Exploring Effects and Learner Attitudes of Gadget-Based Internet Multimedia Reading

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Abstract
This mixed-methods study aimed at investigating the effects of a gadget-based Internet multimedia extensive reading program on promoting language proficiency. In so doing, a pretest-posttest design was applied in the quantitative phase to comparatively analyze outcomes of three classes of college-level EFL learners (two experimental groups and one control, each including 30 university students) on how much they improved in their receptive proficiency, before and after the general English language course they were taking. The first group took the General English course along with a multimedia-based Internet extensive reading program as the study's treatment, and the second group took a linear text (traditional) extensive reading program with their English course. The posttest scores showed that students in experimental group 1 (extensive reading using multimedia texts) outperformed both experimental group 2 (extensive reading using linear texts) and the control group. Furthermore, experimental group 2 had higher scores in comparison to the control group. As for the qualitative phase, results of the follow-up interviews and open-ended questionnaires also indicated that the learners liked, and would prefer to substitute traditional reading programs by gadget-based multimedia ones. EFL teachers may be most interested in outcomes of this study since insights may be gained regarding the extent to which Internet-based reading should enter language courses.

Keywords: Extensive Reading, Internet Reading, Linear Text, Receptive Skills, Multimedia text

Introduction

Extensive reading has been investigated quite thoroughly (Bell, 2001; Hafiz & Tudor, 1989; Lao & Krashen, 2000; Pigada & Schmitt, 2006 Tanaka, 2007) when it comes to the reading of printed texts, which are otherwise called linear since one must usually begin from the very first page and continue up to the last so as to understand them thoroughly. The results of such studies have shown that reading linear texts extensively influences English proficiency positively. In this regard, fiction, and especially graded readers are considered suitable kinds of texts to be applied since they are the materials used in most investigations and suggested by most researchers (Bell, 2001; Lao & Krashen, 2000; Mason & Krashen, 1997; Pigada & Schmitt, 2006; Rodrigo et al., 2007; Tanaka, 2007).

Comparatively, there is very little data on the reading of multimedia Internet texts which exist quite predominantly in Information and Computer Technology (ICT) and on electronic gadgets everybody has, and even far less on the extensive reading of them. What can be found in

the literature at present (Evans, 2005; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004; Smolin & Lawless, 2003; Warschauer & Ware, 2008) points to the fact that enhancing new literacies has now become essential with regard to the advent of ICT. Furthermore, the reading of multimedia texts contributes to the development of English literacy (Al-Othman, 2003; Coiro & Dobler, 2007). However, it has yet remained unknown whether extensive reading of multimedia Internet texts, which is believed to enhance the new kind of literacy, will be advantageous to EFL learners either to the same degree or even more when compared to the traditional model of reading extensively. Answering this may not be inferable but needs to be investigated for two reasons. The first is that what exists in present-day research on Internet reading is majorly concerned with the reading of informational kinds of multimedia texts, (Coiro & Dobler, 2007; Pino-Silva, 2006), that differ quite a lot from fiction, whereas what has mostly been used in connection with reading linear texts extensively so far has mainly been fiction. The second reason is that multimedia texts present on the Internet are usually authentic since their target audiences are not EFL learners with their various limitations in their language proficiency. Therefore, more research is required to see if students' exposure to multimedia texts of fiction, which are mainly fictional and also authentic, helps develop second language proficiency.

Since the influences of extensive reading of linear texts on language proficiency and motivation have already been proven fairly strongly in many studies (Bell, 2001; Hafiz & Tudor, 1989; Lao & Krashen, 2000; Pigada & Schmitt, 2006 Tanaka & Stapleton, 2007) conducted to date, a reasonable approach to analyze probable influences of multimedia texts' extensive reading is to evaluate the possible proficiency enhancement created by extensive reading for Internet and linear texts comparatively. Multimedia Internet extensive reading occurs when texts include more than one mode, like a written story accompanied by an audio file, video clips clarifying parts of the text, and/or hyperlinks within the written text. In the current study, it seemed logical for the researcher to include a control group with identical general English courses but with no program for extensive reading, since the classes that were going to take part in the program were going to be convenience groups of students attending English courses at university. When there is a comparison group present, it is possible to check the effects of extensive reading on proficiency, since the English course variable – the course that both multimedia text and linear text groups were going to take – could be held constant.

This study is considered significant due to two reasons. First, it is among the pioneers of studies aiming at investigating the effects of Internet-based multimedia extensive reading on increasing receptive skills. Second, it provides implications for changing the way ELT stakeholders deal with the saying that multimedia gadget-based materials are ones that language learners are engaged with on a daily basis, and learners need to advance their mastery for coping with them. Finally, the results of this study provide information which language teachers can ponder over for their increased possible future incorporation of Internet texts in their curricula.

The aim of this paper was to investigate the influences of reading multimedia gadget-based Internet texts extensively on developing Iranian university-level students' receptive skills in English, and seeking whether learners would prefer such an approach over traditional paper reading The insight about this purpose was gained through two categories of the literature reviewed. The first concerns those studies which claim extensive reading linear texts in an extensive manner, specifically if the texts are graded stories, impacts on promoting learners' vocabulary knowledge (Lao & Krashen, 2000; Pigada & Schmitt, 2006), speed of reading (Bell, 2001; Lao & Krashen, 2000; Tanaka, 2007), writing (Mason & Krashen, 1997), comprehension in reading (Bell, 2001; Mason & Krashen, 1997; Tanaka, 2007), as well as motivation in English

reading (Asraf & Ahmad, 2003; Lao & Krashen, 2000). The second category concerns those studies that either present new literacies as a result of the popularization of ICT or uphold Internet-based reading since it increases the pace of reading (Al-Othman, 2003) and motivation of English reading (Arnold, 2009), and applies self-controlled strategies of reading (Coiro & Dobler, 2007). There are very few studies that have investigated the effects of multimedia extensive reading on listening and reading simultaneously in the Iranian context. In addition, studies that have looked into the effects of multimedia-based instruction on reading and listening have reported mixed findings. This study therefore aims at filling these gaps. In order to serve the objective of this study, the following research questions were raised:

Q1. Are there any statistically significant differences between the receptive English proficiencies of students who extensively read (a) multimedia Internet texts, (b) linear texts and (c) those who took the same English courses without extensive reading programs?

