



The Role of Extensive Reading in Enhancing Reading Ability of Thai EFL Undergraduate Learners

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Abstract

Since reading is one of the essential skills that helps learners improve all parts of the English language, bringing extensive reading (ER) apart from using only textbooks into learners' attention is worthwhile spending time looking into it. It is widely known that many commercial textbooks used in English classes in all levels may not interest the learners in terms of level of difficulty, content, organization of the book etc. Consequently, the teaching approach in English reading should be employed some alternative reading activities into the class curriculum to increase learners' interest and motivation in learning English. In this article, ER is discussed as a vital teaching approach that enhances Thai EFL undergraduate learners' reading ability. Many researchers have investigated the effects of reading ability through the learning by using ER on Thai EFL learners and this article aims to provide the evidence for the role of ER in enhancing reading's ability of Thai EFL undergraduate learners and discussed how teachers and learners can utilize this method in their courses.

Keywords: Extensive reading (ER), Reading ability, Thai EFL undergraduate learners

1. Introduction

In the 21st century, using English as a main mean of communication has gradually adopted in many countries apart from native English-speaking countries with a variety of reasons. For instance, the influence of globalization influences the emergence of many multinational companies which can be located all around the world (Rao, 2019). As a result, to maintain the relationship of international alliances in terms of science, technology, business, education, tourism and so on, English, which is considered a global language, can play a vital role in this matter (Rao, 2019). However, students always find the learning of English reading difficult and one of the factors of the difficulty is the teaching methodology. According to Hayikaleng et al. (2016), the teachers of English in Thailand employ the traditional methods with focusing on the read aloud process and following by answering the comprehension questions. This type of strategy does not promote the students to master the new language but only keeps the students to be passive learners.

In Thailand, it was found that English reading classes have been the focus in all curricula from the beginners to advanced learners to pave the way for almost all kinds of educational resources or university textbooks written in English especially in a higher education. In this matter, learners who possess the strong reading skills can reach a greater process in learning English and other academic content (Anderson, 1999 as cited in Puripunyanich, 2021). Moreover, in the classroom, learners are usually assigned the reading assignments which seem to be an obligation for them and the reading instruction mainly focuses on a detail related to vocabulary and comprehension (Pratontep & Chinwonno, 2008). Regarding the alternative

approaches in teaching English reading in order to enhance learners' attention, ER is considered to be the effective approach for the expected outcomes in terms of gaining learners' interest since students are exposed to a large amount of materials which suit their interests and appropriate level so that students can reach the core content quickly and easily (Renandya & Jacobs, 2016 as cited in Puripunyanich, 2021).

In a straightforward description of ER, ER is defined as the process of accessing a lot of reading materials and trying to understand the overall reading text (Brown, 2002 as cited in Celik, 2019). According to Mision (2025), ER is grounded in Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which posits that the effective language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to language slightly beyond their current proficiency level. With the emergence of ER, many English instructors and facilitators have realized and accepted this approach as one of the vital approaches in facilitating language learners to read more often and understand the general idea of the reading text more easily.

For Thai EFL undergraduate learners, it is unavoidable to be exposure by numerous reading materials written in English regardless the field of study. As a result, the encouragement of employing ER approach is worth considering in this matter. In addition, Villas (2016) stated that the ER program was initiated to get rid of the obstacles occurred in the reading classes of Thai university and develop learners' language ability in general.

To focus on the benefits of ER in terms of motivation, learner autonomy and English proficiency development etc., this present article addresses the theoretical background of ER, characteristics and components, ER in the age of internet and AI, the implementation of ER approach in classroom, and previous related studies on the use of ER among EFL undergraduates in Thai and international contexts. The following section is discussed in detail.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definitions of extensive reading

