

Investigating Teachers' and Students' Attitudes Towards the Practice of Extensive Reading at A University in Vietnam

Ai Linh Pham

Faculty of International Training, Thai Nguyen University of Technology, Vietnam

ABSTRACT: This study examines teachers' and students' attitudes towards the practice of Extensive Reading (ER) in teaching non-English-majored students at a university in Vietnam. Employing a qualitative methodology, data were gathered via semi-structured interviews with students and teachers to examine the perceived advantages and obstacles of implementing ER in an EFL context. Research indicated that ER markedly improved students' reading fluency, comprehension, vocabulary development, writing skills, and general motivation for learning the English language. Nonetheless, the investigation revealed significant limits in practice. Several students articulated irritation and disengagement stemming from challenging or unengaging readings, with many identifying a deficiency in evaluation as a demotivating element. Educators similarly observed diminished student engagement when extensive reading activities were not formally incorporated into the curriculum. Recommendations are offered for curriculum designers and instructors aiming to enhance the integration of extensive reading into tertiary English programs in Vietnam.

KEYWORDS: Extensive reading, non-English majors, reading fluency, vocabulary acquisition, motivation.

I. INTRODUCTION

English has evolved into a necessary means for communication, academic accomplishment, and professional development in the framework of global integration. English is acknowledged as a fundamental foreign language taught in various contexts in Vietnam, ranging from primary schools to university levels. Although university students majoring in English usually get in-depth education and practice of the language, non-English majors usually struggle to become more proficient in English because of few exposure and practice chances (Nguyen & Trinh, 2011). Particularly in settings where English is taught as a foreign language, Extensive Reading (ER) has been progressively acknowledged among the several strategies for language learning as having the ability to raise learners' general language competency (Day & Bamford, 2002).

ER is the practice of reading outside the classroom, in which the materials are easily understood and enjoyable stuff for students. It seeks to improve vocabulary, reading fluency, and attitude toward language acquisition (Waring & Nation, 2004). ER pushes students to read for general knowledge and enjoyment, frequently using simple graded readers or real materials appropriate for their competence level, unlike intensive reading, which concentrates on exact knowledge of short texts. ER improves not only reading comprehension but also writing skills, vocabulary development, and general language confidence according to many research (Krashen, 2004; Renandya, & Jacobs, 2002).

Despite the obvious benefits of ER, its inclusion into tertiary education courses in Vietnam is still rare, particularly for non-English speaking students. Non-English majored students might run across time restrictions, lack of enthusiasm, and inadequate access to appropriate reading materials (Pham, 2020). Furthermore, Vietnamese teachers might not be completely aware of ER's ideas and application techniques, which would explain their underuse. These students frequently face a number of impediments that obstruct their participation in ER. Time constraints frequently arise, as academic schedules are predominantly occupied by major-related courses, resulting in minimal opportunity for voluntary English reading (Pham, 2020). A deficiency in intrinsic motivation to read in a foreign language can diminish the inclination to participate in extensive reading activities, particularly when English is perceived solely as a mandatory subject rather than a functional instrument for communication and personal development (Nguyen & Trinh, 2011).

This study intends to investigate the application of ER in teaching English to Vietnamese non-English majored students at university level. It aims to find out how ER is perceived by teachers and students, pinpoint the difficulties in its application, and assess how it affects language learning of the latter. Understanding the function of ER in this particular educational environment would help the research support the growth of learner autonomy and motivation in Vietnamese higher education as well as lead to more efficient English language teaching strategies.

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The study is driven with two research questions:

1. What are teachers' attitudes towards the use of extensive reading in English lessons?
2. What are students' attitudes towards the use of extensive reading in English lessons?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Extensive Reading

Extensive reading (ER) is acknowledged as an effective method for second and foreign language learning, especially in enhancing reading fluency, vocabulary, and learner autonomy. Although the notion is widely acknowledged in language education, its meanings fluctuate throughout the literature, resulting in variations in interpretation and application. Day and Bamford (2002) offer a widely referenced description of Extensive Reading as "an approach to language teaching in which learners read a substantial amount of accessible material in the new language" (p. 6). This definition emphasizes three fundamental components: the quantity of reading, the accessibility of the texts, and the learner's autonomy in selecting reading materials. The concentration on "a lot" and "easy" aims to diminish cognitive burden, enabling learners to concentrate on meaning rather than structure. This approach, while pedagogically beneficial, may oversimplify the varied aims and effects of extensive reading, particularly for intermediate or advanced learners who could gain from engaging with more challenging literature.

