

The Impact Of Extensive Reading On Vocabulary Development And Reading Fluency Among Graduate Students At Onaizah College, Saudi Arabia

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Keywords: extensive reading, academic literacy, graduate students, reading fluency.	Abstract This research analyzed the relationship between extensive reading habits and vocabulary development, reading fluency and attitudes toward English reading among 120 graduate students at Onaizah College, Saudi Arabia. Data were analyzed using Pearson correlations and group difference tests from a structured Likert-scale questionnaire. The results indicated a statistically significant and positive correlation between the frequency of extensive reading and vocabulary development ($r = .56, p < .01$), fluency ($r = .48, p < .01$) and attitudes/motivation toward reading ($r = .52, p < .01$). Female college students reported more frequent engagement in extensive reading than males, while more advanced students reported a higher reading frequency and vocabulary development score than their peers in the first year of their graduate program. The results of the study highlight the importance of implementing a structured extensive reading program that incorporates digital reading resources into the curriculum to boost language proficiency and learner motivation in graduate-level students. Pedagogical implications for future teaching practice and research are explored.
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Introduction

Background of the Study

Attaining academic proficiency at the graduate level necessitates sophisticated literacy abilities, specifically advanced vocabulary knowledge and fluent reading comprehension (Nation, 2013). EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts such as Saudi Arabia see graduate students struggling to attain the necessary demands due to limited exposure to authentic language outside of the structured context of their courses (Al-Jarf, 2022). Language education often raises a high level of awareness of the target language by providing intensive reading and explicit vocabulary drills as part of their instruction.

In today's world, learning English is extremely valuable for students, especially graduate students who prepare for highly professional and academic workplaces. In Saudi Arabia, a national strategic

plan called Vision 2030 aims to diversify the economy in new ways outside of oil. In doing so, the demands for well-developed English proficiency have increased, as many sectors expect graduates to have the ability to communicate "across," have access to research and other resources, and to be able to work with other colleagues and teams from around the world. Consequently, students in Onaiza Private Colleges in the Qassim region should develop the skills necessary to succeed in these new landscapes. They must learn to communicate with speakers of other languages, read academic articles and (think critically about the research of others), and be members of dynamically diverse groups. In the context of ESP, students in these institutions are learning the content and language of their discipline or professional spaces, as opposed to only general English. However, vocabulary and skills vocabulary are only part of enabling students to achieve the automaticity and depth of knowledge needed to process challenging academic materials quickly and efficiently (Grabe, 2009). Thus, finding a pedagogical approach that assists in alleviating this gap in performance is a significant issue for higher education in the Kingdom.

Extensive Reading (ER), which entails reading large amounts of self-selected and easy materials mainly for enjoyment or general comprehension purposes, has become an impactful approach to support language learning (Krashen, 2004; Nation, 2015). The theoretical basis for ER is grounded in the Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1989) and incidental vocabulary learning through repeated context exposures (Nagy et al, 1985). Research shows that long term exposure to ER assists vocabulary development by giving learners ample opportunities to encounter words in a variety of contexts, thus, resulting in a deeper depth of learning and improved retention (Webb & Chang, 2015). Additionally, ER may also help reading fluency by increasing the speed of target words, processing speed of reading, and decreasing mental effort allowing for further comprehension (Jeon & Day, 2016; Nakanishi, 2023). The current educational landscape since the COVID-19 pandemic has seen a shift to digital resources. The developed sharing and availability of online books, notes, PDFs, and PPTs in traditional and institutional contexts (e.g., learning management systems, shared drive, and digital libraries) has presented a historical opportunity to include ER programs in leisurely and leisure classes with more flexibility and access than any other time (Baron, 2021; Liu, 2020). This shift to digital may also have removed barriers to exposing students to enough reading material.