Extensive reading (ER) has been widely discussed for decades in terms of language scaffolding tools. In addition, it is obvious that many researchers have common agreement that ER is highly supportive for implementing the class of foreign language learning. In everyday life, when students read extensively, they tend to read a large quantity of their enjoyable books or graded readers for a better understanding of the context. For the term "Extensive Reading", Kelly (1969) as cited in Uraiman (2011) stated that the originality of this term was brought as one of the approaches employed in language teaching by Harold Palmer. In Palmer's view of ER, students generally read considerably and rapidly. Day et al. (2016) as cited in Nutalak (2019) clarified that ER is the teaching technique that aims to provide the opportunities for the students to read books in a large amount to reach English fluency including other foreign languages. Furthermore, Grabe and Stoller (2011) also defined ER as an approach "in which learners read large quantities of material that are within their linguistic competence" (p. 286), whereas Bamford and Day (2004), "extensive reading is an approach to language teaching in which learners read a lot of easy material in the new language" (p. 1). In ER approach, the students learn to read by reading for all information together with having pleasure and enjoyment. The idea of ER is that readers should be encouraged to read longer and larger texts than short reading texts used in intensive reading approach with the main intention of pleasure and enjoyment.

2.2 Characteristics of extensive reading

According to Day and Bamford (2002, pp. 137-141), the original characteristics of ER principles were proposed in terms of ten principles in successful extensive reading. Each principle is as follows:

1. The learners are encouraged to read easy and appropriate reading materials for overall understanding.
2. Several reading materials and a wide range of genres must be affordable for the learners in terms of reading flexibility.
3. The learners are free to select the reading materials that they are interested in, and they

can quit reading whenever they find it out of their reading comfort zones.

4. The learners need to spend the ample time to read a lot.
5. The purposes of reading aim for pleasure, information and overall understanding in accordance with the learners' interests.
6. The benefits gained from reading are considered a reward for the learners. Tests or exercises should be excluded from this process.
7. When reading materials match the learners' reading ability, they tend to read faster without using a dictionary.
8. The learners choose their own reading materials and read them individually and silently to discover how foreign language fits into their lives.
9. Teachers leads the learners to the introduction of extensive reading and help them select the appropriate reading texts that interest them.
10. Teachers and learners can share their reading and discuss the book to gain more foreign language understanding from the book. Teacher acts as a role model for the learners.

2.3 Graded Readers

Graded readers have played a significant role in doing ER. In many ER programs, graded readers are employed as the main source since they have been specifically designed to enable the learners to practice reading skills and other related skills from reading. According to Hill (2008), graded readers are described as "books written for learners of English using limited lexis and syntax" (p.185). Generally, the beginners are not interested in reading many English materials due to the difficulty of the use of language, vocabulary, and grammar etc. Therefore, graded readers are provided with a variety of difficulty levels in terms of language, grammar, vocabulary and plot. (Waring, 2008 as cited in Azmuddin et al., 2014). At the early stage of reading foreign languages, beginners usually struggle with the understanding of the texts because of their limited vocabulary words. However, Waring (2008) as cited in Azmuddin et al. (2014) explained that using graded readers is one of the main supportive approaches to help the learners acquire unsimplified reading materials eventually. Waring and Takaki (2003) also argued that graded readers provide the contribution in terms of vocabulary development. Graded readers help learners with "gaining skills and fluency in reading, establishing previously learned vocabulary and grammar, learning new vocabulary and grammar" (Nation & Mingtzu, 1999, p. 356). As a result, graded readers are very useful for ER and the focus on using graded readers is for the learners' pleasure and interest. Graded readers contain various genres and the important process in using graded readers is to select the appropriate level of book so that the learners can read it smoothly and easily without using dictionary and they can be able to enhance their reading abilities at the same time (Han, 2010).

2.4 Extensive reading in the age of the internet and AI

In the digital era, it is common for students to read and study on electronic devices nowadays. With the development of the internet and technologies, the way of learning has changed promptly. According to Mikeladze (2014), one of the reasons that the internet has become a vital factor as a primary resource of education is because of a large amount of information available online for any people who have the electronic devices connected to the internet. Smadi and Al-Zawahreh (2013) stated that technology has evolved swiftly and blended smoothly in daily activities, particularly in academic contexts since it enables instructors to consider shifting the lessons and textbooks from static formats into more interactive and engaging formats. Consequently, EFL instructors will normally incorporate technology into language classrooms for enhancing learners' motivation and promote effective learner engagement in the educational process. For these reasons, internet resources are considered valued instructional materials to encourage and support the students to read for learning.

