

EXTENSIVE READING IN IMPROVING ESSAY WRITING SKILLS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOLS LEARNERS IN KURESOI SUB- COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract: English is a language of communication in most countries in the world and learning it, just like any other language, requires the four skills of language acquisition, which is, listening, speaking, reading and writing and the most challenging is the writing skill. Despite the challenge, communicating in writing is important because it is one of the greatest achievements among learners in all levels of education and therefore, because of the importance pegged on it, competence in writing is necessary. In Kenyan secondary schools, especially in rural areas, mastering writing skills is a challenge and it is evident in the continuous dismal performance in English subject in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) results which are continuously below average. The challenge of poor performance in English subject lead the researcher to analyze whether extensive reading can affect writing positively in secondary schools of Kuresoi Sub-County, Nakuru County, Kenya. The study relied on linguist Stephen Krashen Comprehensive (input) hypothesis also known as the monitor model. A cross-sectional study research design was adopted. The target population was teachers of English and students in Kuresoi North Sub-County because English is a compulsory subject in secondary schools. Simple random sampling technique was used to recruit teachers of English and learners. Thus, a sample of 190 learners and 8 teachers were used as the respondents of the study. Qualitative and quantitative data was collected by use of questionnaires for students and interview schedules for teachers. Pre-testing was conducted to determine the validity and reliability of the instruments. Ethical considerations were put in place by collecting permit and ensuring that the participants' were not identified by name. Analysis of qualitative data was done thematically in line with the objectives and descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution and percentages were employed in analysis of quantitative data. Tables and figures were used to present responses for each item used. The research findings indicated that reading and writing are connected to each other and those who practice wide reading perform better in writing, however, in the list of the several teaching methods in writing classrooms, extensive reading was rarely used and majority of the learners hardly engaged in extensive reading for lack of reading material and the desire to read. Recommendations were made to enable curriculum developers, school administrators, teachers and students gain insights into extensive reading and its effectiveness in writing and seek to improve it over time.

Keywords: Extensive Reading, Essay Writing Skills, English Language.

1. INTRODUCTION

Most countries all over the world use English language for communication. Among the several countries using it for communication is Kenya, which uses it as its second language. Nonetheless, its adoption in the country as its official language has not made it popular among students, especially, in rural schools where learners speak the same local

language and therefore, affect English. Expertise in any language requires learners to learn listen, speak, read and finally, write. To listen and read are done passively because they are internalized by an individual and the outcome is not tangible, unlike the spoken and written words, in which there should be prove of the outcome. These skills exert different levels of challenges to learners because of their attitude towards each skill. The most challenging is learning to read extensively and to write meaningfully as pointed out by Tangpermpoon (2008) who said that, writing development needs learners who have a wide knowledge of not only the English words but also its grammar rules as well as the principles of organization. Developing such skills requires users of English language in everyday communication and further, perfecting it requires extensive reading. Notably, students rarely use English in their everyday communication and rarely do extensive reading, resulting to Writing problems.

If the pupils were made aware of the value of reading and communicating in English on a daily basis, the issues might be lessened. It is through the awareness that they can put an effort in its use. The fact that most subjects in schools use English to disseminate its content is enough reason for learners to learn the language thoroughly but unfortunately most learners neither like reading nor communicating in English and majority of them complete the education system without gaining the reading skill and the few who try to read as explained by Rere (2012) cannot comprehend the content in books they are supposed to read, thus, making acquisition of other language skills difficult.

Comprehensive reading is the complete opposite of intensive reading because, in contrast to it, the texts read are mostly fiction and therefore, each learner makes their own choice of what to read and the texts can be voluminous because the main focus is quantity of reading and to accomplish the quantity reading, therefore, requires the reading speed to be fast. Pleasure, information and general understanding are the main purposes here and because there are no assignments at the end of reading, the main assignment being reading itself, for this type of reading to be effective and help the students as explained by Palmer (1927, as cited in Smith, 2003) it should be merged with the other language activities like retelling the story read to other learners. The teacher's role is not active, their only role is to be examples to students by also tagging along with a book to read and the reading does not have to necessarily be done in a class and in a way because there is no confinement the reading will be enjoyable. If the two types of reading are integrated often, the learners will not view reading as a burdensome activity, leading to improvement in language.

