



# Enhancing Summary Writing Skills through Extensive Reading in Second Language Acquisition

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of extensive reading (ER) on Omani students' summary writing skills. In this program, the researcher selected a simplified graded book appropriate for the students' language level and cultural familiarity. Fifty Omani participants from English Foundation Year 3 took part in the study. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were adopted for analyzing the data. The results from the questionnaires and interviews indicated that students had a generally positive view of task-based reading programs. Most students reported that peer collaboration and guided reading tasks helped them better understand the texts and, as a result, enabled them to produce more coherent summaries. However, it is important to note that certain demotivating factors were identified concerning task-based extensive reading. The primary demotivating factors included low completion rates, lack of integration into the course curriculum, difficulties with dictionary use, and mismatches in language proficiency. To ensure the success of a task-based extensive reading program, it is crucial to address these challenges effectively.

**Keywords:** extensive reading, task-based, summary writing, attitudes, challenges

## Introduction

Extensive reading is defined as "reading in quantity and to gain a general understanding of what is read. It is intended to develop good reading habits, build vocabulary and structure knowledge, and encourage a liking for reading" (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 212). Extensive reading is introduced as an approach to teaching reading in a second language. The aim is to encourage learners to read in a second language and enjoy it (Day & Bamford, 1998). As a pedagogical approach, extensive reading is based on the idea that pleasure reading positively affects acquiring a second language (Ro, 2019). The extensive reading program is a supplementary class program linked to an English course, in which students are provided time, support, and resources to engage in pleasure reading at their language proficiency level without the stress of exams or grades (Davis, 1995).

However, studies show that extensive reading alone cannot improve learners' language skills. As Green (2005) states, extensive reading "fails to provide a clear learning purpose for learners" (p. 309), and it may not be the most effective method for L2 acquisition as the linguistic elements in the text are not explained or practiced. In his study, Green (2005) shows that, in contrast to extensive reading, task-based schemes promote interaction and negotiation, which are missing from extensive reading. Therefore, learners can face gaps in their understanding of the target language through negotiation and sharing knowledge. According to Xu (2021), ESL students may find L2 reading boring and demotivating as it does not provide attainable goals or engaging tasks. In fact, task-based language teaching aims to improve learners' communicative competence by involving them in meaning-focused communication through the performance of tasks (Ellis & Shintani, 2014).

Task-based extensive reading has demonstrated positive outcomes in various areas of language learning (Hafiz & Tudor, 1989; Hill, 2008; Chen, 2018). It positively affected learners' vocabulary knowledge (Pigada & Schmitt, 2006; Ro, 2019). In Kara's (2019) study, by implementing this program, learners gained higher scores in reading comprehension. In Park's (2016) study, extensive reading was coordinated with writing practice and

interactions, leading to students' continuous engagement with texts and developing students' writing fluency. He pointed out that integrating extensive reading with writing in a meaningful way can enhance and support each other, reinforcing the connection between them. In Chen's study (2018), task-based learning integrated into an extensive EFL reading program motivated learners to read more books and gradually develop reading habits.

Two issues motivated the researcher to conduct this study. English foundation students usually find reading assignments uninteresting, stressful, and beyond their linguistic competence. It was found that to complete reading assignment tasks, students relied on Google Translation, which, in most cases, led to a high percentage of plagiarism. Another issue is that textbooks do not have sufficient reading materials for students to enhance their language skills. Therefore, extensive reading was incorporated along with a task-based approach to improve students' writing skills, utilizing Willis' (1996) A Framework for Task-Based Learning.

It was crucial for the researchers to select books that matched the students' language proficiency level, while also being engaging and easy to read. As the findings of the study by Gopal et al. (2022) showed, introducing stories appropriate to the students' level increased ESL students' motivation to read while reducing anxiety. "The Tales from the Arabian Nights" was selected as a graded book. This book was chosen because of its appropriate language level and cultural familiarity. These two features were assumed to facilitate the joyful reading experience. This study integrated a task-based approach into extensive reading to investigate its effectiveness in summary writing, and it aimed to answer the following questions:

1. How effective is task-based extensive reading in improving students' summary writing skills?
2. What are the students' attitudes toward task-based extensive reading programs?