Q2. What are Iranian EFL learners' attitudes towards multimedia-based extensive reading?

Literature Review

A fairly large number of empirical investigations in EFL settings have proven that the extensive reading of printed materials, where information is usually conveyed linearly, helps develop the learners' vocabulary knowledge (Seiter, 2020; Suk, 2016; Webb & Chang, 2015), speed of reading (Huffman, 2014; McLean & Rouault, 2017, Nakanishi, 2015), writing (Mermelstein, 2015; Park, 2016), comprehension in reading (Tanaka, 2007), as well as motivation in English reading (Asraf & Ahmad, 2003; Lao & Krashen et al., 2018). Students also develop wider and deeper knowledge about the world, which is essential in relating and connecting with the text and other people (Renandya, 2016). The fundamental idea lying underneath these investigations concerns the input hypothesis proposed by Krashen (1982), which is based on the fact that the reception of comprehensible input by a learner enhances their target language acquisition. An example of this is written information which can be read, understood and comprehended easily and independently by a learner. Hung (2011) believes that exposing learners to comprehensible input would be parallel to the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) idea of Vygotsky (1978), which concerns the area between what one knows and their subsequent ability which requires help and support as facilitators for its development. However, ZPD is usually considered as a theoretical basis for studies which see the development of language as something social; these are consequently focused on investigating such impacts as, for example, teacher-student communications and scaffolding (Gibbons, 2003; Ko, Schallert, & Walters, 2003).

A number of other researchers have claimed that a majority of the young individuals who live in this century are frequently in contact with electronic gadgets and Information and Computer Technology (ICT) (Evans, 2005; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Smolin & Lawless, 2003; Warschauer & Ware, 2008). People use mobile phones, send e-mails and text messages and very frequently search the net and are somehow engaged with other web-based communicative functions on an almost daily basis. The importance of multimedia-based instruction has been pointed out by many scholars. Some scholars have proposed changing the definition of literacy from a traditional paper-based one, turning into one based on the modern digitalized world we live in today (Coiro, 2003; Kress, 2003; Leu et al., 2004).The aforementioned examples all indicate the fact that learners today are no longer only reading linear texts, but they are interacting with multimedia texts, which include a blend of forms like written texts, images (whether motionless or moving) and spoken language. In addition, the interaction of present-day

students with ICT has changed the concept of literacy altogether. It has been found that the reading of online multimedia texts contributes to reading which is more self-regulated (Coiro & Dobler, 2007), while it also builds up motivation (Arnold, 2009) and reading speed (Al-Othman, 2003). Such positive effects of reading multimedia texts thus lay emphasis on the importance of preparing the grounds for leading EFL learners to further interact with such Internet-based texts in extensive reading programs.

Extensive Reading: Linear Text

There have been a large number of studies on the linear kind of extensive reading programs (Asraf & Ahmad, 2003; Bell, 2001; Lao & Krashen, 2000; Mason & Krashen, 1997; Rodrigo et al., 2007; Tanaka, 2007) which can serve as a basis for extracting the fundamental guidelines for implementing them, and also for understanding what the proper materials for reading are supposed to be. If one recognizes what these two exactly are, they will actually have understood what extensive reading is. Moreover, the aforementioned studies posit that extensive reading possesses a good potential for enhancing EFL learners' English language skills and competence.

Proper reading materials

The primary principles for implementing extensive reading programs emphasize the importance of the reading materials' being interesting so that they can be comfortably read and comprehended independently, and consequently be read fast, accompanied with a sense of joy. Most researchers whose works were investigated for this study (Asraf & Ahmad, 2003; Bell, 2001; Mason & Krashen, 1997; Tanaka, 2007) made use of graded readers. Graded readers are mostly made simple and have been prepared for systematic control on the vocabulary items and grammatical structures to result in a leveled sequence of difficulty and complexity for various levels of learners. Nonetheless, novels, which are authentic, and which were clearly not written in a way so as to match the levels of EFL learners, and are not simplified either, have also been used in a number of studies successfully (Lao & Krashen, 2000; Rodrigo et al., 2007). Such a fact reasonably implies not only is it the large amount of reading that is important, but also reading the right things is certainly influential as well, and simplified stories as well as those written for native speakers are suitable extensive reading materials in case they seem interesting to the learners and also if the learners have no problem with the degree of their syntactic and lexical difficulty levels.

Extensive Reading: Internet Multimedia Gadget-Based Text

Scholars who have taken into account the effect of ICT on modern-day literacy (Evans, 2005; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Smolin & Lawless, 2003; Warschauer & Ware, 2008) advocate a meaning shift in the very concept of literacy, moving from a traditional viewpoint on mastery over linear texts toward a subsequent viewpoint focused on multimedia gadget-based texts. Based on this support for the new concept of literacy, together with investigations which show the influences of Internet reading on reading pace (Al-Othman, 2003), interest (Arnold, 2009; Naderi Anari, Rostami Aboo Saeedi, & Shariati, 2019), and reading strategy application (Coiro & Dobler, 2007), this study investigates how extensively reading multimedia Internet texts affects Iranian university-level students' receptive proficiencies. Multimedia extensive reading occurs when texts include more than one mode, like a written story accompanied by an audio file, video clips clarifying parts of the text, and/or hyperlinks within the written text.

