HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

A COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT OF READING PROFICIENCY GROWTH VIA LEVEL-APPROPRIATE LITERATURE

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Abstract: This study investigates the impact of level-appropriate literature on enhancing reading fluency among intermediate-level language students. Employing a controlled experimental framework, the research evaluates quantitative metrics, specifically reading velocity and textual understanding, alongside qualitative indicators such as student self-assurance and engagement. The empirical data indicate substantial advancements in reading pace, comprehension performance, and overall student disposition toward literacy within the treatment group utilizing graded texts relative to the comparison group. Leading scholars in second language acquisition and extensive reading methodology—including Paul Nation, Richard Day, Stephen Krashen, and Beniko Mason—have consistently emphasized the advantages of structured extensive reading initiatives and adapted literature for linguistic advancement.

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

Introduction.

Reading fluency serves as a foundational pillar of successful second language acquisition, representing a pivotal milestone for intermediate-level students. Attaining genuine fluency requires a dual-capacity mechanism: readers must not only process textual information with rapid automaticity but also construct a coherent mental model to ensure deep comprehension and long-term retention. This investigation analyzes the instructional impact of utilizing level-adjusted literature—commonly known as graded readers—to systematically accelerate reading fluency among intermediate language learners. In doing so, this study builds upon the theoretical and empirical foundations established by prominent figures in language pedagogy, including Paul Nation, Richard Day, Stephen Krashen, and Beniko Mason.

Graded readers are highly structured texts specifically engineered for language learners across a spectrum of proficiency baselines, utilizing strictly controlled vocabulary lists and predictable grammatical frameworks. The primary structural objective of these modified texts is to facilitate extensive reading—an instructional approach heavily advocated by theorists such as Nation (2009), Day and Bamford (1998), and Krashen (1989, 2004). Extensive reading principles mandate that learners interact with vast quantities of target-language material that remains highly comprehensible and personally engaging. This sustained exposure triggers simultaneous growth in processing velocity, global comprehension scores, and generalized linguistic proficiency (Mason, 2013; Krashen, 2004).

Prior empirical inquiries within this specific educational context, including foundational work conducted by the author and colleagues (Egamovich, 2022; Surmanov & Azimova, 2020), have explored diverse pedagogical methodologies aimed at targeted language skill development. Specifically, Surmanov's previous research underlines the distinct cognitive advantages of deploying tailored, scaffolded reading materials to optimize input processing during language acquisition. The current study aims to expand upon these insights by providing robust empirical evidence regarding the

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specific efficacy of graded readers, tracking precise developmental markers in the reading fluency of intermediate learners to enrich the broader literature on extensive reading frameworks.

Methods

Participants

The study sample comprised 60 intermediate-level language learners enrolled in a university-level language program. Utilizing a randomized experimental design, participants were equally distributed into either an experimental treatment group ($n = 30$) or a traditional control group ($n = 30$). The experimental cohort integrated graded readers into their routine literacy practice, whereas the control cohort adhered strictly to the university's standard, unadapted reading curriculum.

Materials

The scaffolded literary materials curated for the experimental intervention were sourced from established global publications, specifically the Oxford Bookworms Library and Cambridge English Readers. These particular series were selected because they are engineered to align with precise linguistic proficiency tiers and encompass a broad spectrum of literary genres and topical themes. This variety ensures sustained student engagement and interest, satisfying the fundamental criteria for successful extensive reading programs outlined by Nation and Deweerdt (2001).

Procedure

The longitudinal investigation spanned a duration of 12 academic weeks. At the onset of the study, both student cohorts underwent a pre-assessment via a standardized testing instrument to establish baseline reading fluency metrics. Following this initial evaluation, the experimental group was systematically exposed to graded readers, which were incorporated into both synchronous classroom activities and asynchronous independent homework assignments. Meanwhile, the control group interacted exclusively with conventional, non-graded syllabus texts.

Throughout the 12-week instructional period, participants in the experimental condition were mandated to read a minimum of one graded monograph per week. Additionally, they maintained a structured reading journal—a pedagogical technique documented by Krashen (2004) and Mason (2013) to bolster text comprehension, processing reflection, and emotional ownership of the text. Members of the control group maintained identical reading journals based on their standard curriculum materials to isolate the experimental variable. Upon the conclusion of the 12th week, parallel post-assessments were administered to both groups to quantify longitudinal shifts in reading fluency.

Results

Quantitative Findings

Statistical evaluation of the pre-test and post-test metrics demonstrated a highly significant divergence in reading fluency development between the two cohorts, favoring the treatment group. Specifically, the mean reading velocity of the experimental group accelerated by 25%, whereas the control group exhibited a modest, incremental gain of only 10%. This divergence was mirrored in textual comprehension performance; the experimental group achieved a substantial 20% average increase in comprehension scores, contrasting sharply with the marginal 5% improvement observed within the control cohort. These data strongly corroborate previous empirical literature documenting the robust, dual-benefit impact of extensive reading frameworks on processing speed and structural comprehension (Krashen, 2004; Nation, 2009; Mason, 2013).