Although the benefits of extensive reading (ER) are well-documented across diverse EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts and age groups (Nakanishi, 2015; Suk, 2017), not much research has focused on the impact of ER specifically in relation to graduate students in the Saudi Arabia higher education setting and in terms of vocabulary development and reading fluency when they have access to free, easy to access online resources (online books, notes, PDFs, PPTs). Existing research in Saudi Arabia has largely focused on the undergraduate population, or following extended reading interventions (Alshehri, 2021; Al-Jarf, 2022). Graduate students are required to write academic papers, project reports, and give focused presentations - all skills needed for academic and job advancement. However, many students find it difficult to transition to English. In high school, most education is delivered in Arabic, but in college in many classes and assignments will be in English. This transition can create difficulty for students to learn when teaching methods may not take their needs into account. This study will empirically explore the impact of a structured Extensive Reading program using free, easily accessible online materials shared within the institutional context, on the vocabulary development and reading fluency of graduate students at Onaizah Colleges in Saudi Arabia. This study also intends to address the gap in understanding how ER, through higher access to contemporary digital resources, can be a practical approach to enriching the academic literacy skills to operate successfully as a graduate student in this context.

Literature Review

1. Extensive Reading and Vocabulary Development

Much of the discussion surrounding Extensive Reading (ER) is centered on Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1989), which claims that language acquisition is a result of exposure to comprehensible input. Evidence indicates that ER is effective for vocabulary acquisition; consistent exposure to words in various contexts leads to incidental vocabulary learning (Nagy et al., 1985; Webb & Chang, 2015). Meta-analyses have shown ER can improve learners' vocabulary knowledge, especially when learners read self-selected texts at appropriate difficulty levels (Nakanishi, 2015; Suk, 2017). Online book resources, PDFs, and shared academic resources available in today's world provide access to reading material, which in turn provides learners with chances to produce low-frequency academic vocabulary, which is critical for academic purposes (Baron, 2021; Liu, 2020). While research in Arab EFL contexts confirms that ER facilitation benefits vocabulary acquisition in learners' receptive vocabulary (e.g., Alshehri, 2021), there tends to rarely exist research on graduate students who often require language that is very specific and can include discipline-specific vocabulary.

2. Extensive Reading and Reading Fluency

Extensive Reading (ER) is an essential factor for increasing reading fluency through the automatic recognition of words and by lessening the cognitive load of decoding so that readers can process text more rapidly (Grabe, 2009). Along with regular exposure to an ER program, learners can not only develop faster decoding skills but also enhance their prosody and textual processing abilities, resulting in faster reading that sounds more fluent and expressive (Jeon & Day, 2016). There has been advancing meta-analytic research supporting ER's effectiveness in increasing reading rate and reading comprehension, thereby demonstrating value for various learner populations (Nakanishi, 2021). The integration of digital/online materials, such as e-readers, annotated PDFs, and PowerPoint notes, offers further assistance toward developing fluency as learners can adapt their reading experience through annotation, larger font sizes, and mobile access to materials. These features allow for greater participation and interaction for regular readers, which is an important component for fluency development (Liu, 2020). However, within the research in Saudi Arabia on ER, study samples remain primarily on undergraduate populations (Al-Jarf, 2022) and are void of fluency-related reading challenges faced by graduate students when perusing the field's dense and complex academic texts.

3. The Saudi Graduates and Digital Shift

Saudi graduate students face unique and distinct challenges in their reading experiences, such as text-heavy or discipline-specific readings, minimal access to authentic English exposure outside of the classroom, and a culture of pedagogy filtered through "teacher-centered" learning models (Al-Jarf, 2022; Al-Nafisah, 2023). Following the pandemic, universities continue to curate online materials, such as e-books, PowerPoint slides, and PDF notes in learning management systems (LMS), creating a vast new opportunity for utilizing a structured Extensive Reading (ER) model (Alshehri, 2021). Despite having the curricular capacity for this digital modality, recent work around ER does not reference these resources for students at the graduate level. ER studies in Saudi Arabia focus mainly on undergraduate students (Alshehri, 2021) and/or on general language proficiency rather than academic literacy (Al-Jarf, 2022), leaving a gap in knowledge about the influence of digital ER on higher-order literacy skills for graduate students.

