



## **The Impact of ER-IR Approach on the Improvement of Saudi EFL Learners: An Intervention Study**

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### **Abstract**

This intervention study is an attempt to investigate the impact of ER-IR Approach on the enhancement of Unified Scientific Track learners' EFL in Ula Branch, Taibah University, KSA. Twenty participants were selected from fresh university students and divided equally into experiment and control groups. A mixed method (quantitative and qualitative) design was implemented; achievement tests and structured interview were used as effective measures for collecting data. Pre-tests and post-tests were administered to gather quantitative information followed by an in-depth interview which conducted for six participants to collect qualitative information in form of learners' opinions towards ER-IR Approach and its effects on their reading skills. The findings showed that ER-IR Method strongly encouraged learners to gain successful progress and sufficient knowledge of their EFL learning.

**Keywords:** extensive reading, intensive reading, ER-IR Approach, EFL learners

### **ENGLISH AS FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDIES IN SAUDI ARABIA**

Traditionally, the main issues to be investigated in EFL previous studies which related to English teaching in Saudi Arabia are seen in several areas, including English curriculum, teaching methods, learners' lack of motivation, lack of teacher training and administrative processes.

Al Resheed (2008) for instance, conducted a research on EFL Program of the secondary schools - problems, causes and solutions. He raised some questions involving - what are the qualities of English textbooks/materials in secondary schools?, What English methods do teachers use in teaching English in the classroom?, How can the curriculum be developed to cope with Saudi culture? The selected samples were 20 classes, 10 public school & 10 private school classes. The major findings of this study concluded that reasons for the problems are lack of motivation, attitude to English culture, the great social distance between the two cultures, and traditional methods of teaching English.

Similarly, Al-Subahi (1989) made a research on the evaluation of English program in intermediate schools. The study proposed to identify the status of the current syllabus of English at intermediate schools with reference to its: 1) Identification of aims and instructional objectives. 2) Manipulation of content, material selection and graduation. 3) Application of teaching methods and learning techniques. 4) Criteria for student achievement and assessment. Four responding samples are selected to arguing for the analysis of ESA content and instruction, namely: students, English teachers, supervisors, and parents. Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that there is dissatisfaction among students, parents, English teachers and supervisors with the present program of English at Intermediate Saudi School -ESA. This seems to be produced by the faulty syllabus, inadequate level of competence among teachers, lack of instructional material, confusing educational supervision, poor working environment, focusing on writing and reading as opposed to speaking and listening and lack of experience to verbal English. The study provides some principles for improving an innovative EFL program for intermediate school students. It also suggests principles for EFL instruction and evaluation which are built on contemporary EFL literature of functional/ notional approach.

Moreover, Al-Hamlan (2013) prepared an evaluative study to investigate whether EFL curriculum fulfils students' needs. The subjects of this study were 500 female learners at the third secondary classes from Riyadh state. The questionnaire was designed by committee members expected to explore learners' views about this particular curriculum. It was disclosed that the curriculum meets the necessities of the learners in common sense but learners did not pay attention to matters like the difficulty of textbooks, learners' classroom interactions and the number of the new expressions included in the textbooks.

At the college level, Al-Murabit, I. (2012) did a study on analysis of fresh learners' syllabus in Saudi community college where English is the language of teaching. The study attempted to develop the English syllabus of the college. The findings revealed that stable changing of lecturers, course books, course hours, assessment and scoring strategies, coping with technology and others similar matters are essential to the development of syllabuses.

On the other hand, Al-Saadat and Al-Braik (2000) assessed the role of instructors and EFL supervisors in the improvement of English Language Curriculum in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The questionnaire was developed to elicit responses from a total of 84 EFL teachers and supervisors. The results would reflect the strong belief among the population of the study, teachers in particular, in the importance of change to the present English language curriculum. Data derived from the study also show that most of the teachers (above 80.5%) found curriculum design and textbooks as the most problematic areas needing change.

In this regard, AlHarbi (2000) suggested current issues in English Language Education in the KSA, including three main points, 1) Motivations and attitudes towards English, 2) English language planning, curriculum, and materials and 3) Classroom dynamics: from

teaching to learning. He claimed that the best models of teacher development are often in threefold: English language proficiency, the socio-cultural experience of learning to teach and the technical, methodological, and theoretical aspects of teaching.

Moreover, Nadeem, S. et al (2013) conducted a study on whether the EFL teachers are ready to integrate technology. 12 male Saudi English language teachers were given a questionnaire in advance then semi-structured and structured interviews were used for collecting data. The results indicated that although English teachers were aware of the importance of technology & its uses, they have inadequate knowledge of IT, lack of technology and the insufficiency of teachers' training.