Multimedia texts and listening

With regard to the wide use of audio files existing side by side with the texts available on the Internet in this era, the listening skill is definitely affected if learners are exposed to programs which require them to make use of the audio files for better understanding the story or text they are reading. Accordingly, a number of researchers have attempted to investigate the effect of exposure to multimedia texts on the listening skill of language learners. In a mixed-methods study by Jiang (2016), it was found that multimodality could improve learners' autonomous listening significantly and enhance their comprehension, as well as their multiliteracy capacity. Another study by Yongjin (2013) indicated that after a 16 week research, multimodality facilitated students' competence of English-listening when used appropriately. In yet another investigation on the effects of multimedia texts on listening, Cahyono and Widya (2017) found that using visual textbooks helps the students answer questions of the book simply. They can predict the answer by the images given in their books. In addition, by adding video clips to the listening classroom, students become more enthusiastic and enhance their listening abilities more enjoyably. Consequently, the learners become more powerful in listening.

The necessity for including multimedia texts in literacy programs

Luke (2003), in line with the perceptions of Smolin and Lawless (2003), believes that effects of ICT on reading and writing today are quite significant. He implicitly emphasizes the need to include multimedia texts in literary curricula. Stressing the role of new hybrid research methodologies and theories, Luke (2003) claims that today's texts, which are multimedia and exist in the present era's scripts, like hypertexts, text messaging and games, have changed into multifaceted, hybrid sign-based forms, and require different dimensions from reading, observing, social exchange, and communication. Such new demands in the field of literacy definitely reveal their fundamental position in academic learning.

Multimedia texts and extensive reading

Pino-Silva (2006) directly claims that ICT must be considered when dealing with extensive reading. In his study, Pino-Silva applied an Internet-based kind of program for extensive reading which had been developed on the basis of a paper-based one which had in turn been started more than 10 years before. His participants studied articles taken from the Internet and from journals like the Newsweek, the Scientific American and Discover. The task which students were obliged to do subsequently was to fill in worksheets and send them to an Internet group which had been created for the program. The answers which were given by the students in an open-ended questionnaire showed their beliefs in their learning new words, and their joy in the flexible nature of being able to choose what to read and also when to read it, as well as the fact that the Internet-based nature of the study had provided them with a chance to access a large number of new and fascinating magazine articles. The students also mentioned that, thanks to the Internet, they had enjoyed being able to contact their teachers frequently. Accordingly, Pino-Silva concluded that integrating the Internet into programs which concern extensive reading was an instructional approach worthy of development. However, in another study by Pellicer-Sanchez et al. (2018), through tracking the eyes of the participants on what they mostly read when exposed to multimedia texts, it was found that more time was spent on reading texts compared to pictures. Pictures were looked at more when they were accompanied by audio playbacks, but the result of this, much like the results of reading multimedia texts without devoting much time to questions, was that reading comprehension was not affected. Nevertheless, when considering all aspects of multimodality, and even with the consideration of the few cases where its effects are not great

enough, it can still be said that instructional approaches based on involving multimedia texts are worthy of development.

To sum up, the irrevocable trend of ICT has already certainly called for a direction shift from the outdated literacy of linear texts toward a more modern type of it, which has as its centerpiece multimedia texts. Furthermore, a number of studies, though not a very large number of them, show that reading Internet texts enhances online reading motivation and speed, in addition to facilitating learners' use of reading comprehension strategies. The literature reviewed thus approves of reading multimedia texts extensively in connection with enhancing motivation and proficiency in English. Because the advantageous nature of extensively reading linear texts has already been proven somehow firmly, it seems logical to further investigate effects of multimedia texts' extensive reading through comparing it with the impacts of identical reading but this time with linear texts. However, since the learners participating in this study were EFL university students taking a four-stage English class aimed at enhancing reading, this study also made use of a group of students which neither took part in extensively reading multimedia texts, nor did it take part in extensively reading linear texts.

Methodology

Design

This research adopted an explanatory sequential mixed methods design. Both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis were used. Three classes were used to conduct the research, namely the multimedia group (n-30), the linear group (n30) and the control group (n=30). All three groups took a pre-test at the beginning of the term, checking for their receptive proficiencies, and a post-test at the end, where results of changes were checked to find the effect of multimedia-based extensive reading on receptive proficiency in comparison with extensive reading of linear texts, as measured by the receptive proficiency test of TOEIC.

Following the first phase of the study, the second phase was qualitative, with a semi-structured interview and an open-ended questionnaire to extract participants' attitudes.

Participants

Two sets of participants were selected for each phase of the study. The participants of the quantitative section were 90 intermediate level English language learners at Mazandaran University of Science and Technology. Before starting the study's main treatment sessions, the participants were required to be homogenous in terms of their proficiency level. Although Mazandaran University of Science and Technology has all its freshmen interviewed by language experts in order to place them in one of its EFL levels ranging from pre-intermediate through advanced (Language 1, Language 2, Language 3, and finally Advanced General English (Language 4)), in this study, even though the learners who were chosen were all students of the third level, that is Language 3 (High-Intermediate) it was still decided to have the students sit for a standardized placement test to further strengthen the validity of the placement results. As the researcher decided to choose intermediate level EFL learners, the students took the OPT test in order to have their current proficiency levels checked. They were students in different fields of study like mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, and computer engineering. 49 male and 41 female learners were included in this study whose first language was Persian and ranged in age from 19 to 24 years old. The participants of the quantitative phase of this study were selected through a random sampling procedure. Three intermediate classes (each including 30) were randomly selected from among the intermediate classes which had been formed and were going to be held in the following semester. One class (experimental group 1) received extensive reading