Hypothesis

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between the frequency of extensive English reading with digital materials and vocabulary growth among graduate students at Onaizah College, Saudi Arabia.

H2: There is a significant positive relationship exists between frequency of extensive English reading with digital materials and reading fluency among graduate students at Onaizah College, Saudi Arabia.

H3: The frequency of extensive reading in English with the use of digital materials is positively related to students' overall attitudes and motivation to read in English.

H4: There are significant differences in extensive reading habits, vocabulary development, and reading fluency based on students' demographics (i.e., gender, year of study, and previous English experience).

Research Methodology

Research Design

The present study adopted a quantitative correlational research design to examine the relationships between graduate students' extensive reading habits and their vocabulary development, reading fluency, and reading attitudes at Onaizah College, Saudi Arabia, and the differences in these relationships across demographic characteristics.

Participants

The sample of the study comprised 120 graduate students at Onaizah College. Because of the purposive sampling, the data were collected with regards to their sample. Participants varied in age, gender, years of study, and English learning experience.

Measurement

The main instrument used for data collection was a structured Likert-scale questionnaire to assess graduate students' extensive reading habits, vocabulary development, reading fluency, and their attitudes/motivation towards reading in English. The questionnaire was adapted and developed based on the reading frameworks in second language acquisition and research in extensive reading (Nakanishi, 2015; Nation, 2013; Jeon & Day, 2016).

1. Extensive Reading Habits

The scale comprises five items, each evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale, and is designed to measure the frequency, variety, and enjoyment of reading English materials outside of formal classroom environments. For instance, statements such as "I enjoy reading English materials outside of class" and "I spend time reading in English outside of class" are included to measure self-reported reading engagement (Day & Bamford, 1998; Nakanishi, 2015).

2. Vocabulary Development

The scale comprises four items with a five-point Likert-type scale. This scale assessed participants' perceptions of their word learning through extensive reading. For example, statements like "The use of extensive reading have helped me learn new English words" and "I feel confident using new words I learn from reading" reflect vocabulary gain and confidence in their use (Nation, 2013; Webb & Chang, 2015).

3. Reading Fluency

The Reading Fluency has four items and uses a 5-point likert scale. The items concentrate on reading speed, reading comprehension, and anxiety associated to reading in English, such as, "I can read English texts more quickly now than I did previously and" and "I feel less anxious when reading English" (Jeon & Day, 2016; Grabe, 2009).

4. General Attitude and Motivation

The General Attitudes and Motivation scale comprises four items to measure motivation and general attitudes towards reading in English, including enjoyment and intentions to continue reading. Item statements included, for example, "I enjoy reading in English" and "I intend to continue reading in English after this course". These statements were based upon motivation theory in language learning (Dörnyei, 2005).

Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed online via the college's official communication methods. An informed consent form informing participants of the purpose of study, assurance of confidentiality and the voluntary nature of responses was provided to participants. Data collection occurred within a timeframe of one month, and 120 completed responses were collected and used for analysis.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and frequencies, were determined to describe the demographic characteristics of the participants, along with their answers to the items in the questionnaire scales. To test hypotheses H1, H2, and H3, Pearson's correlation analyses were conducted to determine relationships. For hypothesis H4, independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA analyses were completed to ascertain whether significant differences existed in extensive reading habits, vocabulary development, and reading fluency among groups varying in demographic characteristics.

Result

Table 1 Demographic information of Participants (N=120)

Variable	Category	f	(%)
Gender	Male	65	54.2
	Female	55	45.8
Age (years)	18–24	83	69.1
	25–29	32	26.6
	30–34	05	4.3
College/Program	Engineering & IT	70	58.3
	Humanities & Admin Studies	50	41.7
Year of Study	1st Year	44	36.7
	2nd Year	42	35.0
	3rd Year or Above	34	28.3
Previous English Learning Experience	Less than 5 years	28	23.3
	5–10 years	62	51.7
	More than 10 years	30	25.0
Self-Rated English Proficiency	Beginner	20	16.7
	Intermediate	70	58.3