## Methods

### Research Design

This study utilized a task-based extensive reading approach to investigate its impact on students' summary writing skills. The study also explored students' attitudes toward the task-based reading program. The design followed Willis' (1996) task-based learning framework, which includes two phases: the pre-task phase and the task cycle phase.

### Sample Description

The study involved 50 participants from the English Foundation level at the Arab Open University in Muscat, divided into two classes with 25 students in each. The students participated voluntarily, and the study was explained to them as an additional task not included in their course curriculum. Participation did not impact their final course grades. The participants were introduced to a graded book titled *The Tales from the Arabian Nights*, selected for its cultural familiarity and thematic relevance, which aimed to increase student interest in reading in English. The book consists of seven simplified stories, and the program was conducted over seven weeks, from February to March 2023.

### Research Instruments

Two primary instruments were used to collect data: First, a questionnaire was administered in week eight to assess the students' attitudes toward task-based extensive reading and its impact on their summary writing skills. This brief questionnaire, consisting of seven questions, was designed to understand the students' opinions on the program, its effectiveness in improving summary writing, and the challenges they encountered during the program. Second, interviews were conducted after the questionnaire to gain deeper insights into the students' experiences and perceptions of the reading program.

### Data Collection

Data was collected through the following procedures. In the pre-task phase, the teacher introduced the storybook and the task to the students by using titles and cover illustrations to spark interest. Students were assigned stories to read at home each week, with an emphasis on understanding the general meaning of the texts. Dictionaries, such as the Learner's Dictionary by Vocabulary.com, were provided to assist students in understanding unfamiliar words.

During the task cycle phase, the process began with the task phase. Here, students worked in pairs or small groups to answer comprehension questions and discuss various aspects of the story, including the characters, setting, plot, conflict, and key points. Teachers monitored these discussions but refrained from directly teaching or correcting errors to encourage independent learning.

The planning stage followed, consisting of two parts. In the first part, groups collaboratively wrote the first draft of their summaries and then exchanged drafts with other groups for peer feedback. In the second part, students revised their drafts based on peer feedback and with guidance from the teacher. Dictionaries were made available to support students with spelling checks and identifying alternative words.

Finally, in the report phase, one student from each group presented their final summary to the class each week. To ensure engagement, the teacher set a specific purpose for the activity, such as taking notes on each summary presented, thereby involving all students in the process.

### Data Analysis Procedures

After data collection, the responses from the questionnaire and the transcripts of the interviews were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative analysis was used to evaluate the students' responses to the questionnaire, identifying trends and patterns in their attitudes toward task-based extensive reading and its perceived effectiveness in improving their summary writing skills. For the qualitative analysis, the interview transcripts were carefully reviewed to gain deeper insights into the students' personal experiences and perceptions. This allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges students faced during the program, as well as their overall views on how task-based extensive reading influenced their writing abilities.

The teacher's feedback on the students' writings was also considered during the analysis. This feedback focused on both language and form, offering specific areas for improvement while reinforcing the learning objectives. By examining the feedback alongside the questionnaire and interview data, the study aimed to assess the overall effectiveness of the task-based reading program in enhancing summary writing skills and understanding students' attitudes toward the approach.

### Results and Discussion

This section addresses the study's primary research questions by examining the effectiveness of task-based extensive reading in enhancing students' summary writing skills and exploring their attitudes toward such programs, utilizing both questionnaire responses and interview data. Regarding the first research question, this study found that the task-based extensive reading program significantly aided students in enhancing their summary writing abilities (See Table 1).

**TABLE 1. Did the questions help you to write a better summary of the stories?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes, they guided me to write a summary.	38	76.0	79.2	79.2
	No, I did not understand some questions.	5	10.0	10.4	89.6
	Partially helped.	5	10.0	10.4	100.0
	Total	48	96.0	100.0	
Missing	System	2	4.0		
Total		50	100.0		

Table 1 illustrates that 79.2% of the students reported that the comprehension questions were effective in guiding them to write better summaries. This indicates that the questions were instrumental for the majority of students in identifying important details from the stories, thereby facilitating more accurate and coherent summaries. Additionally, interview data supported these findings, revealing that students benefited from group discussions and post-reading activities. By sharing and discussing key ideas, students were able to construct more coherent summaries, as they could identify the most relevant points from the stories.

