The Impact of Extensive Reading on Thai Primary School Children's Vocabulary Knowledge

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Abstracts

The present study aimed to investigates the impact of extensive reading (ER) in Thai primary school EFL students' vocabulary knowledge and students' attitudes towards extensive reading(ER). The participants were twenty primary school learners, aged between 10-12 years old, at an opportunity extended school in the Northeastern part of Thailand. They were selected using voluntary participation. The students' native language was Thai, and they had approximately three hours of English language a week. Moreover, none of the students had previously studied English with native English teachers. The research instruments consisted of the Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS) test, a reading attitude questionnaire and reading report. All participants were requested to read ten graded readers during a ten-week reading program. The quantitative data were analyzed using means, standard deviation and percentage, while the qualitative data were coded into themes based on ER principles.

The results showed that participants' receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge improved after the 10-week implementation of ER and Primary school participants' attitudes toward ER (graded readers) were also positively increased. Overall, the current findings reveal the benefits of ER for vocabulary growth and attitudes toward reading. Other implications in light of pedagogical and methodological practice are also discussed.

Keywords: The Impact of Extensive Reading; Thai Primary School Children; Vocabulary Knowledge

Introduction

Reading ability is a critical skill, particularly in academic settings where second language (L2) learners are required to read to learn and complete related tasks (Grabe, 2009 : 23-26) According to Day & Bamford, (1998 : 187-191), reading is the ability to understand the meaning of written texts that enables the learner to acquire knowledge, gather information, and learn grammar structures and words from various types of text. These contribute to language proficiency, academic success, and personal development. Given the significance of reading in academic contexts, it is important to understand how L2 reading competence can be developed. It has been previously shown that reading ability is only likely to develop gradually when L2 learners are continually exposed to abundant, meaningful input or extensive reading (ER). Indeed, ER has been suggested as one of the most effective methods for improving reading abilities because it exposes L2 learners to ample amounts of meaningful input, motivates L2 learners to read, and leads to the development of skilled reading abilities (Day & Bamford, 1998 : 187-191; Grabe, 2009 : 23-26; Krashen, 2004 : 56)

In Thailand, students learn English as a foreign language (EFL) as a compulsory subject from primary school to university, thus reading is one of four English skills that they have to master based on the school curriculum. English language learners have limited exposure to reading. Often, teachers use direct translation as primary reading instruction. Moreover, students are unlikely to search for the meaning of new words before class, indicating the students' passive learning and the failure of English reading instruction. Indeed, many Thai students are untrained readers, and language instruction strategies in class are not applied as often as they should be (Fowle, 2000 : 83-84). Thus, there is a need for further investigation into the benefits of extensive reading, particularly in primary school children in Thailand in which English is learned as a foreign language.

       Extensive reading (ER) is an approach for the teaching and learning of L2 reading in which participants read large numbers of books and other materials that are well within their linguistic ability (Day & Bamford, 1998:187-191). ER helps develop good reading habits, builds knowledge of vocabulary and structure, and encourages reading. Furthermore, it consolidates participants' acquisition of the second language and, at best, increases their proficiency if set up and carried out appropriately (Day & Bamford, 1998 : 187-191). A plethora of studies have shown that ER enables learners to gain several linguistic benefits, including enhancing reading fluency (Huffman, 2014 : 17-33; McLean & Rouault, 2017 : 92-106, Nakanishi, 2015 : 6-37) and vocabulary development (Suk, 2016 : 73-89; Webb & Chang, 2015 : 667-686) Given these benefits, students should be exposed to ER as early as possible. The current study will examine the use and potential benefits of ER in promoting English language learning in primary school children in the English as a foreign language (EFL) context. Specifically, this study will be conducted in a Thai EFL setting where students lack the opportunity to use the English language.

Research objectives

The current study focused on enhancing Thai primary school learners' vocabulary knowledge, the progress of vocabulary knowledge through extensive reading via graded readers. It also aims to determine the students' attitudes toward extensive reading and graded readers. Specifically, the following three research questions were formulated to guide the study:

       1. Do Thai primary school students gain vocabulary knowledge after reading graded readers?

       2. What are Thai primary school learners' attitudes toward graded readers?

Research Methodology

1. Participants and setting

       This study included 20 male and female Thai primary Opportunity Extended School children in northeastern Thailand. All participants were aged between 10-12 years old. The mother language of the participants was Thai, and no participant had stayed in an English-speaking country. Participants had learned the English language during grade 1, were familiar with the English alphabet, and had a small English vocabulary. That is, their English proficiency was considered to be at a beginner's level.