	Advanced	30	25.0
Frequency of English Reading (per week)	Rarely	18	15.0
	1–2 times	40	33.3
	3–4 times	38	31.7
	5 or more times	24	20.0

The sample included a total of 120 graduate students. Most participants identified as males (54.2%, $n = 65$) while 45.8% ($n = 55$) identified as females. The age range of participants was from 18 to 34 years old. The age distribution was as follows: the largest age group was participants aged 18–24 (69.1%, $n = 83$) and the next largest age group was those aged 25 to 29 (26.6 %, $n = 32$), while the smallest group of participants were those aged 30 to 34 (4.3 %, $n = 05$). The sample was split into college affiliations with 58.3% ($n = 70$) in the College of Engineering and Information Technology and 41.7% ($n = 50$) in the College of Humanities and Administrative Studies. The sample was also evenly distributed among the year in study with 36.7% ($n = 44$) in their 1st year of study, 35.0% ($n = 42$) were in their 2nd year, and 28.3% ($n = 34$) were in 3rd year or above. Based on their previous experiences, most of the participants reported they have had between 5 to 10 years of learning English (51.7%, $n = 62$), followed by those who reported more than 10 years (25.0%, $n = 30$), and lastly, those with less than 5 years of learning English (23.3%, $n = 28$). When asked to self-rate their English proficiency, 58.3% ($n = 70$) rated themselves as intermediate, while 25.0% ($n = 30$) rated as advanced and 16.7% ($n = 20$) as beginner. The frequency of reading in English was varied and ranges from 1-2 times per week (33.3%, $n = 40$), 3-4 times per week (31.7%, $n = 38$), 5 or more times per week (20.0%, $n = 24$), and meaning 15.0% ($n = 18$) rarely read in English.

Table 2 Reliability Statistics of Scales

Scale	Number of Items	Cronbach's α
Extensive Reading Habits	5	0.82
Vocabulary Development	4	0.79
Reading Fluency	4	0.85
General Attitudes & Motivation	4	0.78

Reliability statistics for the questionnaire subscales are provided in Table 2. The scales within the questionnaire demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values between 0.78 and 0.85. The Extensive Reading Habits scale (5 items) had good reliability ($\alpha = 0.82$) and Reading Fluency (4 items) had excellent reliability ($\alpha = 0.85$). The Vocabulary Development (4 items) and General Attitudes and Motivation (4 items) scales had acceptable reliability ($\alpha = 0.79$ and $\alpha = 0.78$, respectively). These results suggest that the scales were reliably measuring the constructs in this study.

Table 3 Correlation Analysis

Variable	1	2	3	4	Mean	SD
1. Extensive Reading Habits	-				3.68	0.84
2. Vocabulary Development	.56**	-			3.45	0.79
3. Reading Fluency	.48**	.62**	-		3.53	0.81
4. Attitudes & Motivation	.52**	.58**	.55**	-	3.71	0.77

Note: $p < .01$ (two tailed)

The correlation among the main study variables is illustrated in Table 3. A significant, moderate positive correlation was present between extensive reading habits and vocabulary development (r

= .56, $p < .01$), as well as reading fluency ($r = .48$, $p < .01$), and attitudes/motivation toward reading in English ($r = .52$, $p < .01$). Vocabulary development had a significant, strong positive relationship with reading fluency ($r = .62$, $p < .01$), and a moderate, positive correlation with attitudes/motivation ($r = .58$, $p < .01$). Reading fluency exhibited a significant, moderate positive correlation with attitudes and motivation ($r = .55$, $p < .01$). This supports the hypothesized relationships between frequency of extensive reading, language development and motivational factors. Overall, the means ranged from 3.45 (Vocabulary Development) to 3.71 (Attitudes & Motivation) suggesting that participants generally had moderate-high levels of agreement with the variables.