However, a smaller proportion of students—10.4%—reported difficulties in understanding some of the questions, which may suggest issues such as language barriers or the complexity of the questions. Another 10.4% felt that the questions were only partially helpful, indicating that the questions might not have fully addressed all necessary aspects to support effective summary writing. Despite these challenges, the overall response suggests that the task-based extensive reading program was largely effective in improving summary writing skills.

In addition to these improvements, some challenges in summary writing were identified. While most students showed progress in their ability to summarize, difficulties remained in producing concise summaries that excluded unnecessary details. This struggle to focus on the essential elements of the story often resulted in excessively long summaries containing irrelevant information. Teachers observed this issue in their feedback, noting that some students needed further support in distinguishing between pertinent and non-pertinent details to create more succinct and accurate summaries. Concerning the second research question, the majority of students enjoyed reading the stories in the graded book, as shown by the data in Table 2.

**TABLE 2. Did you enjoy reading the stories in this book?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	43	86.0	89.6	89.6
	No	5	10.0	10.4	100.0
	Total	48	96.0	100.0	
Missing	System	2	4.0		
Total		50	100.0		

Specifically, 89.6% of the students indicated that they enjoyed reading the stories, which suggests that the material was well-suited to the students' interests and reading levels. The data suggests that the graded book "The Tales from the Arabian Nights" successfully engaged most participants, with only 10.4% showing discontent. This indicates that the reading text was well-suited to the participants' interests and reading levels, thereby contributing to their overall positive experience with the material.

**TABLE 3. Why did you like this book?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	It was interesting.	25	50.0	52.1	52.1
	It was easy to understand.	12	24.0	25.0	77.1
	The language was simple.	8	16.0	16.7	93.8
	It was short.	2	4.0	4.2	97.9
	your answer	1	2.0	2.1	100.0
	Total	48	96.0	100.0	
Missing	System	2	4.0		
Total		50	100.0		

Table 3 provides insight into why students liked the book, with the majority (52.1%) stating that it was interesting, and 25% noting that it was easy to understand. This indicates that the students found the material engaging, which likely contributed to their positive attitude toward the program. The primary reasons for enjoying the book were the interesting stories and ease of comprehension. These are key factors for selecting materials in an extensive reading program, as they significantly impact students' engagement and comprehension. Although a few students appreciated the book's length, this was less important than the other reasons. However, time constraints and completion rates presented challenges.

**TABLE 4. Did you read all seven stories?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	22	44.0	45.8	45.8
	No	26	52.0	54.2	100.0
	Total	48	96.0	100.0	
Missing	System	2	4.0		
Total		50	100.0		

As seen in Table 4, only 45.8% of students completed all seven stories, indicating that most students (54.2%) did not finish the entire book. This low completion rate may have been influenced by course workload, personal commitments, time constraints, or other competing responsibilities. The data reveals that slightly more than half of the participants did not read all seven stories, suggesting a low completion rate for the whole book. While a significant number of students found the book interesting and easy to understand from previous analyses, most students did not complete reading all seven stories. The reasons for this might vary, including time constraints, personal commitments, poor reading habits, or course workload.

**TABLE 5. Why didn't you finish all the stories?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	I did not have time.	25	50.0	80.6	80.6
	I was not interested in those stories.	2	4.0	6.5	87.1
	It would not affect my marks.	4	8.0	12.9	100.0
	Total	31	62.0	100.0	
Missing	System	19	38.0		
Total		50	100.0		

In Table 5, the majority of students (50%) reported that they didn't finish the stories because they didn't have time, indicating that time management was a significant challenge. This may have been influenced by course workload, personal commitments, or other competing responsibilities. The participants provided three reasons for not reading all seven stories.