Krashen (2004) conceptualizes ER within his Input Hypothesis, equating it with "free voluntary reading" (FVR). He contends that reading for enjoyment in a low-anxiety setting is the most effective instrument for language acquisition. Krashen's definition prioritizes learner motivation and affective elements, while minimizing the significance of reading materials and classroom management. Although his perspective accurately emphasizes the significance of learner involvement, detractors contend that it may not be entirely relevant in educational settings because institutional assessments and curriculum mandates influence learning experiences (Tanaka & Stapleton, 2007).

Waring and Nation (2004) enhance the definition by integrating cognitive and affective elements. It is proposed that ER entails engaging with a substantial volume of content that is both intriguing and comprehensible, remaining within the learner's language capabilities, with the principal objective being to read for overall comprehension. Their definition seeks to equilibrate input quality, quantity, and learner engagement. Nonetheless, it predominantly presupposes the existence of suitable graded materials, which may not be feasible in all educational settings - particularly in Vietnam, where resources are often scarce and students may have limited access to authentic or appropriately leveled texts (Pham, 2020).

All these definitions agree on several fundamental features: learner agency, substantial input, and text comprehension rather than analysis. However, they differ in their practical focus - specifically on materials, learner autonomy, motivation, or the classroom environment. This difference may provide difficulties for educators striving to adopt ER uniformly. Furthermore, the definition of ER may require modification to align with local contexts, learner requirements, and technological advancements, including digital reading platforms that are transforming reading behaviors and opportunities.

In conclusion, although the fundamental concepts of Extensive Reading are well-established in literature, their definition is not universally consistent and should be regarded as context dependent. An appropriate description of ER must encompass its educational principles while also addressing practical constraints, learner diversity, and institutional objectives.

2. Strengths of Extensive Reading

ER has been well recognized as an effective instrument for the advancement of second and foreign language acquisition. It entails learners engaging with substantial volumes of intelligible and engaging content, typically at or marginally behind their existing competency level (Day & Bamford, 2002). The advantages of ER encompass linguistic, cognitive, and emotional areas. Nonetheless, whereas literature robustly endorses the favorable effects of ER, a critical analysis indicates that these advantages are occasionally exaggerated or not universally achievable due to contextual constraints.

One of the most frequently referenced benefits of ER is its contribution to enhancing reading fluency and comprehension. Students that participate in consistent, voluntary reading typically exhibit accelerated word recognition, improved syntactic processing, and increased reading speed (Taguchi et al., 2004). The enhancements result from consistent exposure to vocabulary and grammatical structures in context, enabling learners to organically integrate language patterns. Critics contend that these benefits may be more pronounced for learners at middle or advanced competence levels, whereas beginners may find it challenging to freely engage with texts without sufficient scaffolding (Waring & Nation, 2004).

ER is also thought to enhance vocabulary acquisition. Krashen (2004) asserts that vocabulary is optimally acquired through relevant input, and ER offers the perfect context for this acquisition. (Waring and Takaki (2003) demonstrate that frequent exposure to lexical words in various contexts enhances vocabulary memory. However, the incidental acquisition of vocabulary through extensive reading may be inadequate for acquiring low-frequency or specialized terms, indicating that extensive reading should be augmented with additional strategies for more thorough lexical development.

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Besides cognitive benefits, ER possesses significant affective advantages. It has been demonstrated to cultivate favorable dispositions towards reading and language acquisition, alleviate language anxiety, and augment learner motivation (Day & Bamford, 2002). When learners are permitted to select their own reading materials, their autonomy is enhanced, frequently leading to increased interest and perseverance. However, these advantages are significantly contingent upon learners' access to suitable and engaging texts, which may be lacking in under-resourced environments, such as certain Vietnamese universities (Pham, 2020).

Moreover, ER is recognized for enhancing writing proficiency, as students assimilate prevalent text structures and discourse patterns through consistent exposure (Mason & Krashen, 1997). The degree of transfer from reading to writing is still a subject of discussion. Certain research indicate only moderate enhancements in writing accuracy and coherence, suggesting that explicit teaching may still be essential for learners to properly cultivate their written communication abilities (Grabe, 2009).

Notwithstanding the multitude of demonstrated advantages, the efficacy of ER is not certain in every educational context. Successful implementation necessitates educator training, institutional backing, availability of reading resources, and meticulous incorporation into the curriculum. In situations where these prerequisites are absent, the advantages of ER may be diminished or even unachieved (Nguyen, 2015).