2. Research instruments

Three research instruments were used to assess the extent to which the ER approach influences students' vocabulary knowledge and attitudes towards reading. These instruments included a reading attitude questionnaire and a vocabulary knowledge scale test.

2.1 Reading attitude questionnaire

Before and after reading a graded reader, each participant was asked to complete a reading attitude questionnaire adapted from Yamashita (2013: 248-263). The questionnaire items were also validated based on the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC), and five experts were asked to assess the items. Each item was rated on a 3-point scale: +1=congruent, 0=not sure and -1=Incongruent. The questionnaire itself included 20 items that examined participants' attitudes. The participants had to complete the 5-point Likert scales, ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. The questionnaire was given to all participants both before and after the ER implementation. The reading attitude questionnaire was translated into Thai researcher and cross-checked by experts in the field of EFL translation.

2.2 Vocabulary knowledge scale test

The Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VSK) test was adopted to measure primary school children's vocabulary knowledge before and after the ER period. The VSK test was presented in self-reported word knowledge to measure the participants' incremental knowledge of the 60 target words. The target words were selected based on the following criteria:

1. The target words are selected from all graded readers used in the study.

2. All the target words must appear in all graded readers selected for the current study.

3. The list of the target words was piloted with a different group of participants with a similar background of English proficiency.

4. The target words that were rated by participants in the pilot study as "known" were excluded from the target words for the main study.

5. The final list of target words was used in the vocabulary knowledge scale test to measure participants' vocabulary knowledge

The VKS test was also developed based on Schmitt and Meara's study (1997 : 17-36) to measure the growth of knowledge of given words during a relatively brief course of instruction. That is, the VKS captures significant stages of knowledge in word learning during a relatively short term of instruction. Specifically, the VKS test offers an alternative measure to assess different aspects of word knowledge and the development of vocabulary learning among English learners and is intended to measure the progression in the development of vocabulary knowledge. In the VKS, participants use self-evaluation to rank their word knowledge. Participants are able to rate the word as unknown (A) if they don't remember having seen this word before. They can rate the word as B if they have seen this word before but don't know what it means, or C if they understand the word when they see it in a sentence. Note that the L2-L1 translation is required if students select option C. Finally, students can rate the word as D, which means that they know the word and are able to use it in their own writing. To illustrate this skill, the participants were asked to write a sentence on their own. The VKS was also used after the completion of the program to determine if, and to what extent, the participants' vocabulary enhanced following ER.

2.3 Reading report

The participants were also asked to write in Thai on a reading report after finishing a reading session. A reading report allows readers to document how they feel about the characters and the reader's overall enjoyment of the literature. In the current study, the reading report used a reflection paper of how the readers feel about what they read and how they coped with the text when a full understanding of the text is enhanced.

3. Data collection procedure

The students were first given the VKS prior to the ER implementation. This test was given once again at the end of the ER program. Before the test, the instructions and examples of the VSK were provided to the students in their native Thai language. The pre-test and post-test results were then compared to examine the student's improvement in vocabulary knowledge. The reading attitude questionnaire was also given to the students both before and after ER implementation to explore their attitudes towards the ER.

4. Data analysis

To answer the first research question, students of the research took the VKS test before and after the vocabulary knowledge through ER for ten week and analyzed quantitatively. Secondly, to score the questionnaire, five Likert scales used to measure students' attitudes towards ER, were valued as follows: ranging from 1point=strongly disagree, 2 points= disagree, 3 points=not sure, 4 points= agree and, 5 points=strongly agree.

