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EXPLORING PAKISTANI EFL LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF EXTENSIVE AND INTENSIVE READING APPROACHES ON THEIR GRAMMATICAL COMPETENCE

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Abstract

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This study explored how extensive and intensive reading approaches were perceived by Foreign Language (EFL) Learners as a means of improving their grammatical competence. Based on a purposive sampling technique, the data were gathered using semi-structured interviews and the reflective diaries of five participants. The data analysis methods employed in the study included thematic analysis and personal interpretation. The findings revealed that EFL learners perceived improvements in their grammatical competence through the integrated use of Intensive Reading (IR) and Extensive Reading (ER) approaches. Additionally, the learners found these reading approaches enjoyable and engaging for them. The results also highlighted the role of teachers in actively involving students in these approaches to enhance their grammar skills. Furthermore, the researchers recommend that teachers should actively engage students in intensive and extensive reading approaches. Further research is required to investigate the effectiveness of the Intensive Reading (IR) and Extensive Reading (ER) approaches on students' grammatical competence across various educational settings using quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods designs.

Keywords: Intensive, Extensive, EFL, Language, Approaches.

Introduction

Reading is crucial to enhancing students' language proficiency in English as a foreign language (EFL) context (Thanh & Vien, 2021). Students' language skills may increase if they are exposed to various reading materials (Grabe, 2009). However, reading is currently becoming less common among students (Channa et al., 2021). For students to profit as much as possible from reading, it should be prioritized in the EFL setting. Otherwise, it would be equivalent to locking their doors to the world of knowledge to deny EFL students the opportunity to read (Al-Homoud & Schmitt, 2009). Reading is crucial for academic growth and language learning in the EFL context (Abbas et al., 2021). Several studies have shown that reading helps EFL students with language proficiency. For instance, Saba & Noreen (2020) revealed that reading helps students improve their language skills, particularly vocabulary growth and grammatical competence because it exposes them to various vocabulary and grammatical structures. In addition to this, reading also encourages students to read topics outside of the curriculum that enhance their interest, which fosters independent learning and a love of reading (Grabe, 2009). Stronger reading skills are associated with higher academic performance in various courses. According to Sadia & Pathan (2021), students who are proficient readers do better in a variety of academic disciplines. Therefore, a conducive reading environment could encourage students' passion and positive attitudes toward reading. (Nita et al., 2022). According to Andrés (2020), teachers can help EFL learners develop a love of reading by encouraging them in the IR and ER approaches, choosing exciting books, and implementing interesting reading activities. The research highlights how crucial it is to incorporate reading into Pakistani EFL classes to foster the student's language proficiency, which will ultimately develop their other associated skills like grammar and

vocabulary. Although reading is emphasized in Pakistani EFL classrooms, it is not adequately practiced in and outside the classroom. (Tahira, Muhammad, Asma, 2023), From the studies, it has been found that teachers primarily focus on the traditional method of teaching reading in the classroom, which exposes students to very little reading material outside of textbooks. As a result, to increase reading input in the classroom, some practical approaches, such as the ER approach, need to be practiced along with the IR approach and this will prove helpful in developing their language skills in general and their grammatical skills in particular.

Problem Statement

Using IR and ER in teaching and learning contexts is not new. These approaches have been studied and used in different contexts and educational levels for several years. Research has also demonstrated the benefits of IR and ER techniques for students' affective and cognitive development (Nation & Waring, 2020; Renandya & Jacobs, 2016). Various empirical investigations have been carried out to examine the impacts of both IR and ER. However, IR and ER are hardly investigated in Pakistan, and studies on how IR and ER develop students' grammatical competence are rarely found in the literature (Shumaila & Khan, 2021). Furthermore, in Pakistan, EFL classes are typically taught using the conventional Grammar Translation Method (GTM). Apart from this, students rely on their textbooks and teachers. Therefore, to the best of researchers' knowledge, this is the first qualitative study to explore the practices of IR and ER approaches in EFL classroom settings at Pakistani universities. Furthermore, investigation is needed to determine how these approaches improve the students' grammatical competence after their exposure to both the reading approaches in their classes. Therefore, this study fills this research gap by conducting a purely qualitative study to explore EFL learners' perceptions about the integrated use

of IR and ER in developing their grammatical competence.

Research Objective

1.To explore the perceptions of pre-university EFL learners of Sukkur IBA, Pakistan about the role of IR and ER approaches in developing their grammatical competence.