Application of the above-mentioned approaches, especially extensive reading is important because studies for example one done by Farooq (2012) shows that learners of English have challenges in writing, a problem that emerges because learners lack adequate vocabulary to put forth their ideas, have poor spelling, first language interference and insufficient knowledge on the rules of English grammar. These problems crop up because our learners are poor readers and poor reading culture leads to decline in the performance of national examination as seen from the performance in 2019 KCSE examination. It was noted that, candidates' performance in English paper three which entails writing has always been ranked the lowest over the years as compared to English paper one and two as shown in the Table 1:

Table 1: Performance of English

Year	Candidature	Paper	Maximum score	Mean score
2018	659953	1	60	48.58%
		2	80	30.98%
		3	60	31.42%
		Overall	200	36.39%
2019		1	60	48.00%
		2	80	41.25%
		3	60	33.33%
		Overall	200	41.00%
2020		1	60	42.3%
		2	80	33.3%
		3	60	34.4%
		Overall	200	37.86%

Source: KNEC 2021

This trend calls for investigation into the current composition writing pedagogy in order to put in place necessary intervention measures. Learners were not creative; their essays did not answer questions asked making them irrelevant and were not interesting. The recommendation given to teachers was that, students should be instructed in all facets of essay writing and given ample practice aside from encouraging the learners to read both intensively and extensively in order to demonstrate understanding of literature set texts in writing which seems to be lacking.

In addition, Wafula (2009) explains that most Kenyan secondary schools teachers of English either ignore to teach reading and or teach it inadequately and this is because learners rarely participate in pleasure reading. The teachers work extremely hard to complete the curriculum in accordance with the policies established by the Ministry of Education, and as a result, they do not have time to read additional material. He goes on to say that the bulk of secondary school instructors lack confidence in how to teach language skills because they had little training and learn by doing. As a result, English language teachers are unsure on how to approach the teaching of reading. Testing or students taking turns reading comprehension passages in class are accepted as methods of teaching reading. At the secondary school level, children should be able to perform the following, according to Kenyan curriculum developers: read silently, read quickly, read for detail, read for enjoyment, read critically and widely, extend vocabulary, and appreciate various linguistic forms. These goals for reading have been set in order to help teachers guide students through a process of learning to read, but they appear to be unachievable because, as Okwako (2011) notes, Kenyan schoolchildren rarely have time for leisure reading because of a curriculum that prioritizes exams. In this case, there is no scheduled time for extra reading in the timetable, which causes students to accept not doing leisure reading as the norm. Since the students must complete carries over from school, there is scarcely any time for leisure reading at home either. Ngwiri (2014) adds that the lack of role models makes it harder for young people to build a reading culture. He contends that Kenyans read mostly for academic objectives.

Notably, KNEC has expressed worry over the issues stated above. Numerous contenders are mentioned as having weak writing, speaking, and spelling skills. Poor reading habits and a lack of access to additional reading materials that advance language proficiency are to blame for this. A good composition should also use appropriate word choice, proper sentence structure, logical paragraph development, originality of expression, and proper idea organization, according to KNEC (2012–2013). Many students are unfamiliar with these composition score indicators. These problems in secondary schools, transcends to higher levels of learning as noted by Barasa (2005) who says that universities have admitted first students, who have difficulties in writing, reading and holding discussions in English language. All these have been blamed on failure by learners to do extensive reading from an early age because learners exposed to extensive reading perform better in all the areas of language skills.

Based on the above problems, researchers are continually looking for ways of improving learners' writing skills as seen from Koross (2012). In his study, spoken word was employed as a technique to improve the writing skills of secondary school students in the rift region. He found out that the challenges were based on learners' attitude on teaching strategies used, few extra texts and inability of learners to speak in English thus leading to incompetence in writing. The findings led to the recommendation that teachers teach oral skills in novel ways. For instance, in secondary schools in Kenya, the focus is on rigorous reading, which is frequently done in language classrooms and is accomplished through the use of interactive classroom activities like debate and debates, as opposed to extensive reading. The reason the researcher focused on extensive reading is that it affects all language abilities and equips pupils for subsequent academic courses since they read widely.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Writing is a language area tested at secondary level of schooling. However, as stated by Sermsook, et al (2017), learners find mastering the writing skill as the most challenging and this is evident in the national examination reports which consistently register below average performance in English over the years (KNEC, 2019). Students who perform poorly in English have a harder time getting into their preferred higher education programs. Most university courses require at least a C (plain) grade in English subject and therefore, something should be done about it. Poor performance in English is attributed to inadequate mastery of the four language skills and for learners to be competent in second language writing, as stated by Kondrat (2009) they should learn that in the four skills of language acquisition are ordered such that, reading precedes writing and the former serve as the foundation of writing and to be able to write effectively needs information which is found in books. However, a hindrance to reading extensively is largely in Kenyan system of education (8-4-4)