practices using linear texts, that is, the Oxford readers; the other one experienced an extensive reading program of using gadget-based multimedia Internet texts in the process of their class, and the third group, the control group, was only used for the sake of comparison, only received the university's default general language instruction without any sort of extensive reading program. For the qualitative phase of the study, however, 20 participants were chosen from the multimedia experimental group through a purposive sampling technique. The researcher contacted those experimental group participants who displayed more activity in class and were also more *naturally* engaged with their smartphones and tablets, as opposed to *under*-users and *over*-users. Under-users are those individuals who are somehow different from ordinary people in the amount they use technological devices such as tablet computers and cellphones. They only seem to start using such devices when there is a degree of obligation from the outside. On the contrary, over-users are those who are excessively engaged and into their electronic gadgets and can therefore not be considered as good samples with generalizability in research studies. That resulted in 20 of the students agreeing to take part in the interview.

Instruments

Oxford Placement Test

This study used the original pencil-and-paper Oxford Placement Test (1985) which was first developed by Dave Allan. It is both easy to administer and practical at grading students into different levels of proficiency.

In this study, students whose scores ranged between 30 and 47 were included as the researcher's aim was to include intermediate-level learners. Furthermore, the reliability index for the OPT test was calculated and reported to be .80 (Wistner, Sakai, & Abe, 2009). Moreover, it has been reported that this placement test enjoys construct validity (Wistner et al., 2009).

The TOEIC Test

In order to measure EFL learners' receptive proficiency levels before and after treatment sessions, a TOEIC pretest and a TOEIC posttest were used. Reviewing the related literature, many researchers like Pigada and Schmitt (2006) and Tanaka (2007) indicated the advantageous nature of reading extensively in the reading comprehension classroom and its impact of proficiency scores. Furthermore, regarding the reliability and validity of TOEIC tests, Woodford (1982) and Zhang (2006) approve that scores gained on the TOEIC test possess validity and reliability in the evaluation of learners' proficiency in English.

Semi-Structured Interview

The qualitative data of this study was obtained through twenty interviews with twenty participants from the experimental group. The interview was a semi-structured one. A semi-structured interview includes a set of questions to give direction to the interview but does not dictate those directions. This provided the interviewer with the freedom to probe more deeply into the perceptions of the participants regarding the extensive reading of multimedia texts through asking relevant questions based on active conversation (Lodico et al., 2006). The questions were developed for the interview early on in the study. However, once the quantitative data were reviewed, the list of questions was consulted in order to make sure that they were aligned with the results of the quantitative data analysis. This was done so that the researchers could make sure that the line of the qualitative questioning was going to be an additional piece of information to use in the triangulation process of reviewing the data. The questions which had originally been written were aligned quite well with the results of the quantitative data analysis,

meaning that they only required some slight adjustments. The results of the quantitative phase of the study were not revealed to the interview participants so that their focus would completely be turned to their opinion and perceived usefulness of the multimedia-based extensive reading program itself. The data collected from the interviews was recorded, transcribed and then analyzed to formulate the findings.

Open-Ended Questionnaire

In order to obtain more detailed data in the qualitative phase of the study, an open-ended questionnaire was used by the researcher which would subsequently be used for cross-validating the data gained through the interviews to further demonstrate the participants' opinions and feeling towards multimedia-based instruction. This questionnaire included a total of 8 questions, which the learners had to answer in a few sentences in English. Through these questions, the learners were asked to give their opinions regarding the multimedia-based instruction, such as whether they enjoyed the treatment, or which part of the multimedia was more helpful to their reading comprehension. In addition, a few other questions about the treatment existed in the questionnaire, which have all been provided as the supplementary materials to this study.

Reliability and validity of the qualitative phase

As for the credibility of the data, the researcher applied member checking, peer debriefing and methods triangulation. In the member checking stage, the participants reviewed the drafts and themes which emerged from the data to evaluate and access the feedback concerning the accuracy of interpretations. In the peer debriefing phase, a colleague went through an external check of the process of the study. The external instructor received the raw data and the researchers understanding and explanations beforehand so that he could review and question the process of the study so as to make sure the study makes sense and the understandings drawn from the research were plausible and correct. Regarding methods triangulation, two qualitative tools were applied namely the open-ended questionnaire and the semi-structured interview, to create the credibility of the research.

To address the transferability issue of the data obtained in the current study, the researcher applied thick and rich description. Through thick, rich and sufficiently detailed descriptions of the context, individuals who subsequently study the research results will be enabled to make the required comparisons and judgments about the amount of similarity, and consequently transferability. Addressing this issue is regarded as descriptive adequacy.

Dependability is one of the other necessary issues which must be taken into consideration when conducting such qualitative methods. To check for the dependability of the current qualitative study, the inter-rater method was made use of. The researcher chose a number of transcriptions in a random manner and asked a peer to code them with the coding labels specified in advance by the researcher. This second coder was told that he was to choose whether he himself preferred to add other codes he himself might find necessary. Following the second coder's coding of the data, the outcome was compared with the researcher's coding results so as to check to what extent the two coders labeled the parts of the transcription identically.

Procedures

As mentioned before, in order to conduct this study, both quantitative and qualitative data collection procedures were adopted. In order to do so, for the quantitative part, overall 107 EFL learners were initially considered in the three classes out of which 90 were chosen after the OPT test. The participants who scored 30- 47 were chosen because the researcher aimed at choosing

intermediate-level EFL learners. Overall, 90 EFL learners were chosen and divided into three groups: experimental 1, experimental 2, and control group.