Research Question

1.What are the perceptions of EFL pre-university learners of Sukkur IBA, Pakistan about the role of IR and ER in developing their grammatical competence?

Significance of the Study

This study is critical because it will support the established theories and guidelines for teaching grammar using IR and ER approaches. Since the IR approach is teachers' primary method to teach grammar in EFL classes, students are also accustomed to it (Harmer, 2007; Ellis, 2006). Teachers will become more familiar with the features, advantages, and difficulties of combining IR and ER approaches while teaching students grammatical skills. In addition to adding to the body of knowledge already available on second languages, this study will ignite the curiosity of other researchers who may wish to conduct similar investigations at various educational levels, both inside and outside Pakistani educational settings.

Delimitation of the Study

This research study is delimited to Sukkur IBA University, a Pakistani public university in Sindh. The study participants are five foundation semester students enrolled in the university's foundation program. The study's participants, who comprised a small sample within a particular academic environment, were chosen based on their availability and desire to participate. Because of this, the results are limited to the experiences and perceptions of these specific individuals and could not accurately represent the larger population of EFL learners in Pakistan who attend other universities or levels of education. Moreover, the research alone examines the

effects of extensive and intensive reading approaches in this institutional context, potentially affecting the applicability of the findings to alternative educational environments or geographical settings.

Literature Review

Intensive Reading Approach

Mart (2015) asserts that the intensive reading (IR) method enables readers to examine the vocabulary and grammar in the text closely. This technique, which Brown (2007) calls "close reading," requires readers to study texts carefully to understand their content. To improve student understanding, teachers actively participate by posing questions, reading aloud, and formulating predictions and inference activities. According to Harmer (2007), instructional resources (IR) are usually teacher-directed and concentrate on helping students improve their receptive skills, which include skimming, scanning, reading for details, and drawing conclusions. Through a deeper engagement with the language, this approach is wildly successful in helping learners increase their understanding of grammar and vocabulary.

Extensive Reading Approach

The extensive reading (ER) approach has been defined in several ways by foreign language reading pedagogy (Bamford & Day, 1998). Students read much content for fun at their reading level to gain a general understanding using the ER instructional approach. To assist learners in developing language skills and cultivating a love of reading, the main objective is to engage them in exciting reading experiences. As Carrell and Carson (1997) indicated, ER emphasizes meaning comprehension instead of language form analysis. However, reading can also help with grammar development because it regularly exposes children to good grammar. Research by Pigada & Schmitt (2006) supports this, showing that ER can improve vocabulary and grammatical accuracy. Successful ER programs encourage EFL learners to maintain a positive

attitude toward reading, motivating them to complete books and other materials (Yamashita, 2013). Along with its role in various language features, the ER approach also plays a significant role in developing the grammatical competence of learners (Celik, 2019; Yoshizawa, Takase, & Otsuki, 2018)

Benefits of Reading Approaches

A few research studies have examined the benefits of IR and ER techniques in a single study. However, many studies have found the benefits of both approaches separately. The first section of the literature review discusses research related to the benefits of the IR approach. (Sarwar, Khurram, 2023), Researchers have conducted some research studies to assess the effectiveness of the IR approach. The authors of those studies investigated how the IR approach affected many language domains, including writing, vocabulary, grammar, reading comprehension, and overall language competency. To gauge how well the IR approach works on different language aspects, most authors have conducted studies in various contexts of the globe. (Ebrahim, 2018; Widyaasita, Dayu, & Aprizani, 2020) and experimental research designs (Khazaal, 2019). Regarding the ER approach, some researchers have carried out studies to assess the effects of the ER approach within the past 30 years. The authors have examined the effectiveness of the ER approach on a range of language skills, including writing, vocabulary, grammar, reading attitudes, and overall language proficiency. The findings of those studies have shown that ER is beneficial for learners' various language skills, including reading comprehension (Suk, 2017; Mariano et al., 2020), reading motivation and attitude (Porkaew & Fongpaiboon, 2018; Yamashita, 2013), vocabulary (Alsaif & Masrai, 2019), writing (Mermelstein, 2015; Park, 2016), and grammar (Khansir & Dehghani, 2015; Lee, Schallert, & Kim, 2015). Some researchers have explored students' perceptions of the integrated use of intensive and extensive