Research Conceptual Framework

Comprehension of a text or message is necessary for language acquisition and the development of language literacy. According to the comprehension hypothesis states that "we acquire language and develop literacy when we understand messages, that is when we understand what we hear and what we read when we receive comprehensible input." The claim made by the comprehension hypothesis is that people acquire the components of language, the "skills" such as vocabulary and grammar when they obtain comprehensible input (Krashen, Lee, & Lao, 2018 : 20-24). To facilitate language acquisition, the comprehension hypothesis states that "input must be at least interesting so that acquirers will pay it attention" (Krashen et al., 2018 : 20-24). Furthermore, for optimal acquisition, the input should be compelling; that is, the input should be so interesting that the acquirer enters a state of "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990:3). When readers enter a state of flow during reading, they are wholly engrossed in the text (Nell, 1988 : 6-50). The evidence for the Comprehensible Input Hypothesis is the numerous unexpected improvements in a language that occurs without conscious effort, but merely by being very interested in reading or watching films and television programs (Krashen et al., 2018 : 45). The theoretical significance of ER is derived from implicit learning. According to Ellis (2008 : 1-13), implicit learning refers to the acquisition of knowledge without conscious awareness. Implicit learning is essential in developing reading processes that contribute to automatic lexical and syntactic processing and fluency in reading (Grabe, 2009 : 23-26). For implicit learning to impact reading development, long-term and large input volumes are necessary (Grabe, 2009 : 23-26), which means that learners need to read extensively and widely.

i+1 **hypothesis**

This hypothesis asserts that learners should be exposed to language input that is slightly more advanced than their current level. calls this level of input "*i*+1", where "*i*" is the

learner's interlanguage, and "+1" is the next stage of language acquisition. If "i" refers to previously acquired linguistic competence and extra-linguistic knowledge, the hypothesis claims that we move from i to $i+1$ by understanding input that contains $i+1$. Extra-linguistic knowledge includes knowledge of the world and the situation, that is, the context. The +1 represents the next increase of new knowledge or language structure within the learner's capacity to acquire.

Research Results

1. Do Thai primary school students gain vocabulary knowledge after reading graded readers?

In response to the influence of ER on primary school children's vocabulary knowledge, the self-report of the VSK test was analyzed. Table 1 shows the vocabulary knowledge scale (VKS) test results, indicating the number of students who rated the word as A, B, C or D. Words rated as A are those words that students do not remember having seen before, while words rated as B indicate that students have partial knowledge of that word. That is, they have seen the word before, but they are not sure of the meaning. Words rated as C indicate that students are familiar with the word and can also identify its meaning. Finally, words rated as D mean that students have mastery of the word and can use it correctly in a sentence.

Table 1 Participants' self-report on the vocabulary knowledge scale test

Self-rated Words	A		B		C		D	
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Post test
Said	11	0	6	6	3	14	0	0
Be	6	0	12	12	2	8	0	0
Goes	10	0	9	10	1	10	0	0
Helped	11	0	9	10	0	10	0	0
Looking	10	0	7	8	3	12	0	0
Came	6	0	13	14	1	6	0	0
Took	10	0	8	9	2	11	0	0
Have	7	0	7	7	6	13	0	0
Play	8	0	4	4	8	16	0	0
See	4	0	14	14	2	6	0	0
Like	6	0	6	6	8	14	0	0
Wanted	10	0	9	9	1	11	0	0
Call	8	0	12	12	0	8	0	0
Shouted	9	0	11	12	0	8	0	0
Get	11	0	7	7	2	13	0	0
Laugh	12	0	8	8	0	12	0	0
Jumping	10	0	10	9	0	11	0	0
Make	10	0	8	7	2	13	0	0

Blew	10	0	10	9	0	11	0	0
Won	12	0	8	7	0	13	0	0
Forgot	9	0	10	9	1	11	0	0
Drink	11	0	9	7	0	13	0	0
Asking	10	0	9	7	1	13	0	0
Barked	7	0	11	9	2	11	0	0
Washing	11	0	9	7	0	13	0	0
Sit	7	0	9	8	4	12	0	0
Walked	9	0	11	10	0	10	0	0
Thinking	11	0	9	10	0	10	0	0
Children	9	0	9	8	2	12	0	0
Home	8	0	8	9	4	11	0	0
Man	9	0	4	5	7	15	0	0
Cars	11	0	9	11	0	9	0	0
Mum	9	0	9	11	2	9	0	0
Park	10	0	5	7	5	13	0	0
Book	6	0	8	9	6	11	0	0
Time	9	0	10	12	1	8	0	0
Mess	7	0	13	15	0	5	0	0
People	8	0	9	9	3	11	0	0
Wall	7	0	13	14	0	6	0	0
School	9	0	10	9	1	11	0	0
Song	6	0	13	12	1	8	0	0
Pond	11	0	9	9	0	11	0	0
Water	10	0	10	9	0	11	0	0
Boat	10	0	10	9	0	11	0	0
Idea	12	0	7	6	1	14	0	0
Party	9	0	10	9	1	11	0	0
Wind	10	0	10	10	0	10	0	0
Week	9	0	11	11	0	9	0	0
Sheep	11	0	9	10	0	10	0	0
Lions	9	0	11	11	0	9	0	0
Dragons	9	0	11	11	0	9	0	0
Coat	8	0	10	10	2	10	0	0
Trees	11	0	9	11	0	9	0	0
Shop	7	0	13	14	0	6	0	0
Dad	7	0	7	7	6	13	0	0
Green	9	0	6	7	5	13	0	0
Upset	7	0	12	13	1	7	0	0