It is true that the government of Saudi Arabia made great efforts in the field of education, but the students' level of performance in studying English as a foreign language is far below. This claim was supported by Al-Shumaimeri (2003) who mentioned that learners leave secondary schools with no ability to carry out a short conversation. After studying English for several years, the learners have gained little progress in English proficiency.

Fareh (2010) has mentioned some challenges facing EFL curriculums in KSA including 1) School teachers are not well trained and there are no clear teaching methodologies. 2) Learners are not motivated to learn 3) Problems of English course books and teaching resources 4) Evaluation techniques. 5) Teacher-centered rather than student-centered learning.

To solve the challenges of EFL program, Mahibur Rahman, M. & Alhaisoni, E.(2013) argued that there is a need of vigorous contribution from the policy makers, curriculum designers, textbook writers, instructors and learners.

Similarly, Al-Asmari, A & Rabb Khan M. (2014) suggest introducing the World Englishes in the EFL Teaching. They believe that when students study the World Englishes, it increases learners' opportunity to understand other varieties of English and to be aware of people's different cultures, thus, their English proficiency improves.

Although lots of previous studies have been done in English as Foreign Language, most of them focus more on the problems rather than the stable solutions which develop learners' English proficiency particularly reading skills. Fresh university students who are the subject of this study, experience some difficulties in learning English and some of them are not able to cope with scientific subjects where the English language is the means of teaching. Their English achievement is poor due to their English learning background in public schools. Therefore, the present study tends to investigate the efficiency of combining extensive reading and intensive reading approaches on the enhancement of fresh university students' EFL in Unified Scientific Tracks, Ula Branch, in Taibah University, in Saudi Arabia.

## **HOW DOES ER-IR APPROACH WORK?**

The work of ER-IR Approach built mainly on the ten principles of ER Approach provided by Day & Bamford (2002) with some modifications and additions to other techniques

related to IR Approach. In this concern, a large number of books, Graded Readers as reading material would be available in a classroom library and arranged in series from simple to more difficult levels ( from level 1 to level 7). EFL learners have to start reading books including vocabulary and structures which match their learning abilities. This means that there must be a wide range of reading resources with various topics and issues that fulfill the learners' need and interest.

Every individual learner has a chance to select whatever he wants to read according to his linguistic competence and interest. The student has to read as much as possible, the more he reads the greater the number of benefits from the target language Histosugi & Day (2004). The main aim of reading is related to pleasure "i.e., practicing skills of reading" and information "i.e., acquiring linguistic knowledge". The vast amount of reading has been done outside the classroom while the group discussion and answering activities occur inside the classroom. Reading speed is a moderate level, not too fast or too slow which helps the student to read and at the same time to focus on the main ideas and language progress in order to solve duties such as book report or describing characters after he ends reading the book.

The teacher's role, on the other hand, has to introduce the ER-IR Approach to students. He has to prepare forms of reports, activities, give instructions and to be a role model of a reader. The process of learning is related to learner self-autonomy where students are divided into groups, plan and prepare duties outside the classroom and come to discuss them in the classroom with the help of their classroom teacher. The dictionary is sometimes used when it is so important.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The term 'ER' Approach was first used by Harold Palmer (1936), the famous British applied linguist in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to mean reading large quantities of simplified books for increasing readers' comprehension and fluency without doing any duties after reading. ER Approach is one of the most effective ways for improving learners' language proficiency and it supports their reading habits (Carrell and Carson, 1997; Maley, 2005). Tracing the literature of English language, one can find a great number of previous studies highlight the role and the importance of ER in increasing readers' EFL (Attaprechakul, 2013; Grabe, 2010; Popercu, 2012; Gorsuch, 2012; Bernhardt, 2011; Huang, 2013; Abraham, 2013 and Chou, 2011). Moreover, ER encourages learners to improve their self-autonomy and self-confidence Day & Bamford (1998), to develop the components of reading fluency, automaticity, accuracy and prosody (Walker 1997; Camiciottoli 2001). ER also supports learners to enhance writing skills Mart (2015) cited in Tsang (1996). Day & Swan (1998) believe that ER helps students acquire sufficient vocabulary knowledge and language structure. Krashen (1993) assumed that ER is very effective in learners' spelling progress.

