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Reading Fluency and Its Implications in Foreign Language Learning

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Abstract
Reading fluency is widely considered a crucial component of successful language learning because it directly influences comprehension, academic achievement, and learners' ability to process written texts efficiently. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, students often struggle with reading complex academic materials due to limitations in decoding skills, vocabulary knowledge, and reading speed. These difficulties are particularly visible among students studying professional courses such as medicine, nursing, and engineering, where the ability to understand technical texts is essential for academic success.
The present study investigates the effectiveness of the Extensive Reading–Intensive Reading (ER–IR) strategy in improving reading fluency among university-level EFL learners. A quasi-experimental research design was used to evaluate the influence of the ER–IR approach on three major components of reading fluency: automaticity, accuracy, and prosody. Thirty-six first-year university students participated in the study and were divided into experimental and control groups.
Quantitative data were collected using pre-tests and post-tests of reading fluency, while qualitative insights were gathered through structured interviews. Statistical analysis using descriptive statistics and ANOVA revealed that students who participated in the ER–IR program demonstrated significant improvement in reading speed, decoding accuracy, and expressive reading ability. The results indicate that systematic reading practice supported by structured instructional strategies can substantially enhance students' reading fluency.
The findings of the study suggest that integrating extensive reading materials with guided intensive reading activities can help EFL learners build confidence, improve comprehension, and develop long-term academic reading skills.

Keywords: reading fluency, ER–IR strategy, EFL learning, automaticity, accuracy, prosody

Introduction

Reading fluency plays an essential role in language acquisition and academic success. Fluent readers are able to decode words accurately, process text rapidly, and interpret meaning with appropriate expression and phrasing. When students develop strong reading fluency skills, they can focus their cognitive resources on comprehension rather than struggling with word recognition.
In many EFL classrooms, however, students experience difficulties when reading academic texts. These challenges arise because learners often read slowly, mispronounce unfamiliar vocabulary, or fail to

interpret punctuation and sentence structures correctly. As a result, comprehension becomes limited and learning outcomes are negatively affected.

Reading fluency typically includes three main components: automaticity, accuracy, and prosody. Automaticity refers to the rapid recognition of words without conscious effort. Accuracy involves the correct decoding of words in written text. Prosody, on the other hand, reflects the expressive aspects of reading such as tone, rhythm, and intonation.

Developing these three components simultaneously is essential for improving students' overall reading performance. Educational researchers have suggested that structured reading strategies, including repeated reading and extensive reading programs, can help learners develop fluency skills more effectively.

The present study focuses on the ER–IR instructional strategy, which combines extensive reading for general exposure to language with intensive reading activities that emphasize comprehension and linguistic analysis. This approach encourages learners to engage with texts regularly while also receiving guided instruction from teachers.

Literature Review

Researchers have long recognized the importance of reading fluency in language learning. According to Grabe (2009), fluent reading involves the ability to process text efficiently and automatically while maintaining comprehension. Anderson (2008) further argues that reading fluency is achieved when readers can balance reading speed with understanding of meaning.

Several scholars describe reading fluency as consisting of three key elements: automaticity, accuracy, and prosody. Automaticity refers to the reader's ability to recognize words quickly and effortlessly. When readers develop automatic word recognition, they can allocate more mental resources to comprehension rather than decoding.

Accuracy is another essential component of reading fluency. Accurate readers decode written words correctly and interpret sentence structures effectively. Without accurate decoding skills, learners may misunderstand important details in a text and struggle to grasp its meaning.

Prosody is the expressive element of reading fluency. Fluent readers use appropriate stress, rhythm, and intonation when reading aloud. These features help convey the meaning of sentences and support deeper comprehension.

Previous research has demonstrated that extensive reading programs significantly improve reading fluency. Iwahori (2008) conducted a study among Japanese EFL students and found that sustained reading practice increased reading speed and comprehension levels. Similarly, Rasinski (2012) emphasized that repeated reading and guided oral reading can enhance fluency development.

Another important finding from previous studies is that simplified texts play a major role in improving reading skills among language learners. When students are provided with reading materials that match their proficiency levels, they can gradually build vocabulary knowledge and develop confidence in reading.

The ER–IR strategy integrates both extensive and intensive reading methods. Extensive reading encourages students to read large amounts of material for general understanding, while intensive reading focuses on detailed analysis of language structures and vocabulary. When these two approaches are combined, learners can develop both fluency and comprehension skills simultaneously.

Methodology

The present study adopted a quasi-experimental research design to investigate the effects of the ER–IR strategy on reading fluency among EFL students. The study involved 36 first-year university students enrolled in an English language course.

Participants were divided into two groups: an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group received instruction using the ER–IR strategy, while the control group followed traditional reading instruction methods.

Data were collected through reading fluency assessments conducted before and after the intervention. Each test measured three components of reading fluency: automaticity, accuracy, and prosody. Students were asked to read short passages aloud while their reading speed and accuracy were recorded.

In addition to quantitative data, qualitative data were gathered through structured interviews with selected participants. These interviews explored students' perceptions of the ER–IR approach and its impact on their reading development.

The intervention lasted for several weeks and included activities such as repeated reading, vocabulary analysis, teacher modeling, and peer reading exercises. These activities were designed to strengthen decoding skills, increase reading speed, and improve expressive reading.

Results and Discussion

The results of the study indicate that students who participated in the ER–IR program showed significant improvement in their reading fluency compared to those in the control group. The experimental group demonstrated higher scores in reading speed, word recognition accuracy, and prosodic expression.

Statistical analysis using ANOVA confirmed that the differences between the pre-test and post-test scores were statistically significant. These findings suggest that structured reading strategies can effectively improve learners' reading performance.

Qualitative feedback from students also supported the quantitative results. Many participants reported that reading simplified texts regularly helped them develop confidence and become more comfortable with English reading tasks. Others mentioned that repeated reading and teacher modeling helped them pronounce words more accurately and understand sentence patterns.

These results are consistent with earlier studies that highlight the importance of guided reading instruction. When students receive systematic support and practice opportunities, they gradually develop the ability to read more efficiently and comprehend complex texts.

Conclusion

This study examined the role of the ER–IR strategy in improving reading fluency among EFL university students. The findings demonstrate that combining extensive reading with intensive reading instruction can significantly enhance students' automaticity, accuracy, and prosody.

By engaging learners in regular reading practice and providing structured guidance, educators can help students develop stronger reading skills and greater confidence in their language abilities. These improvements ultimately contribute to better comprehension and academic success.

Future research may explore the effectiveness of the ER–IR approach across different educational contexts and larger student populations. Investigating the integration of digital reading platforms and AI-assisted reading tools may also provide new opportunities for improving reading fluency in modern language classrooms.

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