Long	9	0	11	12	0	8	0	0
Old	8	0	3	4	9	16	0	0
Good	10	0	5	6	5	14	0	0
Total (1200)	**540**	**0**	**549**	**557**	**111**	**643**	**0**	**0**
Total %	**45.00**	**0**	**45.75**	**46.42**	**9.25**	**53.58**	**0**	**0**

These results show that, initially, students were not familiar with many words in the list, and only a few students were able to identify the meaning of the words (see Table 1). After the extensive reading (ER) was implemented, students appeared to gain more vocabulary knowledge. Indeed, many words that were previously unknown to the students became known, and the students knew the meaning of many words or were at least in the "I have seen this word before" category. The results showed that ER and reading activities helped students to enhance their vocabulary knowledge.

Table 2 shows some examples of how ER enhanced vocabulary productivity. Several students could not write the meaning of any word before implementing the ER; however, students could write the meaning of the words after the ER intervention.

Table 2 Examples of participants' written meaning of target *words*

No.	Target words	Test	Examples of participants' written the meaning of target words
1	said	Pre-test Posttest	– กล่าว, พูด
2	goes	Pre-test Posttest	– ไป
3	looking	Pre-test Posttest	– มองดู
4	play	Pre-test Posttest	เกมส์ เล่น
5	like	Pre-test Posttest	– ชอบ

6	jumping	Pre-test Posttest	– กระโดด
7	children	Pre-test Posttest	– เด็กๆ
8	school	Pre-test Posttest	– โรงเรียน
9	old	Pre-test Posttest	- อายุ,เก่า
10	good	Pre-test Posttest	ลาก่อน ดี

Overall, these results demonstrate that ER enhanced vocabulary knowledge. This is consistent with other empirical evidence that extensive reading can improve students' vocabulary knowledge (McQuillan, 2019: 129-138; Suk, 201673-89; Webb & Chang, 2015: 667-686).

2. What are Thai primary school learners' attitudes toward graded readers? Thai primary school learners' attitudes toward graded readers were assessed by analyzing the data from the pre-and post-test reading attitude questionnaires administered at the beginning and the end of the study. Students were asked to rate a 20-item questionnaire to measure their five reading attitudinal variables from 'strongly disagree' (1 point), 'disagree' (2 points), 'not sure' (3 points), 'agree' (4 points), and 'strongly agree' (5 points).

Table 3 shows that the overall means of the self-ratings from the pre-attitude questionnaire and post-attitude questionnaire were 3.31 and 3.6, respectively. A t-test revealed that this difference was significant at the 0.05 level (t=6.27). This indicates that the students' attitude toward ER was more positive after participating in the ER intervention.

Table 3 Descriptive statistics from the reading attitude questionnaire

The reading attitude questionnaire	Students (N)	Pre-reading attitude questionnaire		Post-reading attitude questionnaire		t-value	p-value
		Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D		
	20	3.31	0.44	3.61	0.58	6.27	0.00

*Significant at the 0.05 level (p<0.05)

Table 4 shows the pre-and post-test scores for the various statements on the reading questionnaire. Notably, following the ER intervention, students were more likely to agree that ER could help them learn new words (pre-test score = 3.31; post-test score = 3.61). The students also agreed that they understood the meaning of the vocabulary that they frequently encountered while reading. Overall, the results indicate that students felt that their vocabulary knowledge improved through ER.