The first week of the term included the following procedures: How to read linear texts extensively and multimedia texts extensively were explained by the instructor to experimental group 1 and 2. This was done through a number of papers handed out among the students for clarification, and also some PowerPoint slides presented by the instructor. The explanation stage encompassed the aim of the researcher's plans, how much the students were expected to read in a week and the necessary homework, as well as a page including possible story books which could be read for the linear experimental group and a list of websites for finding multimedia stories for the multimedia experimental group. The teacher in the control group told the learners that he invited them to take part in the research so that they would serve as a base for the research study. Stating the treatment sessions, the work on extensive reading was preformed once a week, while the learners were told and supposed to go on with their reading when they had spare time.

As for the second phase of the study which was qualitative, two tools were designed and applied. A semi-structured interview and an open-ended questionnaire were used to check for the modes of multimedia texts the students preferred, the extensive reading program they participated in, their attitudes towards multimedia-based instruction and their ideas concerning English language proficiency.

Linear text group

In experimental group 1, extensive reading was practiced using linear texts. The teacher in this class was supposed to provide support, encourage each student to read by themselves, and also ask them to share what they read with their peers. First, the teacher gave them the general information using PowerPoint presentations. For example, procedures regarding how to choose the material for reading and student-related tasks were described. After presenting the general information, the learners had around half an hour time to do the extensive reading each on their own. This period is known as continuous individual reading because in it, learners read on their own in class. After that reading, students were requested to respond to questions like "What do I know about the story?" and "What do I want to know about the story?"—prior to commencing the reading activity or "What do I learn after reading the story?" Subsequently, the students were asked to share their ideas with their friends in pairs.

Multimedia text group

In experimental group 2, the same procedure was followed as well as searching the net regarding related topics, pictures, or movies which could help learners comprehend the text better or increase their knowledge. Hence, the participants of this group were asked to search the net for anything he/she considered as appealing and related to the text they had read beforehand. Again, in this group, like the former one, the learners explained to their peers the story of the text they had selected in a short 2-3-minute period. At the end, the teacher asked a few students to come to the front of the class and tell the class the stories they had chosen and had read beforehand.

Participants of the multimedia text group got support by two means. The first was being introduced to a number of websites which included stories with a range of difficulty levels. It was quite practical because what we usually find on the net has not been specifically designed for language students. Furthermore, the net has such a large number of texts available that the explanations the students received most probably helped them find their stories more quickly. The second help was in relation to the text types present on the net. The teacher of the multimedia text group illustrated the way a learner might find, for example, a short video or pictures about

the theme of the story, a voice file telling that story, or a second story with an identical theme. The teacher presented short explanations on how to read online extensively and also how to use a number of hyperlinks which would guide students to websites including Basic to Advanced stories in his PowerPoint presentation.

Comparison group

In group 3, which was the control group and was just used for the sake of comparison, English language classes were held as usual without any extensive reading practices. The treatment sessions were run in 10 weeks. Eventually, in the final week of the study, the students in all three groups answered the TOEIC questions a second time.

Data Analysis

In order to check for any significant differences between the receptive English proficiencies of students who extensively read (a) multimedia Internet texts, (b) linear texts and (c) those who take the same English courses without extensive reading programs, the TOEIC pre-test and post-test data were analyzed for their parametric data assumptions. Then in order to check the difference in groups' means, ANCOVA tests were used to see how the learners'' receptive proficiencies were effected through holding constant scores gained on the pre-test as the covariate so that the influence of the learners' varying levels of proficiency from the first stages of the investigation on the post-test outcomes at the end of it would be eliminated.

Results

This study investigated if there were any statistically significant differences between the receptive English proficiencies of students who read (a) multimedia Internet texts, (b) linear texts and (c) those who take the same English courses without an extensive reading program. In order to do so, 90 EFL learners were put in three groups each containing 30 learners. After homogenizing them based on their OPT scores, learners took a TOEIC test as a pretest. The treatment sessions were then started. In experimental group 1, extensive reading was practiced using linear texts. In experimental group 2, extensive reading was practiced using multimedia, and group 3 was considered as a control group. After treatment sessions, the learners took another TOEIC test to see if there was any improvement or not. In order to check for the differences, the means of these three groups should have been compared. The means of these groups are presented in Table 1. As can be seen in this table, there are differences in the groups' posttest scores; however, it should still be checked to see whether the differences are significant or not.

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics of TOEIC scores (Dependent Variable: Post-TOEIC)*

Groups	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
1	52.33	7.73	30
2	57.86	9.09	30
3	44.63	6.32	30
Total	51.61	9.44	90

In order to check for the group's mean differences controlling for the initial difference on the pre- test, ANCOVA was run. However, before running ANCOVA, there were three assumptions that needed to be met.

According to Dancey and Reidy (2007), the assumptions of ANCOVA are:

1.The covariate must be linearly related to the dependent variable.

2.The covariate should be measured without error (i.e. reliably).

3.The regression lines for the different groups must be parallel to each other (p. 435).

The assumption of linearity was checked by a scatterplot of the covariate (i.e., TOEIC pretest before treatment) and the dependent variable (i.e., TOEIC posttest after treatment). As seen in Figure 1, there is a linear relationship, as opposed to a curvilinear one.