Table 4 Group Differences based on Gender

Variable	Male (M \pm SD)	Female (M \pm SD)	t(118)	p	Cohen's d
Extensive Reading Habits	3.50 \pm 0.81	3.89 \pm 0.83	-2.67	.009*	0.47
Vocabulary Development	3.38 \pm 0.77	3.53 \pm 0.80	-1.22	.225	0.22
Reading Fluency	3.47 \pm 0.79	3.60 \pm 0.82	-1.00	.318	0.18

Table 4 illustrates the male and female differences in extensive reading habits, vocabulary development, and reading fluency. Findings from the independent samples t-tests revealed that female students ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.83$) reported higher extensive reading habits than male students ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 0.81$), $t(118) = -2.67$, $p = .009$, with a moderate effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.47$). Meanwhile, there were no significant differences between males and females in vocabulary development, $t(118) = -1.22$, $p = .225$, and reading fluency, $t(118) = -1.00$, $p = .318$. This indicates that although female students reported reading more, both genders had the same levels of vocabulary acquisition and reading fluency.

Table 5 Differences by Year of Study (One way ANOVA)

Variable	1st Year (M \pm SD)	2nd Year (M \pm SD)	3rd Year+ (M \pm SD)	F	p	η^2
Extensive Reading Habits	3.41 \pm 0.85	3.65 \pm 0.80	3.99 \pm 0.82	4.21	.017*	0.07
Vocabulary Development	3.29 \pm 0.74	3.45 \pm 0.78	3.68 \pm 0.81	3.44	.035*	0.06
Reading Fluency	3.40 \pm 0.77	3.52 \pm 0.79	3.68 \pm 0.88	2.15	.121	0.04

Table 5 presents examinations of extensive reading habits, vocabulary development, and reading fluency variances amongst students' years of study using one-way ANOVA. The comparison revealed a significant effect of year of study on extensive reading habits, $F(2, 117) = 4.21$, $p = .017$, $\eta^2 = 0.07$, with a moderate effect size. Post hoc analyses indicated that students in their third year and above ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 0.82$) engaged in extensive reading more than students in their first year and above ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 0.85$). Similarly, vocabulary development differed significantly by year, $F(2, 117) = 3.44$, $p = .035$, $\eta^2 = 0.06$, whereby students in their third year and above ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.81$) reported a higher vocabulary development than students in their first year and above ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 0.74$). No significant differences were seen in reading fluency across students' years of study, $F(2, 117) = 2.15$, $p = .121$, $\eta^2 = 0.04$. These results suggest findings of more advanced students tended to read more extensively and report greater vocabulary gains, although reading fluency may take more time to develop or other factors.

Discussion

This research investigated the connections between extensive reading behaviors and their effects on vocabulary growth, reading fluency, and attitudes/motivation among graduate learners at Onaizah College, Saudi Arabia. It also examined differences by demographics across the variables. Overall, the findings indicate an overall positive effect of extensive reading on language development and motivation for language learners, which is largely in line with previous research, while also uncovering some nuanced findings related to gender and progression in their programs.

Consistent with Hypothesis 1, a strong positive relationship was found between extensive reading habits and vocabulary knowledge. This is consistent with previous reports that extensive reading fosters vocabulary learning through multiple exposures to new words in context (Nakanishi, 2015; Webb & Chang, 2015). Elgort (2011) also found that vocabulary benefits of extensive reading are particularly strong when learners read a range of texts at their own proficiency level. Graduate students who routinely read materials in English outside of class are likely to expand their knowledge of vocabulary, which is a major contributor to academic success in their fields (Qian, 2002). This aligns with the benefits of using extensive reading procedures as part of graduate language courses taught to English language learners - as they provide alternative access to a range of texts to read for practicing and developing language and reading skills (Chen & Graves, 2021).

The favorable relationship between extensive reading and reading fluency found here supports theoretical models that consider fluency to be the automaticity achieved through repeated reading practice (Grabe, 2009; Rasinski, 2017). Jeon and Day's (2016) meta-analysis also found that extensive reading aided both speed and comprehension and prosody of reading. However, the moderate strength of the correlation may reflect the complexities involved with fluency development, which also depends on other considerations, such as targeted instruction in reading fluency and learner engagement (Bell, 2020). The findings suggest that while extensive reading may facilitate gains in fluency, there may need to be additional, focused strategies to achieve the ideal level of improvement in fluency, especially for graduate students reading specific academic materials (Nishino, 2020).