reading approaches. These studies have demonstrated that students exposed to combined IR and ER approaches form positive attitudes about IR and ER approaches and enjoy participating in those related activities. According to a research study by Maipoka & Soontornwipast (2021) on students' perceptions of the effectiveness of IR and ER approaches, students believed that using both approaches would be very helpful for improving their reading comprehension and general language proficiency. Furthermore, students expressed excitement and delight in engaging in the diverse IR and ER-related activities within and beyond the classroom. Some other studies have also shown positive effects of the combined use of IR and ER approaches (Ateek, 2021; Park et al., 2018; Erguvan, 2016; Al-Homoud & Schmitt, 2009). In addition to its effects on various language skills, IR and ER approaches affect students' grammatical knowledge. Lee et al. (2015) investigated how two different reading approaches, ER and IR with translation techniques, affected South Korean teenage learners' comprehension of general grammar and certain grammatical concepts, such as article usages and preposition usages. The researcher administered pre- and post-grammar and attitude questionnaires as part of an experimental investigation. The researcher used an ANOVA test to determine the significant difference between pre-and post-results. The findings demonstrated that, depending on the learners' competency level, the effects of ER and IR approaches varied in terms of the grammar knowledge of the learners. (Asal, Yousuf, et. al, 2023), Low-proficiency learners showed unfavorable attitudes regarding learning grammar through ER, while high- and middle-level learners favored the ER approach more. For learning grammar, both approaches had positive benefits on grammar knowledge. The findings imply that both approaches can teach low, high, and middle-level learners grammar skills.

In a different study, [Liu & Zhang \(2018\)](#) used an experimental study to investigate how ER affected Iranian schoolchildren's grammatical knowledge. The independent sample t-test was used to assess the post-test results. Regarding grammar knowledge, the experimental group outperformed the control group by a wide margin. Thus, it can be said that grammar is effectively learned with both IR and ER techniques. However, effectively learning grammar rules through substantial reading or inadvertent exposure is not always simple. Various approaches are needed to help learners understand grammar, including explicit explanations, output activities, and interactions ([Aka, 2020](#)). Research on the effects of ER on grammatical competence is currently quite limited, even though ER can have favorable benefits ([Bui et al., 2021](#)). The results of the studies have shown that using an IR instructional approach with teachers' explicit instruction and implicit learning through ER is necessary for teaching and learning grammar. Although many studies are available in the literature that have investigated the effects of the ER ([Khansir & Dehghani, 2015](#); [Lee, Schallert, & Kim, 2015](#)) and IR approach ([Gundran, 2024](#); [Velásquez Morales & Rivera Castro, 2018](#)) on EFL learners' grammatical competence separately. However, there is a dearth of studies in the literature that explored the perceptions of EFL Learners about the integrated use of IR and ER on their grammatical competence. ([Hussain, Rubab et al., 2023](#)), Therefore, this qualitative study will be a major contribution to the existing literature on reading approaches. Moreover, there is a need to conduct a qualitative study in the Pakistani context using both IR and ER approaches to explore its impact on the grammatical competence of the learners.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design. The qualitative study design attempts to discover something new and interesting

([Swedberg, 2020](#)). In this study, the researchers aimed to explore the perceptions of pre-university EFL learners about the use of IR and ER approaches in developing their grammatical abilities. Therefore, the researchers employed qualitative inquiry to get a rich and robust understanding of the problem under investigation in the context of Pakistan.

Context of the Study

This study was conducted at Sukkur IBA, a public sector university in Pakistan that provides various programs in media studies, computer science, electrical engineering, business administration, and teacher education. Enrollment in the foundation semester is required to enter the university's regular programs. The foundation semester is intended to provide students with fundamental academic abilities, such as computer literacy, English language competency, and mathematical aptitude. The foundation semester students have been chosen as the study's sample for the current research investigation. The researchers developed the research question considering the study's objective.

Population of the Study

EFL pre-university students enrolled in Sukkur IBA University's foundation program comprise the study's population.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The study used purposive sampling to choose participants. Five students were selected from each of the five classes in the foundation program. These chosen individuals were the participants in semi-structured interviews and reflective diaries. All five participants were purposely chosen on certain characteristics. For example, the students who were attending the IR and ER classes regularly in the foundation program and the participants have the same proficiency level. The participants consisted of three males and two females between the ages of 17 and 19. All participants had the same academic background. At the program's start,

participants received diaries for the reflective diaries along with an explanation of the value of journal writing. (Syed, Sanaullah, Muhammad, 2023), At the end of the program, the participants returned their reflective diaries and participated in semi-structured interviews.