which is examination oriented, rote learning has been given prominence because everyone put so much importance to the exam results. It is for this reason, therefore, that teachers in primary schools expose learners to very little extensive reading because answers are objective in nature. Okwako (2011) notes that this prevents children from having the chance to read for pleasure due to Kenya's strict and exam-focused curriculum, which has a detrimental effect on students and this deprives learners of the chance to build reading abilities from a young age as revealed by Schmitz (2011), that exam-oriented model leads to students losing their imagination and creativeness. This is especially true in secondary schools where teaching is guided by what will be examined (Mugisha 2010, in Ruterana, 2012). In doing this, not only will learners be deprived of a skill that will benefit them for the rest of their lives, but they will also lose interest and motivation in reading in general, to the point where they start to view the reading assignments given to them in school as a burden. The majority of students will also fail to complete the assigned texts, such as set books and this will adversely affect their essay writing performance which is examined in English paper three and the overall grade in English subject in general. It is with this premise in mind, therefore, that this research sets out to check whether reading widely affects writing among learners in Kuresoi North secondary schools.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Among the language skills that play an important role in learning, is reading and to be able to do it successfully, any learner should approach reading with an aim in mind. After the aim is achieved, one is able to speak the language well and write with varied vocabulary, free from any grammatical errors and other language aspects such as the structure of the sentence. This has been proved true by researchers, for instance one by Zainal and Husin (2011) who examined how students majoring in civil engineering relate to reading and writing. The outcomes showed that pupils' writing was positive. According to the study's overall findings, reading and writing are related and support one another in a variety of ways when children write.

Other researchers have also shown that those who read more write better as they are exposed to more language than poor readers. Raimes (1994) emphasized the value of extensive reading in any foreign language since it exposes learners to the language's entirety. Similar to this, Kroll (1997) asserts that reading fosters a writer's originality in language, for the more they read, they get more examples to emulate in their own writing. In this case, therefore, teachers should adopt reading as one of their strategies in aiding learners to write. Overall, a study by Erhan (2011) that examined the integration of reading and composition writing in primary school children found favorable results indicated that a lack of reading is among the factors that can lead to dissatisfaction with essay writing, especially in composition writing. Therefore, this shows reading plays a vital role in writing. Similar findings were made by Shen (2009), who also examined the relationship between reading and writing projects using first-year college students who were learning English as a second language (EFL). Her research showed that reading and writing improve one another's linguistic abilities as well as their critical thinking and creative abilities. Hany (2007) conducted comparable studies on enhancing the writing skills and attitudes of Egyptian English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners using the reading for writing strategy. As a result, students felt more confident in both their writing opinions and their writing abilities.

Equally important is a study by Okwako (2011) who researched on ways of enhancing vocabulary development in English, research was done on how secondary school pupils in Kenya acquired vocabulary knowledge using post-comprehension reading and a multi-tasking strategy to teaching vocabulary reading. In Vihiga, Kakamega County, 76 form three pupils made up the research population. The study included a quasi-experiment on the method of vocabulary instruction, and at the conclusion of the study, the respondents underwent a test to see how much vocabulary they had learned. The test questions were drawn from a variety of reading passages, along with an equal amount of dummy words, but they weren't graded. The investigation lasted three months. The pupils were involved in deciphering words chosen by the researcher. As they discussed whether the passage's ending was the greatest choice, the teacher and students also pointed out their own words from the sections and suggested other endings. The study's findings showed that students gained a lot of vocabulary when they engaged with reading comprehension passages more frequently. This gave them the chance to engage in meaningful communication both inside and outside of the classroom. The study also showed that pupils with high vocabulary test scores had access to a wide range of reading materials. This made it possible for them to expand their vocabulary. These findings provide some insight into the necessity of substantial reading for the development of writing-related vocabulary.