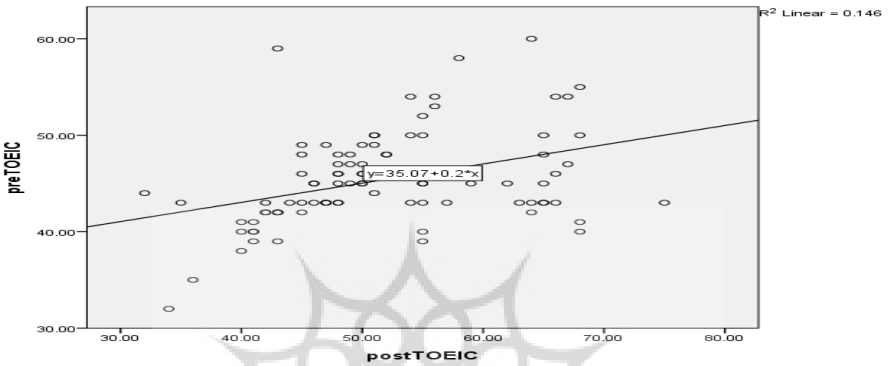

Figure 1. *Scatterplot of covariate and dependent variable*

The second assumption was already checked since the TOEIC pre-test had an acceptable reliability of .85. Regarding the third assumption, a test of between-subjects was consulted. In order to meet the assumption of homogeneity of regression, the interaction of the covariate and the independent variable must be insignificant (Pallant, 2013, p. 298). Therefore, as highlighted in Table 2, the interaction of the treatment (i.e., group) and the TOEIC pretest before the treatment is statistically insignificant (F = .79, p = 0.45 > .05). As a consequence, it can be concluded that this assumption also holds.

Table 2. *The homogeneity of regressions (Dependent variable: Post-TOEIC)*

Source	df	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	5	12.514	.000
Intercept	1	13.725	.000
groups	2	1.786	.174
Pre-TOIC	1	9.178	.003
groups*Pre-TOEIC	2	.790	.457
Error	84		
Total	90		
Corrected Total	89		

a. R Squared = .427 (Adjusted R Squared = .393)

After meeting all the assumptions and as a final step, an ANCOVA test was run. As Table 3 indicates, there was a statistically significant difference between the performances of the students in the experimental and control groups on the TOEIC test after treatment ($F = 19.86$, $p = .00 < .05$). That is, the treatment had a significant impact on the learners' receptive skills as measured by the TOEIC test after treatment. It is important to note that this F value was obtained after partialling out the initial differences on the TOEIC pre-test.

Table 3. *The result of ANCOVA test for TOEIC pre and post tests*

Source	df	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	3	20.431	.000	.416
Intercept	1	12.772	.001	.129
Pre-TOEIC	1	12.173	.001	.124
groups	2	19.862	.000	.316
Error	86			
Total	90			
Corrected Total	89			

a. R Squared = .416 (Adjusted R Squared = .396)

It was found that there was a difference between the means of the control and experimental groups. Hence, a post hoc test was run to find the exact differences between groups. According to Table 4, it was found that there was a significant difference between the three groups. Hence, considering the mean scores in Table 1 and the post hoc results in Table 4, it can be concluded that the students in experimental group 2 (extensive reading using multimedia texts) outperformed both experimental group 1 (extensive reading using linear texts) and the control group. Furthermore, experimental group 1 had higher scores in comparison to the control group.

Table 4. *Results of the Post hoc Test*

Dependent Variable: TOEIC Post					
				95% Confidence Interval	
	(I) groups	(J) groups	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
LSD	1	2.00	.007	-9.5378	-1.5289
		3.00	.000	3.6955	11.7045
	2	1.00	.007	1.5289	9.5378
		3.00	.000	9.2289	17.2378
	3	1.00	.000	-	-3.6955
		2.00	.000	-	-9.2289

Based on observed means
The error term is Mean Square (Error) = 60.886.
*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

The last research question asked for the participants' attitudes and viewpoints concerning Internet-based extensive reading and the different parts of multimedia texts (audio, image or video) in it. In this regard, and in order for the researcher to find the participants' opinions, twenty of the experimental group participants took part in a semi-structured interview and filled an open-ended questionnaire. The aim of the researcher was to obtain the learners' ideas on the different amounts of effectiveness which the different kinds of modality had on their receptive proficiencies.

Questions used in the qualitative phase can be grouped into these themes: (a) the effect of each mode on listening and reading (b) learner's degree of mastery on technology (c) multimedia-based instruction and its role in learning (d) expectations learners had from the program. The semi-structured interview and questionnaire included 8 questions, the results of which are provided below based on the questions in the interview.

Which mode of multimedia texts (hyperlinks, images, audio files, video clips…) has a more significant role in enhancing your receptive skills?

Most of the learners spoke very positively and eagerly of the different modes which are commonly made use of in multimedia-based texts usually available on the Internet. 15 of the students stated that images had a very strong role to play in enhancing understanding, whether it be for listening or reading. Three of the learners said that the video clips available in some story websites had the largest impact, while only one of them stated that audio files which read the story out was more influential. As for hyperlinks, all the participants believed that they had a very constructive effect since they explained words or concepts that were unfamiliar to the reader with further explanations and entries.

How much do you make use of technological tools and devices in the process of your learning?

From the answers of the participants in the study it could quite clearly be seen that multimedia materials and technology played a key role in the process of their learning. All the participants said that they were in frequent contact with their technological devices such as their laptop computers, desktop computers, tablet computers, televisions, smart phones and the Internet. Among these, seven of the learners said that they commonly made use of these technological devices for learning, while three claimed that they did not apply such tools for education, but rather for getting in touch with friends and family, social networking and entertainment.

Does the use of multimedia and Internet-based tools for learning help enhance your English proficiency?

All the participants believed so. One of the participants believed that watching video clips and listening to audio files in English is the best way to learn how to communicate in English. Or another student mentioned that even when he was looking for and studying something in English related to his own field of study, considering the fact that dictionaries and hyperlinks guided him to more simply understand the details of it, he actually learned some English in addition to the

specific texts he was researching in his own field of study. Thus, he believed that he was learning English indirectly while working on his own studies.

Which one do you prefer? Learning with printed books or learning through multimedia materials?