Data Collection Tools and Collection Procedure

The researchers employed semi-structured interviews and reflective diaries as part of their qualitative research methodology. The researcher reviewed relevant studies on the effects of IR and ER on grammar proficiency to prepare an interview guide for the semi-structured interviews. The researcher sent the interview guide to three experts for validation after creating it. Using two individuals enrolled in the same program, the researchers also piloted the interview guide. The researchers revised and updated the interview guide based on the experts' suggestions and the pilot study outcomes. Concerning reflective diaries, to help the participants write more in the reflective diary, the researchers also gave the students reflective diary samples at the commencement of the program. The participants returned the diaries to the researchers at the end of the program. The interview data was collected at the end of the foundation semester of 2023. The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews. The duration of the interview was between 30 to 40 minutes. The researcher conducted the interviews at the convenience of the participants. Participants were informed of the purpose of the interview and then formal consent was obtained to record the interviews. The participants were also ensured that their provided information would only be used for research purposes. Concerning diaries, the students were provided diaries at the beginning of the program. Students could freely choose any appropriate time for them to make daily entries.

Data Analysis Techniques

The current qualitative study aimed to explore how EFL students perceived the contribution of IR and ER to the improvement of grammatical skills. Researchers used qualitative data analysis techniques. The data analysis method employed in this study was thematic analysis, along with individual interpretations. After transcribing each of the five interviews, the researchers employed the six-step thematic analysis method outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006). These steps include familiarity with data, generating initial codes, searching for initial themes, developing and reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally presenting them with in-depth descriptions. This analysis method is widely used and is considered a flexible, easy, and systematic approach to data analysis (Fona, 2024). The researchers read the reflective diaries repetitively and carefully and supported the interview results with relevant quotes from the diary. The researchers verified the data's validity and reliability. Member checking was used to ensure the data's correctness and reliability and to boost the study's legitimacy (Motulsky, 2021). Using this method, two participants reviewed the transcripts and provided interpretations of the data. Any disagreements were resolved through discussions between the participants and the researchers.

Results

This section presents the findings of the study. Analysis of the interview data and reflective diaries revealed that nearly all students improved their grammatical skills. Students showed various enhancements in different aspects of grammar, with some noting improvements in tense consistency and others in basic language structure. Additionally, it was found that grammatical competence was beneficial for the students to master other language aspects. This competence was brought about by their active participation in both reading approaches. "When reading through intensive reading, we

focused on our grammar skills" (P3). Some participants remarked that there used to be discussions about grammar concepts, sentence structures, and subject-verb agreement in the reading classrooms. Some comments suggest that these aspects were primarily addressed during the IR sessions, where detailed discussions and post-reading exercises focused on grammar and composition skills. One of the students remarked *"I improved my grammar in writing before and I was not able to differentiate between different prepositions. I also improved my punctuation skills, like commas, colons, semicolons, and question marks"* (P6). The comments indicated that IR in the classroom was beneficial for them as they could understand basic knowledge about grammar and punctuation. (Batool, Faqir, et. al. 2024), A few of the students remarked that they lacked grammatical competence; however, through various reading activities conducted in the classes, they significantly enhanced their grammatical knowledge, as these activities covered multiple fundamental aspects of grammar. *"There were chapters of a skill set that had many parts of speech knowledge that the teacher used to teach us, so this also improved our knowledge about grammar"* (S14). Moreover, the data indicated that improvements in grammatical competence also led to enhancements in other aspects of their language skills, as grammar is considered crucial for overall language development. The following comment from a student justified the importance of grammar in language development. *"So, once I improved my grammar that helped me to improve my reading skills, which also affected my other skills like writing and speaking"* (S3). Furthermore, an insightful comment from a student indicated that they achieved greater accuracy in sentence structure due to their enhanced grammatical skills. Specifically, with the IR approach, there has been a reduction in their grammatical errors. *"We also learned how to use English phrases (S10) correctly. The*