Intensive reading (IR) approach, on the other hand, concentrates on accuracy rather than fluency and it always deals with grammar and vocabulary of the target language. Reading short texts intensively in classroom supporting by various activities leads to the

improvement of language proficiency. There is also a number of scholars Erfanpour (2013) cited in Simons, et al. (2011) believe that IR Approach is thought to be an effective tool in developing readers' comprehension, vocabulary and sentence structure.

It has been mentioned that using ER alone does not allow readers to gain sufficient language knowledge. In other words, acquiring a complete knowledge of the target language cannot be achieved without implementing both ER and IR Approaches Paran (2003). He believes that when extensive reading and intensive reading are integrated into English classroom, learners are able to know the new vocabulary, understand the grammatical structure, increase the rate of speed and fluency, gain detailed information, make progress in communicative competence and writing style. In brief, due to this combination, the accuracy of writing and the fluency of reading will exist simultaneously in learning contexts Mark (2015).

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

This study attempts to shed a light on the integration of ER-IR approach as a unique teaching/learning technique and presents its research objectives as follows:

- A.** To investigate the efficiency of ER-IR Approach on the development of the Unified Scientific Track students' EFL in Taibah University, Saudi Arabia.
- B.** To investigate the Unified Scientific Track students' views towards ER-IR Approach on the enhancement of their English as a Foreign Language in Taibah University, in Saudi Arabia.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The present study generates two main research questions for investigation.

- A.** What is the efficiency of ER-IR Approach on the development of Unified Scientific Track students' EFL in Ula Branch, Taibah University?
- B.** What are the Unified Scientific Track students' views towards the ER-IR Approach on the development of their EFL in Ula Branch, Taibah University?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

The present research conducts a combination of two main approaches namely, the quantitative and the qualitative method in order to achieve this experimental study. The study focuses on quantitative method because the investigator wants to make sure that almost all the results yield from statistical analysis are facts, accurate and thus, they serve to obtain the ultimate goals of the study. Also, quantitative approach is used because it involves achievement tests which are thought to be the main tools for collecting information from participants. Dealing with achievement tests reduce the possibility of

bias and the authority of the investigator does not have direct access to the research results.

The study also selects qualitative method because qualitative approach involves flexibility. During the performance of the interview, the investigator can create various sorts of questions, varies his/her tone voice until the interviewee gets the points and delivers the exact answers which are needed. Also, the qualitative method is used because the study seeks to evaluate learners' views towards the influence of ER-IR Strategy on their reading habits through another tool which is a semi-structured interview.

In brief, this research tries to employ an experimental study, using quantitative and qualitative research methods which lead to the collection of enough data. The use of integrated methods (quantitative & qualitative approach) and their data gathering tools can get the reader to be satisfied with the study findings.

## **Participants**

The population of the present study are science students of the foundation levels in El Ula Branch, Taibah University, Saudi Arabia. When fresh science students enter the different colleges of Taibah University, they have to be in a foundation institute for one year to study a program called Unified Scientific Track Program and then they distributed to the university colleges based on their final exam results.

The participants of the present research were 20 students who were conveniently selected. They were male and aged from 19-20 years. They represented 183 students who enrolled in semester one of the academic year 2017-2018. All the students were specialized in science and the English language was not their major but it was a key subject in the foundation program. Students studied intensive English course which involves 16 hours a week and 4-hour English lecture for four days.

## **Instruments**

Collecting information from participants in a particular study requires the investigator to work carefully to choose effective and various tools which are competent to measure the assigned data. Therefore, the present study involves some quantitative instruments such as treatment materials in form of Graded Readers, one achievement test to measure reading comprehension and qualitative instrument in form of a semi-structured interview to measure the views of the participants towards ER-IR Approach on the improvement of their EFL proficiency.

## **Procedure**

The total number of participants was 20, dividing into two equal groups, experiment group who were exposed to Graded Readers and control group who were not exposed to any treatment. The tests involve two similar passages for pre- and post-tests. The test addressed the six major aspects of English language including the aspects of main ideas, detailed information, the sequence of events, cause and effects, creating inferences for

language structure, and lexical knowledge. Both groups were administered pre-test. Then the intervention study began and the duration of it was 4 weeks. For experiment group, every participant had to read one book, Graded Reader, weekly. By the end of week four, participants in experiment group had to finish reading 40 books. Both groups taught by one English teacher for a month and then a post-test administered. Additionally, six participants from experiment and control groups were selected to do the semi-structured interview. Six interview questions were carefully prepared and answered by participants in order to measure their views about the benefits of ER-IR Approach and how it supported their EFL.