In a similar vein, Ahmadi (2012) studied writing using extra reading and group work affected writing abilities of foreign language learners of English. In contrast to other studies, it was discovered here through a casual interview with extensive reading plus group that the majority of participants thought reading a common book in groups would be more engaging and productive than reading different stories in each group, which is contrary to the nature of extensive reading. This information was discovered for the participants' self-rating of group work at the end of the program.

To conclude, so much research has been done based on extensive reading and majority has positive impact on the second language learners of English enhancement of the language skills, especially in writing. Most studies have dealt with learners of English in general but little has been done on extensive reading in rural schools setting and currently this is one of the objectives in this study in selected secondary schools in the Kuresoi, Nakuru County.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research relied on linguist Stephen Krashen's Comprehension hypothesis which states that, the acquisition of language and development of literacy depends on how one understands of information passed. When this happens, then we will have received comprehension input (Krashen, 2003). A series of five second language learning hypotheses (Byram, 2001) serve as the foundation for this theory. According to Krushen (2009), there are five hypotheses: input hypothesis, acquisition-learning hypothesis, monitor hypothesis, and affective filter hypothesis. This theory is considered instrumental in this study which focuses on extensive reading and how it affects learners' writing in day secondary schools in relation to the five hypotheses.

According to the input hypothesis, when a learner learns or inputs new information beyond what they currently know, they advance in their linguistic knowledge. In the current study, the learners are exposed to diverse resources comprising of those which run from simple to complex vocabularies. Their interaction with these resources helps them when it comes to written work where their command of language is well displayed on paper.

In so far as the acquisition-learning hypothesis is concerned, language is acquired without a conscious effort of the learner. This hypothesis in relation to the current study contends that when learners are exposed to extensive reading, they are able to acquire vocabularies, good language pattern and strong language command for communication unconsciously which translates to enhanced writing.

Monitor hypothesis does not follow any laid down rules as learning takes place unconsciously. In the case of this study, the embrace and adoption of extensive reading exposes learners to internalize the rules of language hence practicing use of language naturally.

Natural order hypothesis portends that language develops from simple to complex sentence structures. Leipzig (2001) says that reading needs one to recognize printed words, understand them, to enable reading to be automatic and accurate. The provision of different resources to learners is geared towards exposure to natural learning. Further, she notes reading involves fluency which will develop and maintain the learners' desire to read naturally.

The affective filter hypothesis shows that learners' ability to acquire language is affected by negative emotions such as fear or embarrassment and in line with this, Cheng (2007) said that it is such negative emotions that makes most learners inactive in class and thus, leading to problems in writing. Exposure to in-depth reading is a technique to overcome this obstacle because it fosters confidence, and this is appropriate for the current study, which examines in-depth reading and its impact on students' writing ability at a few day secondary schools in the Kuresoi Sub-County.

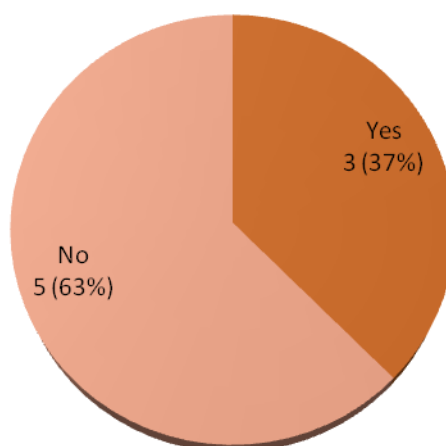
5. RESEARCH DESIGN

Cross-sectional analysis was performed in this study. It was picked because it examines information on variables that was gathered at one particular moment across a sample group. Additionally, it enabled the researcher to focus the cross-sectional investigation on one independent variable and one or more dependent variables. Therefore, it was considered an effective way to get original information from a variety of respondents about how extensive reading affects learners' writing. Additionally, the research design was appropriate for this study since it permitted the use of a mixed technique of data collection; in this case, information from the sampled respondents was gathered using questionnaires and interview guides. Comparatively speaking, cross-sectional investigations are also less expensive and time-consuming. One can also gather information that will serve as the foundation for future studies aimed at improving writing abilities.