Table 4 Pre-test and post-test scores on the reading attitude questionnaire

No.	Statements	Pre-questionnaire		Post-questionnaire	
		Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
1	I gain more knowledge from extensive reading.	3.15	0.74	3.80	1.24
2	I can acquire a new English vocabulary when I read English books.	3.35	0.87	3.50	1.10
3	Extensive reading can help improve my English Grammar.	3.30	0.97	3.80	1.00
4	Extensive reading can help improve my reading skills	3.40	0.88	3.95	1.05
5	Extensive reading can help improve my writing skills.	3.50	0.68	4.05	1.09
6	Extensive reading can help improve my creative thinking skills.	3.60	0.68	4.00	0.91
7	Extensive reading helps me understand the content better.	3.65	0.67	3.80	0.95
8	I develop new thinking skills when I read English books.	3.55	0.68	3.70	0.86
9	I do not mind even if I cannot understand the book content entirely.	3.47	0.75	3.80	0.95
10	Reading in English is helpful for my study.	3.35	0.74	3.95	1.19
11	I am always happy when I read English books.	3.40	0.88	3.85	0.93
12	I want to have ER activities held at school.	3.50	0.76	3.70	0.92
13	Extensive reading can help improve my creative thinking skills	3.50	0.76	3.95	1.14

14	I feel good when I read in English.	3.50	0.76	3.65	0.98
15	Extensive reading is a suitable leisure time for me.	3.35	0.87	3.60	1.04
16	Reading in English is dull.	2.65	0.87	2.35	0.98
17	I feel anxious if I do not understand the vocabularies.	2.50	0.60	2.25	1.20
18	Extensive reading cannot help improve my English skills.	2.60	0.88	2.25	1.06
19	I have a plan to continue reading books in the future	3.55	0.68	3.95	1.05
20	Extensive reading is important in daily life.	3.40	1.09	4.05	1.09
Total		**3.31**	**0.44**	**3.61**	**0.58**

As shown in Table 5, most students gave constructive comments about the ER program based on the qualitative data. Overall, students felt that the activity strengthened their reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, and reading skills. Because of this, students reported that ER was a beneficial activity. Moreover, most participants enjoyed the fact that they could choose their readings, and the topics were varied and interesting. They also noted that they were satisfied with what they read from the books.

Table 5 Participants' reading attitudes toward ER.

Participants	Participants' reading attitude
S1	I acquired a new vocabulary after I read an English book.
S2	I felt good and enjoy it when I read the books.
S3	I knew a new vocabulary and developed new thinking skills.
S4	I improved my thinking skills and fun.
S5	I gained more knowledge and enjoyment.
S6	Books were interesting, and I also learned new words.
S7	It helped improve my reading comprehension and vocabulary ability.
S8	I enjoyed reading English books.
S9	I found it enjoyable because I read about books that interested me
S10	I liked it because it helped me practice. It was not difficult.
S11	I enjoyed the varied topics.
S12	It helped my vocabulary because it had me using a dictionary.
S13	I felt it helped me with comprehension and vocabulary.
S14	It helped me practice meaning from context.
S15	I enjoyed it because the topics were very interesting.

S16	I enjoyed it because I read about stuff that interested me.
S17	I gained more new vocabulary.
S18	It helped me learn new vocabulary, and I enjoyed
S19	I think it helped me improve in vocabulary and reading comprehension.
S20	It helped me learn new words.

In summary, the findings indicated that ten weeks of ER in English affected the students' attitude toward reading and, more specifically, toward ER. Participants were satisfied with the ER approach and had more positive attitudes toward reading because ER had helped them develop their English language skills.

Discussion
1. Influences of extensive reading on receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge

The quantitative data analysis revealed that, following extensive reading (ER), Thai primary school children developed their knowledge of target words. The qualitative data also indicated that although they could not produce a meaningful sentence using the target word, primary school participants could provide more meaning and form of the word. ER offers learners more opportunities to encounter words repeatedly in context, thus allowing them to infer the meanings of words. Indeed, the number of word encounters through reading facilitates incidental vocabulary learning. These findings support previous results on the constructive effect of ER, which found that ER improved learners' vocabulary knowledge. Therefore, it seems that ER enhances primary school participants' vocabulary learning simply because frequent encounters of target words in recurring contexts facilitate learning and promote vocabulary acquisition. Concerning the progress of vocabulary knowledge, when students read an English book that provides repeated instances of words closely related to a topic, they are exposed to word recognition (consciously or unconsciously) and are able to infer the meaning of unknown words.