The primary reason, accounting for 80.6% of participants, was time constraints. The second reason, accounting for 12.9% of the participants, was the lack of impact on their grades. They did not find reading stories that would not affect their marks practical or helpful. The data indicates that marks were motivational factors for the participants to fully engage in reading the book. The third reason was a lack of interest, with 6.5% of participants. Evidently, not all students can have the same interests in the same stories, so there should be a variety of stories to cater to the diverse interests of all students. The data suggests that while most students found the book interesting, the lack of time to complete all the stories might have contributed to their inability to fully engage with the entire reading material. This could affect their overall experience and learning outcomes.

Language proficiency and peer engagement also influenced students' attitudes toward the reading program. As reported in both the questionnaire and interviews, students with better language proficiency seemed more confident in participating in group activities, while those with weaker language skills faced challenges.

**TABLE 6. What problems did you face in this experience of reading and writing a summary?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Working with disinterested students	4	8.0	8.9	8.9
	Using a dictionary for writing a summary	7	14.0	15.6	24.4
	Lack of time for reading the stories at home	17	34.0	37.8	62.2
	Short time for group work	3	6.0	6.7	68.9
	Poor language proficiency	4	8.0	8.9	77.8
	Not interested in this type of books	5	10.0	11.1	88.9
	Your answer	5	10.0	11.1	100.0
	Total	45	90.0	100.0	
Missing	System	5	10.0		
Total		50	100.0		

Table 6 presents the challenges participants faced while reading and writing their summary tasks, ordered from highest to lowest percentage. The most common issue, reported by 37.8% of participants, was time constraints for reading stories at home, which limited their ability to engage fully with the material. 15.6% struggled with using a dictionary to write summaries, likely due to lower language proficiency, which hindered their ability to use new words accurately and construct clear summaries. Additionally, students with lower proficiency tended to be more passive in group work, relying on their peers for assistance. This mismatch in proficiency may have frustrated more advanced students, who perceived their peers as disengaged and uncooperative. As a result, 8.9% of participants reported difficulties working with disinterested peers, further disrupting group collaboration and making it harder to complete tasks effectively. Furthermore, 11.1% of participants lacked interest in this type of book, preferring other genres, while another 11.1% reported other difficulties, suggesting that there were a variety of challenges beyond those directly related to language or content. 8.9% found poor language skills to be a barrier to expressing their opinions in group discussions, and 6.7% felt that limited time for discussion and writing hindered their ability to process the language and comprehend the material effectively.

These challenges, particularly those related to language proficiency and peer engagement, highlight the importance of addressing diverse language skills within group activities. For example, providing students with access to additional language support, such as vocabulary-building exercises or tools like online dictionaries, could help them navigate language barriers more easily. Encouraging balanced participation in group work is also crucial, perhaps through assigning specific roles to students to ensure that everyone is involved. Creating an inclusive environment where all students feel comfortable contributing may also help mitigate frustrations stemming from passive participation. To enhance language proficiency, targeted exercises focusing on academic vocabulary and sentence construction could be incorporated, helping students become more confident in their writing. Additionally, providing more time for discussion and collaboration during group

tasks could reduce pressure and give students ample opportunity to process language and ideas. By addressing these areas, task-based extensive reading programs could become more effective, promoting a richer learning experience for all participants.

### Conclusion

The task-based extensive reading program had a positive impact on most students' summary writing skills. The collaborative and interactive nature of the program helped students improve their ability to write coherent summaries. However, challenges related to time management, varying language proficiency levels, and lack of formal grading led to reduced participation and engagement for some students. Future programs should consider integrating these activities into the official curriculum and providing more support for students with lower language proficiency.

Based on the achieved results, this study puts forward a number of recommendations for educators and course designers to improve the implementation of extensive reading in L2 classes. Including extensive task-based reading in the course curriculum, along with sufficient time allocated for reading, significantly contributes to writing improvement. To achieve this, it is essential to consider various factors, such as time constraints and personal commitments, and to support students in managing their time effectively. Incorporating motivational elements like grades into the reading programs can enhance student engagement and participation. Furthermore, grouping students according to their language proficiency allows for balanced participation by assigning achievable tasks. Additionally, providing training on the effective use of dictionaries can help students find synonyms, alternatives, and correct usage, further enhancing their writing skills. By integrating these strategies, the course can create a more cohesive and supportive learning environment that fosters significant improvements in students' writing abilities.

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