## RESULTS

After the intervention study has been carried out, and the amount of data were collected, two analysis techniques were used to analyze the results of quantitative data, descriptive statistics and One Way ANOVA. The descriptive statistics was utilized for pre-test and post-test results of both groups, experiment and control groups to measure the individual differences between learners whereas ANOVA was utilized to analyze the scores between variables.

In terms of the experimental group, the descriptive statistical analysis for pre- and post-test scores revealed that learners had made much more progress in post-test scores than pre-test scores. The post-test mean (13.1) is higher than pre-test mean (7.1). Similarly, the median (post-test 13 > pre-test 7.5), the mode (post-test 13 > pre-test 8) and the standard deviation (post-test 2.0248 > pre-test 1.8135). These findings would be an actual evidence that participants' performance gained a good progress in post-test than pre-test results, and thus, the ER-IR Approach was considered as an effective tool that enables learners to improve their English language proficiency. (see Table 1).

**Table1.** Descriptive Statistics for English language Pre- & Post-tests – E. Group

E. Group	N	Mean	Median	Mode	SD
Pre-test	10	7.2	7.5	8	1.813529
Post-test	10	13.1	13	13	2.024846

In terms of control group learners, the descriptive statistical analysis of the post-test and pre-test scores disclosed that there were no statistically significant differences between control group learners' post-test scores and pre-test scores. The post-test mean (5.8) is relatively identical to the pre-test mean (6.5), the median (post-test 5.5, pre-test 6), the mode (post-test 4, pre-test 3), the standard deviation (post-test 2.6, pre-test 2.9). These findings revealed that post-test and pre-test scores are relatively identical which means that control group learners did not make any progress in post-test scores because learners were not exposed to Graded Readers.( see Table 2).

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics for English language Pre- & Post-tests Cont. Group

Control Group	N	Mean	Median	Mode	SD
Pre-test	10	5.8	5.5	3	2.616189
Post-test	10	6.5	6	4	2.990726

Moreover, the other technique used to analyze experiment group learners' results is One Way ANOVA. The results of this analysis revealed that there were statistically significant differences between post-test scores and pre-test scores, thus, the average (post- 13 > pre- 7), the variance (post-4 > pre- 3) and the sum (post-131 > pre-72) respectively. The P-value (2.01892E-06) is lesser than 0.05 meaning there is significant progress in post-test scores. These findings suggested that experiment group participants were able to learn much better due to the exposure of ER-IR Approach. (Refer to Table 3).

**Table 3.** One Way ANOVA – English language Pre & Post-test Scores. E. Group.

Group	Count	Sum	Average	Variance	
Pre-test	10	72	7.2	3.288889	
Post-test	10	131	13.1	4.1	
ANOVA					
Source of Variation	SS	Df	MS	F	P-value
Between Groups	174.05	1	174.05	47.11128	2.01892E-06

Similarly, the One Way ANOVA technique is also used to analyze the control group learners' post-test and pre-test scores. The findings of the analysis revealed that there were no statistically significant differences between post-test and pre-test scores whereas the average (post- 6.5, pre- 5.8) and the sum (post-65, pre-58) respectively. The P-value (0.584329) is much bigger than 0.05 which gives an indication that there was no significant difference between the scores of both pre-test and post-tests. In other words, controlled group learners did not gain any improvement in EFL post-test scores because they were not exposed to ER-IR Approach (see Table 4).

**Table 4.** One Way ANOVA of English Language Pre- & Post-test Scores- Con. Group

Control Group	Count	Sum	Average	Variance	
Pre-test	10	58	5.8	6.844444	
Post-test	10	65	6.5	8.944444	
ANOVA					
Source of Variation	SS	Df	MS	F	P-value
Between Groups	2.45	1	2.45	0.310345	0.584

Based on the achievement of English language scores for both experiment and control groups, the results showed that experiment group learners achieved higher scores in post-test( mean=13.20) than pre-test scores(mean=6.50) while for control group learners, there were no statistically significant differences between post-test (mean=6.50) and pre-test scores (mean=5.80). Although experiment group learners' Pre-test scores (mean=7.20) were relatively identical to control group learners' pre-test scores (5.80), the experiment group learners have made a successful progress in post-test scores (mean=13.10) than control group learners' post-test scores (mean=6.50). (see Table 5).