The use of ER through the internet has been seen as an attractive teaching style since it consists of interesting graphic information, photos, audio and videos etc. As one of the main intentions of ER approach is experiencing the real-world context, reading through the internet can allow the students to access a large amount of information together with updated information in the real-world context. Pino-silva (2006) stated that "students learn to explore, evaluate and make

their own decisions on what to read now and what to postpone for later” (p. 93). However, due to the awareness of students’ different learning styles, Mikeladeze (2014) suggested that paper-based and web-based ER can be integrated effectively as an alternative method for the students with different learning styles. According to Pino-silva (2006) ER pedagogy can be a tool to assist L2 students in terms of the enhancement of reading and other language proficiency skills. Referring to Mision (2025), one visible example of incorporating ER into an online platform is XReading (<https://xreading.com>). XReading platform enables instructors to assign reading tasks together with monitoring students’ progress. Moreover, students will have an opportunity to complete the quizzes in relation to the books they read as a measure of progress. Nowadays, XReading is recognized as one of the well-known tools associated with ER; however, it is crucial to acknowledge some platform’s contextual and inherent limitations. In response to different learning styles, the combination of paper-based and web-based ER approach is considered the ideal way to suit the needs of the students. By taking this path, it is believed to empower not only students but also the teachers in a significant manner.

In another perspective, it is undoubtedly acknowledged that AI plays a vital role in various aspects of society, especially in education. Regarding the focus on ER perspective, recently, Mision (2025) conducted a study, aiming at investigating a different strategy, employing artificial intelligence (AI) technique to create a comprehensive reading library based on students’ interests and language proficiency. This study indicated that AI-generated materials, designed using ChatGPT 4.0, can be utilized as a viable supplement to traditional ER resources. The findings also suggested that there was a significant improvement in students’ reading attitudes and high levels of engagement although AI-generated texts were unknown to students.

Another issue with the ER in the digital era is the gamification. Gamification is recognized as one of the innovative teaching approaches widely utilized in English classrooms in the present days. Nevertheless, employing gamification in terms of enhancing reading engagement and reading comprehension in language classrooms among tertiary level has received limited attention (Matyakhani et al., 2024). To implement and promote a more energetic ER classroom, Freiermuth and Ito (2022) carried out a study to examine a classroom that is implemented in a game-based environment to promote reading enjoyment as well as motivating students to engage in reading with greater concentration. The intervention in the study is the adapted version of the Japanese-originated Bibliobattle game. The adapted English Bibliobattle (EBB) consists of three phases of book-sharing activities in English, involving comprehension, summarization, presentation and discussion of books that participants selected for recommending to their peers. Finally, each group is required to choose a “Champion book”. By implementing Bibliobattles, it was found that the game made ER more enjoyable and it was proved to be an effective tool in ER class since it successfully enhances students to read and discuss books through activities.

To sum up, in the age of the internet and artificial intelligence (AI), ER has evolved overtime by the availability of several online reading materials and AI-driven tools such as digital libraries, e-books or AI tools like text-to-speech. These innovations not only make reading more accessible and engaging but also address traditional challenges such as limited resources, learner motivation, and individualized pacing.

2.5 Implementing extensive reading in classroom

Selecting the appropriate materials in reading class has always been the important process to prepare the students with the relevant students’ learning levels of reading ability. To set up ER in classroom, teachers are required to introduce this kind of teaching material and the methods that are going to be used in the classroom together with the learning assessment. Moreover, mutual understanding between the teachers and the students is necessary as well since both will stay on the right track about what they are teaching and learning in each class. Yuria (2018) stated that teachers are the people who should consider the materials that are relevant to the students’ proficiency to help them achieve in the target languages by expressing themselves in books, pages, chapters or amount of time. However, the amount of reading should be in connection with the students’ reading ability and schedules.

Anderson (2014) as cited in Yuria (2018) indicated that students are usually assigned the reading tasks to do out of the class; however, in-class period teachers should allow the students

to learn the importance of reading and what they can learn from it. With these reasons, outside reading is a good opportunity for the students to allow them longer periods of time with longer texts.

Furthermore, Yuria (2018) also suggested that the activities related to the reading tasks should be included as it can be used as evidence to ensure that the students are reading the appropriate level of reading materials. Therefore, Waring (2011) as cited in Yuria (2018) explained that the silent period is important for the students for reading in class and teachers should be around the class to support the students' needs in their reading tasks.