All participants believed that multimedia texts were superior to printed ones when it comes to learning. For instance, one of them said that at present we are mostly using printed books for education and learning while we actually need to shift this trend toward a majorly Internet-based one which could make more use of all the links and modes of communications absent in printed book so as to help learners get more than simply reading and trying to decipher the meanings laid within. He added that multimedia texts were more easily understandable, and could quickly be directed toward supplementary information that may be helpful. Participants also implied that getting access to information was much easier through multimedia tools. Another participant for example said that finding the information you want on a computer or Internet-based software is much more convenient than finding it in books.

How much are multimedia texts made use of in your English classes? Which kinds of multimedia materials are most commonly used?

Seven of the participants said that in most of the English classes they attended, multimedia materials linked to the Internet were very rarely used, while the rest said that they were used minimally. These three said that their teachers made use of PowerPoint slides, computers, CDs and, in some occasions, movies in their classes, but still not the direct Internet. A number of the participants believed that their instructors had to make more use of multimedia and the Internet in the process of their teaching or at least in the assignments they gave the students since multimedia texts are now a common part of people's everyday life. However, it could be understood from the responses that the teaching style instructors had, also played a significant role in the amount of interest students had regarding the overall class procedure. Although they claimed that multimedia would make the class more interesting, compared to teaching printed books, they still believed that they had experiences of teachers not having used multimedia materials, but who, through their interesting ways of handling classes, made the learning process very appealing and fruitful.

What are your expectation regarding the use of Internet-based multimedia in language learning classes?

Most students said that further integration of Internet-based activities would be very helpful for the learning process. The major basis of the students' opinions was that, considering the role of the Internet in their everyday life, it seemed strange why most language teachers were only making minimal use of it in their teaching processes. They also said that while there are so many materials freely and easily available on the net, sticking to traditional ways and teacher-centered classes was not supposed to be this much prevalent as it is today. Overall, most of the students who took part in the qualitative phase of this study expresses high expectation regarding further implementation of such programs in language learning environments.

Is there any part of your English proficiency that this type of instruction does not affect much?

While some of the participants believed that speaking is not influenced much because reading only develops reading, others, who were 10 of the participants believed that such

instruction also influenced speaking and writing. This second group of learners believed that an increase in vocabulary learning would somehow help you speak better and even write better. They also believed that reading a lot can have a good effect on speaking as well. One participant went on to say "just like film lovers are usually good speakers of English, good readers can be, too". However, almost half the students didn't agree with such a point of view and saw multimedia-based Internet extensive reading as being helpful to reading, and to a smaller extent, listening only.

Did the extensive reading program cause you to feel more motivated to read and take part in class?

Once again, almost half the participants had a positive view, while the others had a negative one. Those who believed multimedia on the Internet motivated them to read more and take more active roles in the class mostly pointed to the enjoyment factor as the reason for such motivation. On the other hand, the detractors' standpoint was that being required to read as part of a class process or assignment makes leads to a reduction in motivation and enjoyment factors. While they still believed that in essence, using such materials was very useful and enjoyable for language learners, they only preferred to carry out the activities in class, and not have anything to do before the arrival of the next session at home. In other words, they preferred a classroom-based program to a more comprehensive one that included after-class assignments as well.

Discussion

Reading comprehension is one of the most important skills which should be practiced both inside and outside the classroom. One way to improve reading is to practice extensive reading outside the class. Extensive reading is a method of language learning which consists of reading a relatively large number of texts that are easy and enjoyable. These texts can exist in both linear and multimedia formats and can be further categorized based on learners' proficiency levels and learners can enjoy reading them. In today's modern world, the old concept regarding literacy has converted to a literacy of multimedia texts as a result of the dominant application of digital content. In addition, since the popularity of all these new devices is a continuing process, multimedia texts must play a role in literacy programs. The present study tried to examine the impact of multimedia extensive reading on the possible promotion of Iranian university-level students' reading motivation through comparatively analyzing it against the somehow widely accepted influence of reading printed texts extensively. The results of the study indicate that extensively reading multimedia texts is more effective than reading printed ones in promoting EFL students' receptive proficiencies.

The current study indicated that students who experienced extensive reading using multimedia texts outperformed the ones who experienced linear texts in listening and reading performance, and both of these groups outperformed the control group learners who did not experience any type of extensive reading. This finding is logical as there were treatments in the experimental groups and the learners studied more materials than the control group. Moreover, they had the opportunity to check vocabulary meanings online and they had access to audio files which helped them learn better.

Considering the outperformance of experimental groups, it is worthy to note that the materials used in the experimental group were graded books with different levels for students' own choice, while the materials for the control group were at the same level as the textbook used during the experimental period. As the result indicates, the positive outcome lends support to Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982) which says a learner naturally learns when they are exposed

to input which is one level above the linguistic level they are currently at. Thus, second/foreign language teachers have to be aware of selecting the appropriate levels of graded books with various topics, and students can have an opportunity to read what they are willing to read to achieve natural communicative input that is also comprehensible.

According to hypotheses and evidence reported by many researchers (Bell, 2001; Hafiz & Tudor, 1989; Lao & Krashen, 2000; Pigada & Schmitt, 2006 Tanaka & Stapleton, 2007), it is believed that if the students form a habit of reading through extensive reading programs with adequate comprehensible input in a low anxiety environment, they will improve their reading comprehension in the long run. After all, reading ability doesn't happen overnight.

If working on multimedia story texts is as influential as reading linear texts, one can at least conclude that they must have a similar share in literacy programs. The importance of multimedia-based instruction has been pointed out by many scholars. These scholars have proposed changing the definition of literacy from a traditional paper-based one, turning into one based on the modern digitalized world we live in today (Coiro, 2003; Kress, 2003; Leu et al., 2004). However, the present paper aims at a different view. Multimedia texts do play a significant role in modern literacies, and considering this point, teachers can improve their teaching quality through using it more in classes.

