive reading can best complement in-class activities	34	3	4	0	1

SA = Strongly agree; A = Agree; U = Undecided; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly disagree

With Table 17, it is too much evident that learners show an overwhelmingly positive attitude towards the perspective that extensive reading complements classroom instructional activities. The other responses are simply negligible.

Table 18. Frequency of the responses to the item No.13 of the questionnaire

Item	Question	SA	A	U	D	SD
13.	Reading for leisure raises learners' awareness of language structures.	9	4	15	2	2

SA = Strongly agree; A = Agree; U = Undecided, D = Disagree; SD = Strongly disagree

The respondents to item 13, as Table 18 demonstrates, were more undecided than anything about whether awareness-raising can occur due to the exposure to extensive reading. On the other hand, the total number of respondents who disagreed exceeded that of those who disagreed.

Table 19. Frequency of the responses to the item No.14 of the questionnaire

Item	Question	SA	A	U	D	SD
14.	Reading for the sake of pleasure is very likely to lead to reading for learning.	27	10	0	0	5

SA = Strongly agree; A = Agree; U = Undecided, D = Disagree; SD = Strongly disagree

Very much like item 12 in Table 17, this item bears indications that the participants strongly lay the emphasis on the relevance of extensive reading for learning. There are no doubtful respondents and only 5 strongly disagree which is not such a high frequency compared to the agreements.

Table 20. Frequency of the responses to the item No.15 of the questionnaire

Item	Question	SA	A	U	D	SD
15.	Pedagogically, there is a lot of difference between reading texts in textbooks and reading novels and stories for pleasure.	10	1	21	2	8

SA = Strongly agree; A = Agree; U = Undecided, D = Disagree; SD = Strongly disagree

With item 15, which is the last one on the questionnaire, Table 20 indicates that the respondents have expressed doubt more dominantly than any other positive or negative attitude.

Discussion and Conclusion

Analysis of the data in the present study was conducted through comparing three groups, that is, extensive reading group, intensive reading group, and reading-free group. Results indicated that, initially, a significant difference was found among the three groups. Further analysis using complementary tests was launched to compare the means of all three groups two by two. The only significant difference was between extensive reading group and intensive reading group with the mean of the former exceeding that of the latter. Therefore, the extensive group outperformed the intensive group regarding grammaticality of paragraph writing by producing, on average, a higher number of error-free T-units.

Results from this study are in general agreement with the studies by Bell (2001), Day & Bamford (1998), Leung (2002), Nation (1997), Takase (2007), Yamashita (2008), and Takase (2007). In particular, the support for the positive effect of extensive reading on grammatical accuracy is lent to the local finding of the study by Alzu'bi (2014), Chuenchaichon (2011), Day and Bamford (1998), Hafiz and Tudor (1989), Hedgcock and Ferris (2009), Leung (2002), Nation (1997), Yamashita (2008). Nevertheless, studies by Johansson (2014) and part of the findings by Wang (2010) that could report no cause and effect relation between extensive reading and grammatical accuracy is refuted by this study.

The results from the questionnaire indicated that the participants, in general, were in favor of extensive reading as a source of improvement of their L2. All this is in line with the wealth of studies in literature some of which are cited in this study. The items that represented a different response pattern were about the possibility of teaching grammar and punctuation through extensive reading, which evoked disagreement and negative attitude. Moreover, they were undecided about showing supportive or non-supportive response to a) liking the extensive reading as a classroom routine, b) awareness-raising quality of extensive reading, and the pedagogical distinction between extensive and intensive reading. This finding is in complete congruence with Lee and Hsu (2009) who reported students did not express certainty over their self-improvement in writing and grammar as they were about other skill areas. These two trends of deviation from the general trend can be attributed to the unfamiliarity of the respondents with extensive reading as a fixed part of their EFL classroom routines.

The overall benefits of extensive reading on developing grammatical accuracy can bear good implications for educators and classroom practitioners to allocate more space and time to reading long texts over time. Such a reading can be a rich source of exposure to grammatical, vocabulary, discoursal, stylistic, generic, pragmatic and even literary aspects of the input. Extensive reading once accommodated into the EFL syllabus and teaching routines can prove an excellent source of authentic language that is unlikely to achieve within the EFL classroom situation. Since writing is presumably a more demanding skill than reading and speaking due to its association with formal, academic settings, improved writing as an outgrowth of reading can prove as an asset for EFL use in academic context and more specifically EAP (and to a lesser extent) ESP situations. Areas such as syllabus design, teacher evaluation programs, curriculum development, and many other lines of research, theory and practice can draw upon extensive reading as a beneficial pedagogical and methodological technique.

Future studies can investigate the effects of extensive reading on the enhancement of finer-grained dimensions of grammatical accuracy such as tenses, clause units, connectors, modals, inverted structures, etc. Longitudinal studies can shed light on the developmental order in which accuracy can be enhanced as an outcome of extensive reading. Studies on written accuracy can focus on larger writing units such as essays, reports, or on other genre of writing, namely narrative, descriptive or argumentative writings. Extensive reading effect can further be explored with regard to other features

of writing such as fluency, lexical diversity, lexical variety, cohesion, rhetorical organization, etc. Finally, research can compare the extensive reading content or genre regarding their hypothetical influence in learners' writing.

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