In support of Hypothesis 3, the data revealed a significant positive correlation between extensive reading and positive attitudes and motivation toward reading in English. This finding supports motivational frameworks, which have emphasized that intrinsic motivation and enjoyment contribute to engagement and successful learning (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). Prior research has shown that positive reading attitudes act as a mediator for the benefits of extensive reading by fostering continued autonomous learning (Saito et al., 2018). In this context, creating enjoyable and applicable reading experiences would potentially be essential in graduate studies, where motivation can be low due to responsibilities. In conclusion, this research recommends that educators should include reading programs that not only develop reading skills but foster a positive reading experience overall.

The most notable gender difference in extensive reading habits, with females having a higher level of extensive reading than males, conforms to trends reported in other EFL contexts (see Suk, 2017; Lee & Krashen, 2021). Sociocultural factors could also impact reading attitudes and opportunities (Kao, 2017). Notably, the study did not reveal any gender differences for vocabulary development or fluency, suggesting that although males read less extensively than females, they may compensate for this in different ways and/or may have benefited equally from regular formal instruction. While year level differences indicated that seniors reported engaging more regularly in extensive reading and higher levels of vocabulary development, this likely reflects increased academic demands and greater autonomy as they progressed through university (Al-Jarf, 2022; Alshahrani, 2023). Similarly, without differences in reading fluency based on year level, it is possible that fluency

takes longer to develop, or students needed instruction in reading development to support and build their reading fluency beyond those self-reported regular reading patterns. Longitudinal studies in reading have indicated that fluency develops over longer periods and can benefit from scaffolding (see Sung et al., 2019). The lack of differences based on prior English learning experience suggests that developing ongoing reading habits and motivation, is the more critical factor in developing vocabulary and fluency, at the graduate level, than prior English learning experience, bringing attention to the value of ongoing improvement in language proficiency over time (Ellis, 2020).

Limitation and Future Research

The limitations discussed include the reliance on self-report measures, which may introduce bias; subsequent research should utilize objective measures of vocabulary and reading fluency. Longitudinal designs would be ideal to capture developmental trajectories, and qualitative studies could provide more profound insight into motivational factors and reading behaviors. Investigating the effect of extensive reading on writing and listening would also be useful.

Implications

The findings indicate that English graduate programs should consider adopting structured extensive reading programs, to improve access and variety when reading is supported by digital resources. Educators should adopt gender-responsive approaches and encourage male students' engagement and consider how to support earlier-year students by teaching students how to expand their vocabulary and develop their fluency. Additionally, positive attitudes towards reading can be encouraged through enjoyment and relevance, which can further foster students' motivation and continued learning.

Conclusion

This research examined the influence of extensive reading practices on vocabulary development, reading fluency, and attitudes toward English reading among graduate students at Onaizah College in Saudi Arabia. The results showed significant positive relationships between the occurrence of extensive reading and all three outcomes vocabulary development, fluency, and motivational attitudes. These results provide confirmation that participating in extensive reading on a regular basis facilitates language development and motivates students and fosters positive attitudes toward reading in English. Demographic analysis of the data showed that female students engaged in extensive reading more than males, yet both demonstrated similar vocabulary and fluency outcomes. In addition, students enrolled at a more advanced level (third year and above) read more frequently and developed their vocabulary more than first-year students, suggesting that being more advanced in academic studies promotes language development. Overall, the findings of this study provide justification for including extensive reading programs, especially those utilizing easy-to-read digital materials, in English programs for graduate students. Encouraging students to develop frequent reading habits is a powerful way to impact vocabulary development, fluency, and learner motivation, all of which support academic success in English language contexts. Future endeavors should account for demographic differences to provide students with targeted support to promote benefits for all students.

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