In terms of the teacher's role, teachers can act as a facilitator to inspire, encourage and educate the students during their reading. The support from the teachers can gradually improve the students' reading ability and they will be able to complete the reading task on their own in the future. In addition, allowing the students to share with peers is encouraged so that they can discuss the post-activities together and enjoy the reading at the same time.

2.6 Benefits of extensive reading

It is widely accepted that ER is one of the teaching techniques that is effective to develop learners' reading skills and create enjoyment while reading. In this regard, there are several aspects that are gained from ER. For vocabulary acquisition, Ng et al. (2019) suggests that learners gained a lot of vocabulary words through the repeated reading method including with the meaning of words in each context so that they can gain incidental acquisition of vocabulary from reading in terms of general and academic vocabulary. In addition, according to Horst (2005) as cited in Yphantides and Gallagher (2014), learners who read extensively can gain more vocabulary words when compared to the learners who used traditional methods such as memorization.

In the reasons, the benefits of ER are not limited to reading only but it also applies to other skills. Furthermore, the benefits of ER can also be found in grammar acquisition and writing development. Generally, it is believed that people sometimes learn the grammar structure through reading; therefore, these two elements seem to be related to each other. Celik (2019) suggested that using ER material is the way to show how language works and learners can have the opportunity to explore the relationships among words and concepts together with developing their grammar knowledge through ER.

For writing development, Lee, Hsieh & Wang (2009) as cited in Ng et al. (2019) stated that the reading class which employs ER program tends to have the better improvement in terms of students' writing ability and grammar since the sentences in ER materials are in simplified version and the students can understand the materials easily. Therefore, the learners can acquire sentence patterns through ER materials. In Yerukneh et al.'s (2023) study, the findings confirmed that reading and writing processes are correlated and combined, while ER is proved as beneficial method in improving students' writing skills as well as providing useful insights.

In addition, the role of ER in enhancing speaking skills was found in the study conducted by Shareef (2023). The study suggested that the students' attitudes towards learning English enhanced as a result of engaging ER. A wide range of vocabulary is gained from watching movies and reading e-books as well as sharing ideas in peer-learning activities. This highlighted the influence of ER in significantly increasing students' scores in the IELTS Speaking test together with restoring their self-confidence. Additionally, Samaraweera (2024) showed consistent findings that ER-based activity approach is recognized as effective method for enhancing speaking skills as it supports vocabulary and grammar growth.

In summary, ER provides numerous benefits that extend beyond reading fluency. By equipping learners in large amounts of meaningful input, ER can yield to multiple aspects regarding language development and learner growth.

2.7 Limitations and challenges of extensive reading

While several studies have supported the implementation of ER in the language classroom over years due to the positive outcomes, some studies reveal difficulties in applying ER. For instance, In Mikami's study (2017), some students demonstrated their negative attitude towards ER, indicating that the text was too difficult for them; in addition, their English grammatical skill

and vocabulary knowledge were poor. Huang (2015) also mentioned that students had positive attitude towards ER activity. However, ER was commonly recognized as time-consuming activity and did not contribute to improving exam performance. In a similar vein as in the Thai context, ER probably encounter some challenges since the Thai educational system tends to focus more on exam-oriented nature together with the restricted time; therefore, teachers are usually required to strictly adhere with the curriculum (Saengboon, 2019). Furthermore, it is common that Thai teachers normally struggle with various obstacles, leading to the lack of creativity and stress. Teachers are also required to deal with issues such as heavy workloads, long hours, restricted content, and large class sizes (Ratanasiripong et al., 2022 as cited in Thongsan & Waring, 2024). While ER is widely adopted in countries such as, Korea, Japan, and Taiwan, it has not yet become a prevalent practice in Thailand (Thongsan & Waring, 2024). As a result, the implementation of ER in the Thai context remains uncertain due to a plethora of limitations and challenges. These factors are required to be carefully taken into consideration when considering its adoption.

2.8 Empirical studies on extensive reading for enhancing reading ability among EFL undergraduates in Thai and international contexts

In this paper, for congruency reasons, studies in both the Thai and international contexts were presented in accordance with the discussion regarding the use of ER in enhancing reading's ability of Thai EFL undergraduate learners. Tamrackitkun (2010) investigated reading comprehension, reading fluency and students' attitudes after exposure to ER. Students were assigned to read extensively from the books chosen by their own preferences. In the study, multiple measurements such as translation tests and multiple choices questions were employed to explore the development of English reading comprehension. The study was conducted with Thai EFL students at Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi (RMUTT) in one semester by employing a double-control pre and post-test design. The findings showed that the use of ER in English reading class resulted in reading fluency improvement and positive attitude towards ER.

