



## The Logic of ER-IR Strategy on the Development of Saudi Students' Reading Accuracy

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### Abstract

Reading is a central language skill in every EFL classroom and learners are familiar with a number of reading techniques and strategies. But these techniques are only a part of the intensive reading approach. Illogically reading for the sake of pleasure is rarely existed in EFL classroom. The present study aimed to investigate the logic of ER-IR Strategy on the improvement of learners' reading accuracy. To achieve this goal, an experimental research design was conducted, two study groups, an experimental and a controlled group were formed and a sample of the study were 20 participants selected from fresh university learners in Ula Branch, Taibah University. Pre-test and post-tests were administered and the findings showed that participants had made a better progress in post-test scores.

**Keywords:** ER-IR Strategy, EFL classroom, reading accuracy

### INTRODUCTION

My personal experience in Gulf area ' e.g. in Saudi Arabia and Sultanate of Oman' is that English teachers always activate intensive reading approach (IR) in English classroom when they teach English lessons for comprehension, grammar, vocabulary and other types of reading skills. Even students create a concept that when they study English lesson, they have to deal with short passages with difficult new vocabulary which force them to use dictionaries in order to acquire some information to answer the tasks below. But extensive reading (ER) or reading for pleasure does not find its way to most English classrooms. It is rare to get a teacher who gives students assignment such as to read a simplified book or a chapter of a book for the sake of practicing reading accuracy or to read a book at home and to talk about its characters in the classroom. This unbalanced use of intensive reading and extensive reading helps learners to make some progress in knowledge of syntax ' i.e. language structure ' and ignore the knowledge of reading fluency components such as reading accuracy.

In the situation of Ula Branch, in Taibah University, where the study is implemented, fresh university learners always have one year program namely Unified Scientific Track where

students study intensively the basic subjects using English as the means of instruction. Since all the science subjects are taught in English language and the most credit hours in English subject (16 hours a week) and learners come from schools with poor level of reading skills, it is essential for English lecturers in the Unified Scientific Track Program, to incorporate intensive reading approach (IR) which has already existed with extensive reading (ER) in order to give learners a chance to practice reading accuracy. This study tries to provide great efforts on reading assignment 'e.g. reading short books' to be trained at home and to discuss elaborately in the classroom. In other words, the present study attempts to investigate the effects of IR and ER Approaches on the improvement of fresh learners' reading accuracy.

Most fresh students in the Unified Scientific Track Program (USTP) in Ula Branch, Taibah University are low readers particularly reading accuracy. The deteriorations of learners' reading accuracy have been made due to the following problems:

First, fresh students are poor in reading skills because their English literacy was not well established in general education. In schools, English syllabuses were full of information. There are enough lessons for grammar, vocabulary, and topics for reading. There are also plenty of exercises for all language skills, audios and reading aids. During several years of studying English, students do not make great benefits from this English environment. When they come to the university, they discover that their English language proficiency is not as equal as the level of science subjects in colleges. In this regards, Shumaimeri (2003) claimed that when students had finished secondary schools, they were not able to read simple sentences accurately.

Second, fresh students also face the problem of English syllabus in (USTP). In (USTP), Q Skills for Success Books are assigned as English textbooks for students to study intensively (16 hours a week). But there is a wide gap between learners reading ability which is beginner or elementary level and the actual level of the textbooks which is first-year university level.

Logically, this situation requires a hard work from lecturers to prepare a complete remedial work for reading accuracy but unfortunately, lecturers do not do the supplementary assignment for students to practice because they are not aware of the values of reading accuracy. Even English textbooks do not include drilling exercises allocated specifically for practicing reading accuracy.

Finally, there are some research studies (Bell, 2001; Robb & Susser, 1989; Mason & Krashen, 1997; and Horst, 2005) suggest that ER approach facilitate learners' reading accuracy. On the other hand, studies like (Gonzalez, Davis & Simons, 2011) report that IR approach is more beneficial for learners to improve their reading accuracy. Therefore, the present study assumes that the integration of ER-IR as one reading strategy is the only way to improve learners' reading accuracy.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The first linguist who came up with the terms (ER) and (IR) approaches was Harold Palmer in his famous books namely ' The Scientific Study and Teaching of Language in

1917' and 'The Principles of Language Study in 1921'. Palmer(1917) viewed that 'ER' and 'IR' are two different approaches but they complement each other, as the former refers to a fast reading, book after book, with the reader's attention to the meaning of the text not the content of the text and the latter refers to studying the text line by line, focusing on new words and grammar, analyzing, judging, interpreting and retaining every expression the text contained. Renner(2010) cited in Palmer (1964).

In addition, some experts, for example, Krashen (1993) and Day & Bamford (2002) believed that long periods of reading books encourage learners to enhance their reading accuracy of the target language.

Similarly, Yurika Iwahori (2008) investigated the efficiency of ER approach on the students' reading rates in Japanese public schools. The students used Graded Readers as extra reading resources. The findings of pre-test and post-test scores showed that participants had made a successful progress in their reading rates. Also, at Kent State University in the United States, a similar study was conducted by Yildirim, K. et al.(2014) in Turkish primary school learners. The findings revealed that the reading resources which implemented were very effective in enhancing learners' reading accuracy.