grammatical points, especially parts of speech and sentence structure, were thoroughly and deeply discussed in the classes. It is common practice that in the IR approach, the word-to-word understanding of the text is practiced. This way learners get the opportunity to analyze the language aspects deeply. I used to make many grammar mistakes. However, after completing this semester, I have improved myself" (S16). From the preceding comment of the students, it was indicated that students minimized their language errors in grammatical aspects with their active participation in the IR and ER sessions. One significant finding was noted when a student remarked about improvement in his grammar knowledge. *"The grammar skills improved drastically as we were reading, and maybe because of our unconscious mind, we were now able to write more effectively as the grammar structures improved in a very great manner"* (S18). Similarly, P6 wrote in the diary about his improvement in grammar knowledge, *"Today I read an article on the power of gifts from The Young World magazine, I came to know different aspects of grammar. Often, I used to read the material and did not focus on the sentence structure like which tense in the sentence is used. Neither had I used to focus on phrases and clauses, or which type of sentence was used in the text because I hardly comprehended it because of lack of practice. However, Today I read and observed how sentences were used like simple sentences, compound sentences, and complex sentences. I also came across different alternative phrasal verbs and phrases so I will read more articles like the one before making my grammar skills strong"*. The comments from the interviews and reflective diaries suggest that learners enhanced their grammatical knowledge, facilitating improvements in other aspects of their language skills. The above comments from interviews and reflective diaries suggest that learners developed their grammatical knowledge, which helped them improve other

aspects of the language. It can be suggested that classroom practices through IR and ER approaches were designed in a way that caused improvement in their grammar proficiency. (Rai, Syed, 2023), It was evident from the students' responses that they felt at ease with both reading approaches employed in the classroom. There were no adverse comments from students that undervalued the effectiveness of both the IR and ER approach in building their grammatical competence.

Discussion

The findings imply that the learners' grammatical knowledge increased with the IR approach. Participants in the IR approach were required to comprehend words for words, which probably made it easier for them to understand specific grammatical structures through the intensive reading (IR) approach. Furthermore, the results imply that most participants' grammatical ability increased due to extensive reading (ER) exposure to multiple and varied reading materials. So, the ER approach is also undeniable in the EFL context of Pakistan. The interview results suggest that their grammatical competence is enhanced due to the combined use of the IR and ER approach (Mahmoudian et al., 2011). However, some of the comments also favored the ER approach for the development of this skill (Khansir & Dehghani, 2015; Lee et al., 2015). These findings imply that explicit learning of grammatical rules is essential to be taught to students, and then implicit learning may also play its role in learning grammatical skills (Aka, 2020). The findings of the present study are consistent with the literature that emphasizes the use of IR and ER approaches in the learning of grammar. This study has also some implications for the teaching of reading in EFL classrooms. This study implies that teaching EFL learners using explicit instructional approach (IR) and implicit instructional approach (ER) may provide learners with an encouraging teaching and learning

environment to grow their grammatical abilities.

Conclusion

The findings of the study showed how IR and ER can improve learners' grammatical skills. The results also imply that increasing the quantity of ER material incorporated into the classroom in addition to IR may enhance students' grammar proficiency in the Pakistani EFL context. The introduction of journal writing in language classes may also serve as a better means of encouraging students to write more, which will further enhance their grammatical proficiency. In the current study, students continued to write in their diaries regularly, and there were discernible gains in their grammatical skills. The current study contributes to the existing body of literature by elucidating the role of ER and IR in enhancing learners' grammatical competency. The study tried to fill the gap in the literature by exploring the perceptions of EFL learners about the role IR and ER approaches in developing their grammatical competence. In the previous studies the researchers either investigated the ER and IR approach alone or compared the IR with the ER approach quantitatively to investigate its impact on grammatical competence. Moreover, the study also contributes to the practical domain of teaching IR and ER approaches together for maximum benefits.

Recommendations

The study recommends the following measures for the teachers, students, curriculum designers, and policymakers

For Teachers

- Give students access to various reading materials of various genres.
- Encourage students to write on the books they read and include assignments about grammar in their classes.
- Incorporate post-reading activities connected to IR and ER, including writing book reports or summarizing books, as they can improve grammatical proficiency.

- Ensuring grammatical competence and accuracy should be the main criteria for evaluating book reports.

For Students

- Engage fully in both IR and ER activities that are linked to the classroom.
- Explore fiction and non-fiction reading material to cultivate a love of reading, which can enhance their language skills, including grammar.
- Go beyond the textbooks and curricula in their reading.

For Curriculum Designers

- To design fictional and non-fictional reading material keeping in view the interests and proficiency level of the learners.
- To incorporate exercises linked to IR and ER into the recommended textbooks.

For Policy Makers

- Policymakers should make the ER approach a compulsory component of the curriculum to encourage more reading input in the classrooms.

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