**Table 5.** English Language Proficiency Pre & Post-test Scores for both Groups

English Language Proficiency Test		Mean	SD	N	P-value
Experiment group	Pre-test	7.20	1.81	10	2.02E-06
	Post-test	13.10	2.02	10	
Control group	Pre-test	5.80	2.62	10	0.58432999
	Post-test	6.50	2.99	10	



In regards to qualitative data analysis, the study employed content analysis technique to analyze the scores of in-depth interview protocol. The data collected from 6 participants from experiment and control groups responding to the interview questions introduced by the researcher. All the interview questions were asked to make sure whether learners got benefits from ER-IR Approach or not. The learners' responses were varied. Experiment group learners believe that ER and IR method and Graded Readers were very helpful and they support their learning achievement, whereas control group learners' responses were negative. They did not deal with various reading resources and they did not do more practices during the English language course.

## DISCUSSION

Since the findings of the present study have been analyzed, the discussion is done based on the research questions of the study. The first research question is of a quantitative nature "What is the efficiency of ER-IR Approach on the development of Unified Scientific Track Students' EFL in Ula Branch, Taibah University?"

Based on the descriptive statistical analysis of experiment group learners' scores displayed in (Table1), the mean of post-test score (13.1) was greater than the mean of pre-test score (7.2). These findings disclosed that there were statistically significant differences between post-test scores and pre-test scores which intended that ER-IR Approach support improvement of Unified Scientific Track Learners' English language proficiency.

Additionally, according to the descriptive statistics of control group learners' scores presented in (Table 2), the mean of post-test scores (6.5) is relatively similar to the mean of pre-test scores (5.8). In other words, there is no significant difference between the scores of pre-test and post-test. This analysis revealed that control group students were not exposed to ER-IR Approach with Graded Readers, therefore, they did not make progress in post-test scores after the intervention study was over.

Moreover, according to the analysis of experiment group learners' test scores, analyzed by One Way ANOVA, the P- value (2.01892E-06) is lesser than 0.05, and the average of post-test scores is bigger than the average of pre-test scores, thus, the analysis revealed that experiment group learners were exposed to ER-IR Approach therefore, they made a positive result in post-test scores. In other words, ER-IR Approach is thought to be an effective teaching/learning method which supports Unified Scientific Track learners to develop their EFL learning.

In contrast, the analysis of control group learners test scores analyzed by One Way ANOVA indicated that the P-value 0.584 is greater than 0.05 and the average of post-test scores is relatively similar to the average of pre-test scores. The findings revealed that control group learners did not make any progress in their post-test scores because they were not exposed to IR-IR Approach with Graded Readers.

In brief, one can conclude that ER-IR Approach is a very effective method used to develop the Unified Scientific Track learners' EFL in Ula Branch, Taibah University. This finding is

in line with many studies involving Mark (2015) cited in Brumfit (2008) believed that learners gain successful progress in EFL proficiency when combining extensive reading and intensive reading approaches. Similarly, Nuttall (1996) suggested that extensive reading and intensive reading are complementary and both are effective in enhancing EFL proficiency. This finding also made a concurrent with Paran (2003) study which claimed that to learn EFL properly, you have to use extensive reading and intensive reading simultaneously.

The second research question is a qualitative part "What are the Unified Scientific Track students' views towards the efficiency of ER-IR Approach on the development of their EFL in Ula Branch, Taibah University? The analysis of the in-depth interview results showed that the majority of the participants (4 out of 6) responses are positive. They believe that extensive reading and intensive reading approaches increase their EFL knowledge which includes new vocabulary, new language structure and writing style. The method also supports their self-confidence, learning autonomy and motivation. These interview results are in line with Erfanpour (2013) interview findings which viewed that extensive reading has more positive effects on EFL learners' achievement but it focuses on the skill of reading only, therefore, the researcher added that extensive reading approach and intensive reading approach are essential in studying EFL.

To sum up, based on the interview results, ER-IR Approach has more positive effects on the Unified Scientific Track students' EFL learning.

## CONCLUSION

The present study results showed that practicing intensive reading approach in English classroom enables students to increase reading comprehension and accuracy of writing. The textbooks of this concern are enough for intensive reading exercises. The extensive reading approach, on the hand, enables learners to extend reading from inside classroom to outside classroom and it allows the learners to deal with extra reading resources in order to maximize their reading amount and speed. This sort of practicing increases learners' reading fluency and automaticity.

Moreover, Extensive reading and intensive reading approaches, together, in English classroom, enable learners to master student' EFL reading fluency, writing accuracy and language structure. For this reason, the present study research assumes that ER & IR Approach is a unique method which encourages students to increase their EFL learning.

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