In contrast, (Waring, 1997) claims that IR approach is a very helpful for learners to develop their language proficiency including reading accuracy. This claim supports Paran(2003) to say that to acquire a full knowledge from a target language, you have to use both ER and IR approach in the classroom. Based on this evidence, the present study attempts to measure the benefits of ER-IR as a teaching strategy on the fresh university learners' reading accuracy.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The present study states its research objectives as follows:

- To investigate the impact of ER-IR Strategy on the improvement of first level university students' reading accuracy.
- To investigate the first level university students' opinions on the enhancement of their reading accuracy.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The present study generates two main research questions for investigation.

- Does ER-IR Strategy improve the first level university students' reading accuracy?
- What are the first level university students' opinions towards the ER-IR Strategy on the enhancement of their reading accuracy?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Design**

The present study applies an experimental research design where two groups, experiment and control were assigned to one-month experimental study. Moreover, the study tends to collect a huge amount of data in a short time and to be analyzed statistically, thus, the quantitative method is an effective technique for doing this. As the

investigator wants to acquire enough information from participants who attended the experiment, the qualitative method is a better technique that provides the researcher with a flexibility to reform interview questions till participants get the points and do the responses appropriately Creswell (2014).

## Instruments

The study utilizes two research measures, quantitative, in form of reading accuracy achievement tests and qualitative, in form of structured interview post to the experimental study.

## Reading Accuracy Assessment

Scholars involving (Pikulski, 1990) and (Kress, Pikulski & Johnson, 1987) suggest that decoding word accuracy is used as benchmarks for marking reading accuracy scores. The score of reading accuracy is calculated by dividing the number of words read correctly per minute (WCPM) by the number of words read (corrected words plus uncorrected words). The final scores should be converted into a percentage. Then the teacher has to compare the student's marks against the target norms (Refer to Table1).

**Table 1:** The Performance Levels for Word Decoding Accuracy

Level	Scores in Percentage
Independent	100 - 97 %
Instructional	96 - 90 %
Frustration	Less than 90 %

Adapted from Rasiniski (2004) booklet, Assessing Reading Fluency.

The reader whose score is ranging from 97-to-100 % and marks as an independent level is able to read the assessment text without assistance. The reader who scores 90- to-96% and gets (instructional level) is able to read the text with some help. And those who score less than 90% in word accuracy (frustrated level) will find difficulty in reading the assessment text even with some help.

## Sample selection

The population of the present study were fresh university students in El Ula campus, Taibah University, situated in Northern part of Saudi Arabia. The students are in science stream and English is not their major subject. They enrolled in the academic year 2017 and they are male students aged 18-20. All students share common educational, cultural and economic background. All learners study an academic program called Unified Scientific Track designed particularly for fresh university students last for one year with two academic semesters. The sample of the study were 20 students chosen conveniently from a population of 183 fresh students.

## The implementation of the experimental study

The experimental study program was accompanied by the academic semester one where students studied English course (E101). Q Skill for Success Books were assigned as textbooks for the English course (E101). The program started with 20 participants selected conveniently and categorized into two groups, experiment and control group.

The experiment group learners were exposed to ER-IR Strategy as a method of learning and studying Graded Readers as an additional reading material. In contrast, control group learners were not exposed to any extra reading resources.

Before the study started, the researcher made an introductory lecture explaining the whole procedure to participants. He talked about pre and post-tests, the experiment, interview session and how this program administered. The researcher also introduced some terms such as what is extensive reading, intensive reading, and reading accuracy and why it is important at this crucial stage of learners' study. Then reading accuracy pre-test was administered to all participants (experiment and control groups). The participants were asked to read a written passage for one minute (Refer to Appendix1). The corrected words and uncorrected words were recorded down. Reading accuracy scores were calculated by dividing the sum of corrected words (WCPM) by the total number of words (WCPM added to uncorrected words).

Then the experimental study began. Every individual in the experiment group had to read at least one short book weekly. He had to practice reading accuracy at home and did some assignment for classroom discussion. Every Thursday, experiment group learners had a 3-hour lecture allocated for the program. During this lesson, learners had to do lots of tasks such as role play, TV interview, reading marathon, and describing characters. Doing these exercises, participants created a great reading competition in order to practice reading accuracy. Every two weeks, experiment group learners had to write individually a book report and had to submit it to the researcher for informal assessment and to notice learners progress. After four weeks, the study was ended and experiment group learners had to finish reading 40 simplified books. The reading accuracy post-test was administered for all learners following the same procedure in the pre-test.

Moreover, three participants were randomly selected from each group to perform the interview session. The interview session aimed to investigate the learners' opinions on how was their reading accuracy improved due to the implementation of ER-IR Strategy. The interview questions were prepared and demonstrated by the researcher. Each interviewee took about 15-to-20 minutes to answer six interview questions and to express freely his own views towards the study.