In conclusion, Extensive Reading provides numerous pedagogical advantages, such as enhancements in reading fluency, vocabulary acquisition, motivation, and writing skills. Nonetheless, these advantages are influenced by factors including student proficiency, resource availability, and instructional design. Consequently, ER should be seen not as a universal remedy, but as a significant element of a comprehensive language acquisition plan.

3. Weaknesses of Extensive Reading

Although ER is widely recognized as an effective method for second and foreign language learning, it possesses certain limitations. Multiple studies have emphasized its advantages for vocabulary enhancement, reading fluency, and learner motivation (Day & Bamford, 2002; Krashen, 2004). Nevertheless, a thorough analysis indicates that ER may present several pedagogical, practical, and learner-related obstacles, especially when executed without enough support or contextual modification.

A primary critique ER is related to the restricted efficacy for novice learners. Novices frequently lack the requisite vocabulary and grammatical understanding to grasp even simplified materials. In the absence of sufficient scaffolding or educator assistance, these learners may experience discouragement, resulting in disengagement (Nation, 2001). Although graded readers aim to resolve this issue, the variety of levels and genres offered frequently fails to satisfy the various needs and interests of all learners, particularly in under-resourced environments. Another issue is the laborious nature of ER, especially in academic settings where students must manage various subjects concurrently. Non-English majors frequently prioritize materials from their core disciplines, resulting in minimal time for supplementary reading in English (Pham, 2020). In the absence of incorporation into formal curriculum or assessment frameworks, ER may be regarded as non-essential, leading to diminished motivation and involvement.

The accessibility and suitability of reading materials also constrain the efficacy of extensive reading. In some EFL situations, such as Vietnam, access to graded readers or appropriately leveled literature is limited due to financial limitations or insufficient institutional support (Nguyen, 2015). Moreover, digital alternatives like e-books and online platforms, although promising, necessitate technological infrastructure and digital skills that may be lacking in certain educational settings.

Factors associated with educators further exacerbate the deployment of ER. A significant number of educators are inadequately trained in the principles and tactics of extensive reading, resulting in inefficient practices or total neglect of the method (Renandya & Jacobs, 2002). In the absence of explicit criteria for evaluating ER advancement or integrating it into lesson plans, certain educators may persist in utilizing conventional, assessment-focused methodologies, such as grammar-translation or intensive reading.

A further drawback pertains to the challenges associated with monitoring and evaluating learning outcomes in ER. As students generally read independently and at their own speed, it poses difficulties for educators to ascertain the authenticity of their engagement with the subject or to objectively assess advancements in language competency (Grabe, 2009). Although reading logs and book reports provide some understanding, they may not entirely reflect the qualitative advantages of extensive reading and can occasionally increase students' burden, thereby compromising the enjoyment associated with the activity.

Ultimately, ER may inadequately encompass explicit language education, including grammatical rules, pronunciation, or academic writing competencies. Consequently, it should not be seen as a holistic approach but rather as a supplementary element of a well-rounded language acquisition program (Waring & Nation, 2004). An over dependence on extensive reading without including alternative methods may result in deficiencies in learners' linguistic progression.

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III. METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative research approach to examine the views of both instructors and students toward the implementation of ER in teaching English to Non – English majors at University F. Semi-structured interviews were done to correspond with the study questions. By employing semi-structured interviews, the researcher effectively balanced structure and flexibility, facilitating a deeper exploration of students' opinions and yielding a more profound comprehension of their perspectives (Ryan et al., 2009). Moreover, semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to obtain open-ended responses in a relaxed environment. This is due to the fact that students are not obligated to respond to questions they are unfamiliar with, and the researcher will not exert pressure on the students. Compared to surveys or questionnaires, semi-structured interviews enable the acquisition of rich and thorough data, as they allow for the generation of additional follow-up questions to elucidate unclear responses (Pallant, 2007).

Two semi-structured interview questions concerning attitudes towards flipped teaching were designed to align with the objectives of the present study. To validate the interview questions, the researcher solicited feedback from specialists and peers in EFL instruction. The scripts were entirely in English, as the participants in the current study were English majors. Upon completion of the interviews, the data was encoded using Microsoft Excel. Themes were developed from the codes prior to the analytical process.

The participants in this study comprised 10 lecturers and 10 non – English majors. Participants in the current study were required to possess familiarity with ER.