The current study also indicated that, as primary school participants read more graded readers, they recurrently encounter a number of words, lexical bundles or patterns. As such, this could help primary school readers incrementally build up their vocabulary size incrementally. For example, only one participant could identify the meaning of the word "goes" before the experiment. However, ten participants could recognize the form and meaning of the word. Take the word "laugh" as another example. All participants reported that they did not know its meaning even though eight participants reported seeing this word before. By contrast, after ER, twelve participants could identify its meaning as well as its spelling. This improvement could be accounted for by the incidental exposure and repetition of the word in the graded readers.

Regarding productive knowledge, the current findings showed that primary school students were unable to write the connotations of any words. Nevertheless, participants were able to provide a meaning of some familiar words following ER. One example is the word 'jumping'. Before ER, no primary school participants could remember its meaning or spelling.

However, 11 participants could provide its meaning in their mother tongue (see Table 3 for other examples). This finding indicates the importance of word encounters in reading materials. Like receptive vocabulary knowledge, this could be explained by the concept of sight vocabulary; that is, the words that participants can recognize automatically. Participants may have already encountered these words several times and become familiar with them, which allowed them to gradually build up their vocabulary knowledge. This could be described as "overlearning words to the point that they are automatically recognized in their printed form" (Day & Bamford, 1998:187-191). Taken together, these findings are consistent with previous studies that vocabulary knowledge can be acquired through ER. Indeed, Alahirsh (2014:6) found that ER resulted in significant incidental vocabulary gain, and Al-Homoud and Schmitt (2009) also found significant vocabulary growth in groups subjected to intensive reading and ER, as indicated by participants' scores on the Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT).

The gain in receptive and productive knowledge of vocabulary among Thai primary school participants could be explained by the notion of Stephen input hypothesis, which includes the acquisition-learning hypothesis, the natural order hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis and the affective filter hypothesis. According to Krashen vocabulary acquisition can develop via an unconscious process where a word is acquired via reading. It is a natural process where the acquisition of the various lexical items follows natural sequences. That is, participants can acquire a new word simply by being exposed to it.

According to the input hypothesis, primary school participants who read can improve and advance their vocabulary knowledge according to a natural order when they receive comprehensible input, which is input (graded readers) that is one step beyond their current stage of language competence. This level is often referred to as '*i*+1', where the '*i*' is the student's current level of linguistic competence. The essence of this hypothesis is that the input or reading material needs to be comprehensible in order to improve vocabulary knowledge Some words may be challenging and beyond primary school participants' current level of vocabulary knowledge. However, ER is a meaning-focused rather than a form-focused process Therefore, students can keep reading at their own pace without being worried about unknown and difficult words. When they read extensively in ER-based classrooms under a stress-free environment, they may gain more reading experience and broaden their vocabulary knowledge. Indeed, ER provides a prospect to extend "the components upon which fluent second language reading depends: a large sight vocabulary, a wide general vocabulary, and knowledge of the target language, the world, and text types" (Day & Bamford, 1998 : 187-191).

Overall, the results showed that students significantly improved in vocabulary knowledge. Students may have become familiar with the target words as they read and were then able to predict the meaning of unknown words, possibly from the context and the frequent reoccurrence of the target words. For instance, before the treatment, some students did not know the meaning of the target words, such as 'said' and 'goes'. However, after implementing the ER, the students knew the meaning of those target words, as indicated by significantly improved scores. These results suggest that ER may be a useful approach to teach vocabulary learning. This claim is consistent with McQuillan (2019 : 129-138), who analyzed the effects of pleasure reading and direct vocabulary instruction on academic vocabulary acquisition. The results showed that pleasure reading is 2-6 times more efficient than direct instruction to expand students' repertoire of academic vocabulary. Similarly, Webb and Chang (2015 : 667-686) investigated the effect of ER with audio support on vocabulary learning. The results showed greater average gains for the ER group in the post-test compared to the control group.

This highlights the effectiveness of ER with audio support in increasing participants' receptive knowledge of words, particularly in learners with lower English proficiency.

In conclusion, the current study indicated that ER is beneficial for EFL primary school learners, and the easy reading materials positively affect incidental vocabulary acquisition. This demonstrates the success of the natural exposure and repetition of vocabulary in graded readers in promoting EFL primary school learners' vocabulary acquisition. Specifically, the word recurrence in a variety of easy reading materials leads to vocabulary gains; that is, learners become familiar with the target words, which help them infer the meanings of the word and use it in context.