The study sampled 8 English teachers for interview schedule and the study interviewed all the 8 English teachers, making the response rate to stand at 100.0%. Similar to this, the study's researcher selected 190 students as a sample and was able to get responses from every sampled respondent, yielding a 100.0% observation rate. A response rate of 50% is considered appropriate for analysis and reporting, a rate of 60% is considered good, and a rate of 70% is considered exceptional; hence, the response rate for this study was excellent. A response rate of 50% is regarded ordinary, 60-70% is considered adequate, and over 70% is considered an exceptional response rate, according to Kothari (2004). Thus, the response rate of 100.0% achieved from the teachers of English and 100.0% achieved from students in the study was, therefore, considered excellent. It is in line with this, therefore, that the information can be used for analysis and generation of valid conclusions, which can be generalized to all public secondary schools with the same characteristics as those studied in Kuresoi North of Nakuru County and in Kenya as a whole. This response rate actually occurred as a result of the questionnaires being personally distributed, filled out, and collected right away. The high response rate could also be related to prior notification, voluntary engagement, and assurances of anonymity.

6. FINDINGS ON EXTENSIVE READING AND WRITING PERFORMANCE

Figure 1 presents the results from the question asking respondents how they practice extensive reading with students.



Source: Research Data (2023)

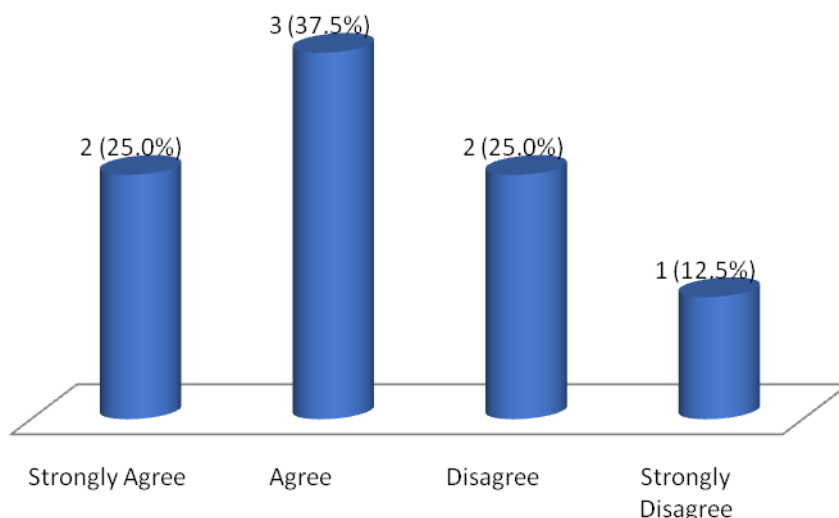
Figure 1: Practice extensive reading with learners

Respondents according to Figure 1 who practice extensive reading with learners were 3 representing 37%) while those who do not practice extensive reading with learners were more than half of the respondents, 5 representing 63%. This implies that most of the English teachers did not practice extensive reading with learners. One of the teachers interviewed said that:

“It is difficult to practice extensive reading because mostly, what we read with learners in class are comprehension passages in their course books and the set books which apply intensive kind of reading and there is hardly time for any other type of reading because our teaching is based on what will be examined at the end of the four year course.”

This assertion proves true what Wafula (2009) found out that most secondary school learners rarely participate in pleasure reading. The English teachers work extremely hard to complete the curriculum in accordance with the guidelines established by the Ministry of Education, thus they do not have time to read additional material. The teaching in secondary schools is directed by what will be examined, according to Mugisha (2010), who further supports this.

Despite the fact that more than half of the study's teachers encourage their students to read widely, their answers when asked how much this practice has improved students' essay writing scores are shown in Figure 2.



Source: Research Data (2023)

Figure 2: Extent to which extensive reading has helped learners score better

Figure 2 reveals that majority of the respondents 3 (37.5%) agreed and another 2 (25.0%) strongly agreed that extensive reading help learners score better in their essay writing. In the interview session one of the teachers said that:

“I have noted that the learners who take the advice we give to do extra reading have improved greatly in their choice of words in writing and this includes added vocabulary. Grammar and spelling of words as well as, paragraphing have also improved. Improvement in these areas of writing will definitely improve the learners’ score in writing.”