What was found in this study is in contrast to the findings of Arnold (2009) who, as a result of his findings, claimed that there seems to be an overestimation considering the large amount of attention multimedia-based instruction is getting. The result of his qualitative study was that a big majority of his participants (74%) chose to read journalistic texts when they were given complete freedom to choose any kind of text they preferred, the point being that they did not show much tendency toward multimedia kinds of texts. Even though the learners, as a result of the Internet-based multimedia course, had claimed to have become more motivated, more self-confident and more powerful in their reading skills, they still did not show much interest for reading multimedia texts.

The present findings regarding the influence of extensively reading linear texts support what Krashen (1982) believed in connection with the significance of comprehensible input and its role in becoming proficient in a language. Pica (2005) also was of the belief that comprehensible input is a must when considering language learning, but not at all enough. As a result, comprehensible input is an important part of learning a language, but it is not the only element required.

Conclusion

The purpose of the current study was to examine the role of extensive reading using both linear and multimedia texts in EFL learners' achievements in receptive skills (reading and listening). In this part, the summary of findings, and the conclusions are presented. Furthermore, theoretical and pedagogical implications are shown and some research venues for further investigations are provided.

Considering the effect of extensive reading on learners' performance in the TOEIC test, it was found that students in experimental group 2 (extensive reading using multimedia texts) outperformed both experimental group 1 (extensive reading using linear texts) and the control group. Furthermore, experimental group 1 had higher scores in comparison to the control group.

The current study can be seen as a leader in investigating the impact of extensive reading of English on the language skills of Iranian EFL learners. Whether the narrative reading text is multimedia or linear, numerical studies state extensive reading as an entry to developing receptive skills. As stated by Day and Bamford (1998), when properly set up and conducted,

extensive reading can help learners read better in the target language, and can also cause learners to take pleasure in reading. Findings suggest that reading extensively will provide understandable input to language learners.

The key result of this study concerns the fact that extensively reading multimedia texts on the net is more influential than reading written linear texts in enhancing the receptive English proficiency of Iranian EFL learners as assessed by the TOEIC exams. The numerical findings, in other words, support the fact that extensively reading, whether it be that of linear or multimedia texts has an important role in improving receptive proficiency. However, the findings of the study turned out to support the notion made by Krashen (1982) which stated understandable input to be a major player in developing language skills because the input given to the learners seemed to have four features of the effective input stated in the hypothesis (1982) for language development.

Statistical results obtained from this research study make it possible to postulate that EFL learners benefit from a robust linear or multimedia text reading program.

The first pedagogical implication is that practitioners can undertake the practice of extensively reading multimedia or linear texts, depending on the facilities of the educational school. The overriding explanation for this is that extensively reading multimedia texts is suggested to be more influential than linear texts in developing the English skills of EFL learners. Therefore, in case an academic organization does not possess a large-enough number of graded readers, at least one single unit class can be arranged for all learners to experience the multimedia or linear type of extensive reading with the anticipation of gaining good benefits for the students.

Nevertheless, if accessing English Internet is more difficult for the learners than accessing graded readers, instructors can perform extensive reading with books in print, and they don't need to worry about the development of English skills for their students through such methods, since they are not much less beneficial.

Another pedagogical implication for course developers resulting from this study is to include the specific types of information and story texts when online reading is performed extensively. This implication is because the kind of multimedia-based reading that has had a positive impact on the study of participants has mostly been that of information texts, e.g. journal articles or stories (Arnold, 2009; Pino-Silva, 2006). In addition, it is likely that extensively reading multimedia texts online will have good influences if structured as a method which acts as a problem-solver, as the study by Coiro and Dobler (2007) indicated, or the collection and sharing of information, as exemplified by the study by Pino-Silva (2006).

Through this study, it has been realized that it is possible to make further modifications and improve the thesis due to the limited understanding of the theories of extensive reading and motivation. Many important theoretical issues in reading have not yet been resolved, and the result of this study is only tentative on a preliminary research basis due to the limitations of the experimental conditions such as time, reading materials and class management.

Such extensive reading research may have a common relevance in many other foreign language learning activities, and in-depth studies will continue to support such hypothesis of thesis and viability if extensive reading if incorporated into the curriculums of schools and language institutes.

For future research, it is suggested to investigate the effects of informative styles of multimedia texts, as opposed to literary forms used in this study. As mentioned earlier, the type of text used in this study, for both linear and multimedia groups, was stories. However, since information texts most often provide authentic texts to their readers, it seems logical to apply such texts in future extensive reading programs.

As for the last research question and the results of the open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, it was revealed that learners think that the various kinds of text modes, that is, audio files, video clips, graphical elements and pictures can be considered positively influencing factors in the process of enhancing receptive proficiency. Most learners, however, preferred texts which were accompanied by more than one mode of multimedia instruction. That is, it was not only the audio mode which was preferable for the participants to go with texts, but rather the presence of hyperlinks, images and online dictionaries was desired and emphasized so as to make the learning process more enjoyable and fruitful. The semi-structured interviews prove that the learners in this study were aware of the aims of the present study. In the interviews, the participants also said that they saw multimedia texts as a part of modern life, and that they made use of multimedia and technology for entertainment, social networking, communication and learning. The interviewees also said that they believed in the key role multimedia texts played in the process of language learning and specifically in enhancing their receptive proficiency, as well as the fact that they had decided to incorporate it in their life more than they used to. They also stated that multimedia texts available on the English Internet were much better than linear printed books, since they more easily allowed for accessing information and comprehension. Eventually, they said that their other instructors did not make much use of multimodality even though such texts were much more beneficial to language learners in the present era. Their demand was for their teachers and instructors to start introducing courses which would give a larger share to Internet-based activities and materials when designing lesson plans.

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