Consent documents were provided to participants prior to the interview to ensure ethical compliance. Furthermore, the privacy of the individuals was assured, as the researcher would provide each participant with a pseudonym.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Positive Attitude

Data collected from the semi-structured interviews showed that ER enhanced reading fluency and comprehension. Extracts below illustrate this point of view.

"I practice ER every day with short passage and after a period of time, my reading fluency and comprehension is much improved. I could read the text with not much difficulty, and I could understand the text better." S7

"My biggest problem is reading because I cannot read fluently, and I don't understand the text much. After trying ER, I feel more confident to read a text because I do not have difficulty in the fluency and reading comprehension." S3

The results of the study revealed that vocabulary acquisition was enhanced when it came to ER. One teacher stated:

"I found that students vocabulary acquisition was much improved since they were advised to apply ER in their reading skill. For example, in the very first lesson, students seem to have difficulty understanding the meaning of several words such as driveway or hallway. After 6 weeks, students were able to choose the correct option related to these words." T2

One student also expressed the improvement of vocabulary after practicing ER weekly.

"I am so happy about my range of vocabulary now. After following my English teacher's advice on practicing ER weekly, I can understand more vocabulary. Moreover, I performed well in the English progress test in terms of vocabulary task." S9

Results from the study revealed that the practice of ER increased students' motivation in learning English. Extracts below proved this point.

One student said:

"Before I practice ER every week, my motivation for studying English was pretty low. When I listened to my English teacher to practice ER at home, I was more motivated in not only reading but also speaking and listening." S6

Another student added:

"I didn't like reading in English before I tried ER because I found it too challenging and unpleasant. However, I started to feel more motivated when I began to read books that were easier and more engaging. I did not have to constantly pause to look up vocabulary, and I could choose the stories I enjoyed. I became more assured and eager to read every day as a result" S5

The findings from this study also showed that ER improved students' writing proficiency. For instance,

One student said:

"Reading a lot of stories in English helped me write better because I saw how sentences were written by native speakers. I tried to copy their style and now my writing looks more natural" S4

A teacher stressed:

"Before students practice ER, they can just use the simple words in their writing. After a period of 8 weeks practising ER, they could use the new vocabulary and expressions in their writing to make their writing better." T6

Data obtained from the semi-structured interviews indicated that ER positively enhanced students' reading fluency and comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, motivation, and writing proficiency. Participants consistently reported significant enhancements in their capacity to read English texts more fluently and with increased comprehension following a sustained engagement in extensive reading. These findings align with prior research on the benefits of ER. Taguchi et al., (2004) found that

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repeated exposure to texts through ER improves both the speed and accuracy of reading, as learners become more familiar with vocabulary, grammatical structures, and text organization. ER encourages natural, repeated encounters with language in context, helping learners process text more efficiently and automatically over time.

Regarding the enhancement of vocabulary acquisition, These findings are robustly corroborated by the current literature. Krashen (2004) asserts that vocabulary is optimally acquired through broad, meaningful exposure to language within context - exactly ER offers. Students are consistently exposed to novel vocabulary in diverse contexts, facilitating enhanced lexical processing and enduring retention. Waring and Takaki (2003) discovered that learners are more inclined to retain new vocabulary when it appears repeatedly in relevant contexts rather than in isolated word lists. The enhancement of vocabulary acquisition via extensive reading seems to be both incidental and cumulative. Learners acquire vocabulary organically and progressively without direct teaching, a characteristic that renders extensive reading particularly helpful for long-term language development. To maximize benefits, ER programs must provide learners with texts that are both appropriately leveled and sufficiently diverse to provide recurrent exposure to valuable vocabulary.

In terms of enhancing motivation, These qualitative insights corroborate the findings of Day and Bamford (2002), who underscored that motivation is a crucial element in effective ER programs. They contend that ER empowers learners by granting them the autonomy to select books that align with their interests and language proficiency, resulting in enhanced engagement and enjoyment. When kids are not burdened by complex language and can choose topics that resonate with them, they are more inclined to read regularly and cultivate a more favorable disposition towards language acquisition.

Regarding to the enhancement of writing proficiency, These results are in line with those of Mason and Krashen (1997), who state that ER gives students a wealth of vocabulary to pull on when they write. Students develop their writing skills - familiarity with various genres, sentence patterns, and coherent devices - through frequent exposure to diverse texts. By incorporating language acquisition into engaging and relevant reading experiences, ER fosters a more intuitive and integrated growth of writing abilities, as opposed to rigorous reading or explicit grammar teaching.