However, few respondents 2 (25.0%) disagreed and 1 (12.5%) strongly disagreed that extensive reading help learners score better in essay writing. In response to further questioning, those respondents who disagreed and strongly disagreed that extensive reading helped students do better on essays said they preferred intensive reading, which is used in most language schools but not extended reading. Despite this, the implication of the findings as shown by majority of the respondents, support that extensive reading help learners score better in their English language examination.

The results are shown in Table 2 for English teachers who were also asked to identify how frequently they utilize the following approaches to teach essay writing skills to their pupils.

Table 2: Method of teaching essay writing skills

Method	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Lecture	5 (62.5%)	2 (25.0%)	1 (12.5%)	0 (0.0%)
Question and answer	4 (50.0%)	3 (37.5%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (12.5%)
Group Discussion	3 (37.5%)	4 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (12.5%)
Role play	3 (37.5%)	3 (37.5%)	1 (12.5%)	1 (12.5%)
Peer teaching	3 (37.5%)	2 (25.0%)	2 (25.0%)	1 (12.5%)
Debate	2 (25.0%)	1 (12.5%)	2 (25.0%)	3 (37.5%)
Demonstration	3 (37.5%)	3 (37.5%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (25.0%)
Reading (Intensive)	6 (75.0%)	2 (25.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Reading (Extensive)	1 (12.5%)	1 (12.5%)	3 (37.5%)	3 (37.5%)

Source: Research Data (2023)

Table 2 reveals that some teaching methods were the teachers’ favorites. Among them were lecture method which was frequently used by more than half of the respondents 5 (62.5%), question and answer method followed closely at 4

(50.0%) and the most frequently used reading method was intensive reading 6 (75.0%). Putting in mind that English language has been integrated, one teacher on being interviewed said:

“I prefer lecture method because with it, there is the possibility of utilizing other methods like choosing to involve the learners by asking them questions or giving them work to complete or read.”

A good number of respondents 3 (37.5%) frequently used group discussion and sometimes used by 4 (50.0%) and never used by 1 (12.5%) respondents. Role play was frequently used by 3 (37.5%), sometimes used by 3 (37.5%), rarely and never used by 1 (12.5%) respectively. Peer teaching was frequently used by 3 (37.5%), sometimes and rarely used by 2 (25.0%) each and 1 (12.5%) respondent never used. Looking at the findings, a considerable number of respondents used those methods. One of the teachers gave the following comments based on the methods:

“The three methods group discussion, role plays and peer teaching are used integrately by learners with the guidance of the teacher and is mostly used in literature classes where learners take the roles of the characters in set books through reading aloud and thereafter, discuss main messages/ subject matter in the book. In this case, a peer teacher comes in to lead the group discussion or at times to lead the whole class.”

Debate was frequently used by 2 (25.0%), sometimes used by 1 (12.5%), rarely used by 2 (25.0%) and never used by 3 (37.5%) respondents. Demonstration was frequently and sometimes used by 3 (37.5%) respectively and never used by 2 (25.0%) respondents. Extensive reading was frequently and sometimes used by 1 (12.5%), rarely used by 3 (37.5%) and never used by 3 (37.5%) respondents. This means that the following techniques were regularly employed to teach students how to write essays: lectures, questions and answers, group discussions, role plays, peer teaching, demonstration, and extensive reading. The least used methods were debate and extensive reading and therefore, the findings indicate there is a gap in extensive reading which can only be rectified if the teachers change their perception towards it and guide the learners to practice it (Asraf&Ahmed, 2003)

7. CONCLUSIONS ON EXTENSIVE READING AND WRITING PERFORMANCE

The study's primary goal was to determine how extensive reading helps students perform better in their writing assignments. The study's conclusions showed that intensive reading helped learners increase their vocabulary and spell words more accurately, writing of meaningful sentences, well developed paragraphs, improvement of English grammar rules and write fully developed essays. Apart from that, the learners' reading speed was also found to have been enhanced and thus, giving them the motivation to read more. All these language skills have shown the positive effects extensive reading has on writing performance. One such study was conducted by Zainal and Husin (2011), who discovered that reading and writing are intertwined and that good readers are exposed to more language than poor readers, which significantly improves students' writing skills.

This study concluded that, based on the findings on the effect of extensive reading on writing performance, the conclusion made is that more reading exposes learners to several language skills and therefore, will write better compared to poor readers.

The study recommends that English Teachers should look for ways of managing time to enable them to teach all the four language skills, especially extensive reading in the writing classes

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