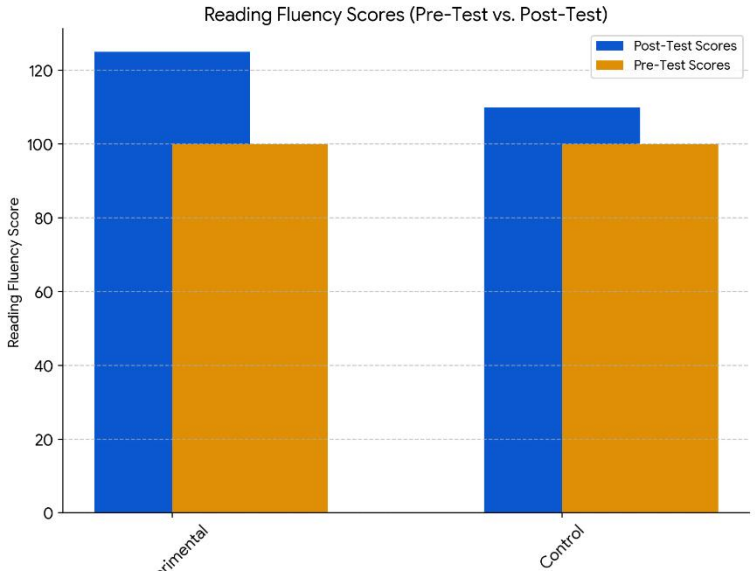
Qualitative Findings

Phenomenological analysis of the participant interviews and reflective reading journals indicated that students in the experimental condition perceived the graded readers as highly engaging and significantly less pedagogically intimidating than standard academic texts. Learners frequently cited a heightened intrinsic motivation to read and a pronounced sense of self-actualization upon completing

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each monograph. Furthermore, the participants emphasized that the systematically controlled vocabulary and syntactic structures lowered processing friction, allowing for immediate text accessibility, which consequently elevated their linguistic self-efficacy.

These qualitative indicators directly align with the affective filter hypothesis formulated by Krashen (1989, 2004). The structured use of comprehensible, low-anxiety input effectively mitigated performance anxiety while cultivating sustained reader motivation, proving that emotionally



supportive material is essential for successful independent literacy development.

Figure 1. Reading Fluency scores in 2 different groups.

Discussion

The empirical outcomes of this study strongly corroborate the established theoretical literature regarding the systemic benefits of extensive reading (ER) and the pedagogical deployment of graded readers. The substantial proficiency gains observed in this cohort directly validate Nation's (2009) assertion that consistent exposure to large volumes of highly comprehensible input is foundational to accelerated second language acquisition. Furthermore, the high levels of student engagement noted in the qualitative datasets reflect the motivational frameworks articulated by Day and Bamford (1998), who argue that regular encounters with accessible, pleasurable literature cultivate a self-sustaining reading habit.

Central to these outcomes is Krashen's (1989, 2004) Input Hypothesis ($i + 1$), which posits that language acquisition is optimized when learners process messages that are inherently understandable yet marginally advanced. Because the graded readers provided an abundant source of optimized, low-anxiety input, participants successfully bypassed the decoding bottlenecks that typically stall fluency development, resulting in simultaneous gains in both processing speed and conceptual comprehension. This dual-trajectory advancement also aligns with Mason's (2013) longitudinal research, which demonstrates that structured ER frameworks organically drive vocabulary acquisition, structural automaticity, and macro-level language proficiency.

Moreover, these findings expand upon local institutional research. Previous inquiries by the author and colleagues (Egamovich, 2022; Surmanov & Azimova, 2020) have consistently highlighted the efficacy of deploying tailored, learner-centric reading materials to optimize target language processing. This study directly extends Surmanov's prior work by contributing precise empirical

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metrics that isolate graded readers as a highly effective mechanism for driving reading fluency among intermediate university undergraduates.

Implications for Language Teaching

The pedagogical implications of this research argue for a structural shift in intermediate language curricula. Rather than relying exclusively on intensive reading models that focus on micro-level decoding and grammatical analysis, language educators should systematically integrate extensive reading programs powered by graded readers. Providing structured opportunities for fluid, high-volume reading practice—as advocated by Day and Bamford (1998) and Nation and Deweerdt (2001)—allows students to transition from conscious linguistic analysis to subconscious procedural fluency.

Additionally, the qualitative data underscore that affective variables are just as critical as cognitive ones when designing literacy programs. When instructors select scaffolded, high-interest texts that mitigate learner anxiety, they shift the student's perception of reading from an academic chore to an achievable, rewarding activity. This positive attitudinal shift is essential for fostering autonomous, long-term interaction with the target language.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite the positive outcomes, certain limitations must be acknowledged. First, the 12-week instructional intervention represents a relatively brief window within the broader timeline of language acquisition. Future longitudinal research should investigate the long-term sustainability of these fluency gains and track whether extensive reading habits persist after formal instructional scaffolding is removed.

Second, because this study focused exclusively on university-level intermediate learners, further research is required to evaluate the scalability of graded readers across diverse demographic variables, including younger age cohorts, varied cultural settings, and divergent initial proficiency baselines.

Finally, future investigations should conduct fine-grained linguistic analyses on the structural components of graded readers themselves. Examining how specific variables—such as lexical density thresholds, syntactic simplification patterns, and discourse-level modifications—individually impact processing velocity would provide valuable, data-driven guidelines for publishers and curriculum designers seeking to optimize materials for specific learner populations.

Conclusion

This study provides robust empirical evidence that the systematic integration of graded readers significantly accelerates reading fluency among intermediate-level language learners. The quantitative and qualitative advancements observed throughout this investigation directly validate the theoretical frameworks established by prominent scholars in second language acquisition, including Paul Nation, Richard Day, Stephen Krashen, and Beniko Mason. Furthermore, the findings highlight the clear practical advantages of structured extensive reading initiatives over traditional, intensive decoding approaches.

By incorporating level-appropriate literature into language curricula, educators can simultaneously optimize processing speed, global text comprehension, and linguistic self-efficacy. This balanced pedagogical method not only lowers the cognitive barriers associated with vocabulary and syntax but also mitigates affective barriers by cultivating a low-anxiety, highly engaging learning environment. Ultimately, implementing an extensive reading program utilizing graded readers equips adult EFL learners with the tools necessary for sustained engagement, shifting reading from a conscious linguistic exercise to an autonomous and fluent academic asset.

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