For Wisaijorn (2017), the study aimed to investigate the effects of ER in terms of proficiency and attitude towards English reading. The participants in this study consisted of 51 Thai university students in the final year who attended in a 15-week project which ER was involved. Regarding the measurement process, the participants were required to complete pre- and post-test reading ability, pre- and post-test questionnaire concerning with the attitude and kept recording the journals about their completed reading together with mid- and post-project evaluations. The findings revealed that students had a slight increase in their post-test after exposure to ER. The results from pre- and post-questionnaire showed that students had the development in positive attitude towards English reading. However, it was suggested that Thai students whose proficiency is not highly developed with this project can be positively improved by engaging in ER.

In addition, Sek et al. (2021) conducted the study to explore students' reading comprehension after the implementation of an ER program for 10 consecutive weeks. Thirty-three first-year students were selected to be the participants in this study, and a quasi-experimental research design was employed to find out the impact of the use of ER approach. Pre-test and post-test with the treatment were given to the students to investigate the improvement. The findings revealed that the ER intervention significantly enhanced the level of students' English reading comprehension.

In a similar vein, Pongsatornpipat (2021) examined the integrated approaches of ER and interactive group activities in relation to the improvement in Thai undergraduate students' reading ability, attitudes towards reading and learner autonomy. The participants included 30 Thai undergraduate students from various faculties in Thailand, attending in a 10-week course. The effects of ER intervention with interactive group activities were assessed using pre-test and post-test in connection with the enhancement of participants' vocabulary and reading comprehension ability, while qualitative data were gathered from interviews. The findings revealed that there was a significant increase in participants' post-test scores of reading test; moreover, they also demonstrated positive attitudes towards reading and were motivated to continue ER beyond the

study.

Moving to the studies conducted in international contexts, Abame et al. (2017) investigated the effects of ER on students' reading comprehension. The participants were composed of 38 second-year English major students. Pre-test and post-test together with questionnaire were employed as primary tools to evaluate the effectiveness of the ER strategy on reading comprehension. The findings supported that ER significantly increased students' reading skill in language classroom. However, in this study, unexpected findings in terms of reading strategy showed that students relied on using intensive reading than ER.

In Nhapulo et al.'s (2017) study, the primary objective of the study was to examine the effect of ER program in connection with reading speed and comprehension of English academic texts among students in a low-income context among 30 students majoring in Journalism. The study emphasized measuring students' reading speed in terms of word read per minutes as well as reading comprehension. In this regard, quantitative data were collected from pre-test and post-test which included academic reading test and reading speed test, whereas qualitative data gained from teacher's observations. Study results showed that reading speed and reading comprehension were significantly related to each other since students who achieved higher reading speed also scored higher marks in reading comprehension tests. Due to the positive result influenced from ER intervention, a balanced approach which combined intensive reading is still necessary to enhance academic reading skill effectively.

In recent study, Taye and Teshome (2025) undertook the study to investigate the effectiveness of ER program in improving reading comprehension and its influence on students' reading strategies and motivation. There were 36 fourth-year EFL students who attended a one-month extensive reading program. The researchers gathered the data using pre-test and post-test along with the questionnaire to assess reading comprehension progress and gain insightful information on students' experiences. The findings suggested that incorporating ER program in the classroom was considered the effective method as it significantly enhanced students' reading comprehension skills. Moreover, students reported increased motivation to read independently.

3. Conclusion

As discussed earlier, ER has played an essential role in developing both English reading proficiency and positive attitude towards English reading. For Thai EFL undergraduate students, ER can be their alternative in terms of selecting their own preference together with relating to their English proficiency level. The benefits of implementing ER in classes seemed to encourage curriculum developer and English reading instructor to promote the approach for gaining students' interest and developing practical approach in teaching reading as well as motivating the students in terms of learning English. Moreover, ER has been recognized as the factor to develop reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, writing ability and learner autonomy etc. Thus, English instructors who are interested in implementing extensive reading in the classes will be able to apply ER program for the most benefit of the students in learning English reading in the future.

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