Writing fluency is a skill that benefits greatly from the learner's increased agency and self-assurance, both of which ER helps to cultivate. In a relaxed environment where they can hear native speakers, students are more willing to try out different words and phrases, which helps them build their own unique voice as writers.

2. Negative Attitude:

Apart from the positive attitude towards the use of ER in EFL contexts, the participants in the current study believed that discouragement was raised when this teaching technique was advised for the whole semester. One student complained:

"I thought ER would be helpful, but I got frustrated quickly. Some of the stories in the graded reading books were too long, and I didn't understand the new words. It made me feel like I didn't make any progresses" S1

In addition, one student stated:

"I thought ER would help, but I got frustrated quickly. Some of the stories were boring or too long, and I didn't understand many of the words. It made me feel like I wasn't improving." S8

Results from the interviews also described students less motivation due to the lack of assessment when applying ER. The quotations below illustrate this viewpoint.

"Some students lost interest in ER over time because there was no formal test or score. They often asked me, 'Will this be graded?' and when I said no, their motivation dropped." T1

Another teacher added:

"Without any assessment or evaluation, it was hard to keep students engaged. They didn't take ER seriously because they felt it wasn't part of their actual coursework." T5

Students' discouragement due to boring stories while trying ER at home was obvious. Such experience indicates that when reading materials do not align with students' interests or language proficiency. ER can cause cognitive overload and diminish confidence, ultimately leading to discouragement. This trend is also noted by Nation (2001), who cautioned that prolonged frustration may reduce learners' motivation to participate in ER activities.

An additional issue which was in line with Pham (2020) arose during the interviews: the lack of assessment and formal curriculum integration, which seemed to diminish the perceived significance of ER. According to Pham (2020), the absence of integration into the official curriculum or evaluation frameworks may render ER as non-essential, resulting in diminished desire and involvement. In educational settings where assessment significantly influences student behavior, as frequently observed in Vietnamese colleges, the absence of concrete outcomes or feedback may lead students to undervalue extensive reading, despite its instructional advantages.

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V. CONCLUSIONS

Overall, this study's findings offer a detailed viewpoint on the application of ER in EFL academic settings in Vietnam. Students and teachers indicated many favorable outcomes linked to ER, such as improved reading fluency and comprehension, higher vocabulary acquisition, heightened motivation, and superior writing skills. Nevertheless, the study revealed significant issues associated with the extended use of ER, particularly when it was executed without adequate scaffolding or evaluation. A number of participants reported feelings of discouragement and diminished motivation due to unengaging content, linguistic challenges, and the absence of formal assessment.

Although this study produces valuable insights, it is not devoid of drawbacks. The research was performed on a limited sample of non-English majors from a single university in Vietnam, thus constraining the generalizability of the findings to wider contexts. The varied educational backgrounds, language proficiency levels, and learning contexts among different institutions in Vietnam and elsewhere may provide disparate outcomes about students' views and reactions to ER. Secondly, the research predominantly depended on self-reported data from semi-structured interviews, which may be prone to bias. Participants may have inaccurately described their experiences due to social desirability bias, recollection errors, or misinterpretation of interview questions. The study also lacked longitudinal tracking of students' reading practices and language skills, which could have provided a more comprehensive and objective assessment of the influence of ER over time. Thirdly, although the study investigated both favorable and unfavorable attitudes about ER, it did not thoroughly analyze the role of teacher mediation or specific implementation tactics. The quality of teacher assistance, frequency of reading sessions, and availability of follow-up activities may considerably impact learners' engagement with extensive reading; nevertheless, these factors were not the primary focus of this study.

This study's findings present significant implications for language educators, curriculum developers, and educational policymakers. The demotivation students experience from insufficient assessment underscores the necessity of truly integrating ER into formal curriculum. Implementing light-touch assessments, such as reading logs, reflective journals, or discussion-based evaluations, could enhance student accountability and motivation while preserving the autonomy fostered by ER. The dissatisfaction articulated by students with challenging or uninspiring texts emphasizes the necessity of offering reading materials that are appropriate for their level, diverse, and culturally pertinent. Educators must meticulously select graded readers and tailor them to align with students' interests and competence levels to guarantee sustained engagement. As certain educators may lack a comprehensive understanding of efficient ER implementation, professional development programs centered on ER pedagogy are crucial. Training must encompass tactics for student motivation, progress tracking, and integration of ER into the curriculum.

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