## RESULTS

To analyze the results of pre-test and post-test scores of reading accuracy for both experiment and control group learners, the descriptive statistical analysis was utilized. In regards to the experiment group, the descriptive statistical analysis of post-test and pre-test scores showed that participants had made much more progress in post-test scores(85.20) compared to pre-test scores(41.40). In contrast, for the control group, the analysis revealed that there were no statistically significant differences between pre-test scores (40.10) and post-test scores (44.10). This successful progress reflects the influence of ER-IR Approach on the learners' reading accuracy.

Based on the analysis displayed in (Table 2), the finding revealed that reading accuracy pre-test scores of experiment group learners were relatively similar to reading pre-test scores of control group learners. Thus, the mean of experiment group learners' pre-test

(41.40) is relatively the same as the mean of control group learners (40.10). In the other way, reading accuracy post-test scores of experiment group learners were higher compared to reading accuracy post-test scores of control group learners, thus, the mean of experiment group learners' post-test scores (85.20) was greater than the mean of control group learners' post-test scores (44.10).

In brief, the findings provide concrete evidence that ER-IR Strategy has a positive effect on the Unified Scientific Track learners' reading accuracy in Ula Branch, Taibah University.

**Table 2.** Reading Accuracy Post-test and Pre-test Scores.

	Mean	SD	N	P-value
Ex. Group				
Pre-test	41.40	6.42	10	1.2534E-10
Post-test	85.20	8.43	10	
Control Group				
Pre-test	40.10	8.01	10	0.35086965
Post-test	44.10	10.50	10	

In terms of the interview results, the study used content analysis procedure to analyze learners' responses to the interview questions. The participants of the interview session were six learners chosen from both experiment and control groups to express their ideas about the influence of ER-IR Strategy on the development of their reading accuracy. The analysis of the interview results revealed two different views. The experiment group learners (3) strongly agree that ER-IR Strategy and reading Graded Readers played a great role in the improvement of their reading accuracy. Most of them were able to read long sentences, paragraphs and some short texts fluently and accurately. Their vocabulary knowledge expanded and their reading ability increased. While control group learners had negative responses because they did not study Graded Readers during the experimental study and thus, they did not know the essence of ER-IR Strategy and how it enhances learners' reading habits.

## DISCUSSION

In this concern, the major findings of the present study in relation to the two research questions will be discussed in the light of learners' reading accuracy test results. The first research question is 'Does ER-IR Strategy improve the first level university students' reading accuracy?' The analysis of pre-test and post-test scores suggest a positive answer to this question. Based on the descriptive statistical analysis of experiment group learners' reading accuracy scores presented in (Table.2), the results revealed that after the exposure to ER-IR Strategy, experiment group learners had made a remarkable improvement in the accuracy post-test scores compared to pre-test scores. This change is statistically significant and it indicates that ER-IR Strategy supports learners to improve their reading accuracy. Additionally, the descriptive statistical analysis of the control group learners' test scores presented in (Table 2) disclosed that there were no significant differences between post-test and pre-test scores. These findings indicated that control group learners were not exposed to ER-IR Strategy therefore, they did not

make any progress in their post-test scores. In other words, there is an actual relationship between ER-IR and the improvement of learners' reading accuracy. These findings were supported by many studies. The most similar ones were done by (Krashen, 1993; Day & Bamford, 2004; Tamackitkun, 2010).

The second research question is a qualitative one "What are the first level university students' opinions towards the ER-IR Strategy on the enhancement of their reading accuracy?" The analysis of the experiment group learners' responses was very positive. All learners in experiment group assume that extensive reading and intensive reading strategies are crucial learning approaches which effectively support their reading accuracy. Doing this experimental study encourages learners to communicate easily, to read topics from a textbook accurately and fluently. It also gives them the opportunity to increase their reading span and new words.

## CONCLUSION

The present study provides a convincing evidence suggesting that the integration of ER-IR is an effective teaching/ learning strategy which plays a vital role in the successful improvement of fresh university learners' reading accuracy. In line with the findings of this study, there are lots of research studies mentioned earlier in the discussion. Interestingly, this study distinguishes from the previous studies in that the former uses both ER-IR approaches, together, to investigate only one aspect of the language i.e. reading accuracy while the latter use only one teaching technique ER approach to investigate multi aspects of the target language including reading comprehension, reading fluency and attitude towards ER Approach. Definitely, more techniques used with less language aspect is better.

Another issue should be kept in mind is that lecturers should not always focus on intensive reading because by doing this, students lack practicing of reading accuracy and even all the components of reading fluency, that is, they will only learn language forms without being able to communicate in real-life situations. One more interesting point is that an increase in reading accuracy leads to better fluency and comprehension. That is, reading accuracy is one concrete step towards reading fluency and comprehension (Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Jacard, Chen & Vellutino, 2007).

To sum up, involving fresh learners in a big extensive-intensive reading project for a long period of time for the sake of practicing the target language definitely develop learners' reading accuracy.

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