2. Primary school students' attitudes toward extensive reading

The findings showed that students' attitudes towards ER were reasonably positive. Specifically, the quantitative finding analysis revealed a significant increase in primary school students' attitudes toward ER following the ER implementation. These findings are consistent with previous studies that ER enhances positive feelings and promotes learner autonomy and reading enjoyment in a learning context (Hagley, 2017 : 203-217 ; Yamashita, 2013 : 248-263) ER is an effective method to encourage students to read and change their reading attitudes. The positive effects of ER on the development of learners' attitudes toward reading and their motivation to read have been reported in many research studies (Hagley, 2017 : 203-217.; Hayashi, 1999 : 114-132; Day & Bamford, 1998 : 187-191). For instance, Takase (2007) showed that ER increased Japanese students' motivation to read English extensively with enthusiasm, and this feeling sustained their reading in the L2 throughout the year. Indeed, students reported that their reading ability improved after reading extensively, and they were also pleased to take charge of their own learning (Takase, 2007 : 1-18).

ER allows students to be exposed to many reading materials to foster reading enjoyment and promote reading independence. Students are trained to take responsibility for their own reading by choosing the books they want to read and to read outside the classroom at any time and place of their choice. They can stop reading if the book is not interesting or not what they had expected. In addition, the significant gain in students' English reading ability after they have been exposed to an array of reading texts and trained with learning strategies enables them to gain more confidence in English learning over time. Students become more interested in foreign language texts and gain confidence as readers (Day & Bamford, 1998 : 187-191). As a result, they perceive themselves as learners who can learn and manage their own learning in the most effective manner and eventually gain confidence, enjoyment and a positive attitude to learning actively. The following extracts derived from the primary school participants' reading report could provide evidence to support this claim:

"It helped improve my reading comprehension and vocabulary ability." (S7)

"I enjoyed reading English books because I chose the books myself." (S8)

"I enjoyed it because I read about stuff that interested me." (S16)

"I think it helped me improve in vocabulary and reading comprehension." (S19)

As the ER is an independent program, students can volunteer to join without any conditions. Students can read any books they want to read that are appropriate for their English language level. They compete with themselves rather than with others, so they feel relaxed and comfortable while reading. Indeed, according to the reading reports in the current study, the students reported that they felt relaxed to read without stress. They were more confident to read English books because they had opportunities to ask their friends or use a dictionary when they encounter a problem or unknown word. This finding is consistent with Day and Bamford (1988

: 187-191), who reported that ER helps students learn to read in a second language and helps them to enjoy reading. Altogether, these results indicate that ER can help students increase their reading attitudes and to enjoy reading.

In conclusion, the present study showed ER is beneficial for primary school students. The ER approach can build confidence, motivation, enjoyment, and a love of reading, making students more effective language users and lower any anxieties about language learning.

The current study explored the benefits of ER and primary school students' attitudes towards ER in a Thai EFL context. The results indicated that ER could enhance students' vocabulary knowledge (Suk, 2016:73-89; Webb & Chang, 2015: 667-686) because they can choose the books they want to read and ensure they are appropriate for their English language level. Moreover, the students expressed positive attitudes toward ER. Together, these results indicate that ER can be used in EFL classroom contexts to improve the students' motivation to read. Students should also be familiar with the process of learning so they can read with a concrete goal, become aware of their successes and failures, and evaluate their learning performance. Once students can take control of their own learning process, they are ready to become autonomous learners.

Recommendation

The participants in this study were homogeneous in that they shared a similar educational background, age, academic language exposure, and level of language proficiency. Moreover, the sample size was small. Thus, the generalizability of these results may be limited. Future research may include different groups or a larger sample size of students to ensure that the results are generalizable. The current study was also conducted in a primary school setting for a limited time. As such, the effects of long-term ER instruction cannot be evaluated. Future studies may wish to investigate ER instruction in different reading classes with students from other classes or secondary schools for a longer continual duration, such as one academic year, to better assess the potential learning outcomes of ER. Finally, this study focused only on students' English language reading abilities; therefore, future studies may wish to investigate other English skills, such as fluency in conversation or writing skills.

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