The Development
of Pre-extensive Reading Materials
for Successful Practices in EFL Classrooms

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Abstract

Extensive reading (ER) has gained wide popularity, especially in the context of English as a foreign language (EFL), because it provides opportunities for exposure to authentic English without having to travel abroad. Although numerous studies have examined the effect of ER programs in EFL contexts, particularly regarding linguistic gains (e.g., vocabulary and reading speed), fewer studies have focused on ER material. Therefore, I conducted a study on the issues in administering ER in EFL contexts and discuss how the pre-ER materials developed for EFL classrooms have addressed the issues.

Keywords: Extensive Reading, Development of Reading Materials, EFL

1. Introduction

For decades, extensive reading (ER) has attracted not only English teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) but also researchers, a range of whom have conducted various studies on how ER benefits L2 and EFL learning contexts. Against the background, I sought to examine literature addressing ER in EFL settings published between 2001 and 2020 in EFL settings by using the search terms "extensive reading," "EFL," using the "allintitle" option in Google Scholar. The search returned 295 articles, subsequently grouped by year of publication, as shown in Figure 1.
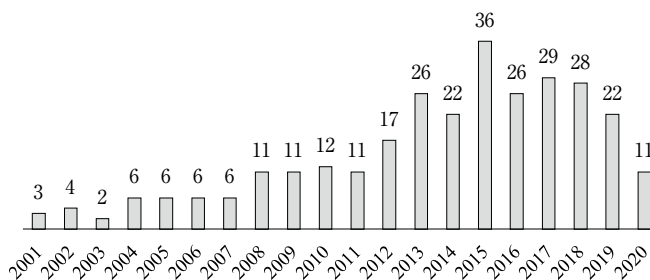

Figure 1 Number of published articles on extensive reading in English
as a foreign language (N = 295), 2001–2020

Figure 1 shows an average of approximately 22 articles have been published each year since 2010, which indicates ER's continued interests and popularity in EFL settings. A review of 110 of those research articles for free PDF revealed their overwhelming focus on the linguistic and motivational gains that are achievable by participating in ER programs (see Table 1).

Table 1 Research themes of ER research articles in the EFL settings published from 2010 to 2020

Theme	Article				
Language proficiency	Davoudi et al. (2015)	Su (2016)			
Writing ability	Kirin (2010)	Ahmadi (2012)	Wang & Wang (2013)	Al-Mansour (2014)	Mermelstein (2015)
	Ahmed & Rajab (2015)	Salehi, et. al. (2015)	Poorsoti & Asl (2016)	Zarei (2017)	Wang & Ho (2019)
Reading comprehension	Tamrackitkun (2010)	Kargar (2012)	Yamashina et al. (2012)	Mermelstein (2014)	Al-Nafisah (2015)
	Ahmed & Rajab (2015)	Sabet & Rostamian (2016)	Hartiwi et al. (2016)	Park (2017)	Delfi (2017)
	Endris (2018 a)	Endris (2018 b)	Neisi et al. (2019)	Wang & Ho (2019)	Chavangklang et. al. (2019)
Reading fluency	Tamrackitkun (2010)	Rezaee & Nourzadeh (2011)	Modirkhamene & Gowrki (2011)	Forster (2014)	Hadjeb & Bouaziz (2014)
	Endris (2018)	Yoshizawa et al. (2018)	Tran (2018)		
Grammar	Alqadi & Alqadi (2013)	Lee et al. (2015)	Khansir & Dehghani (2015)	Yaghoubi-Notash, (2015)	Poorsoti & Asl (2016)
	Shea (2016)	Park (2017)			
Speaking, including pronunciation	Malmeer & Araghi (2013)	Hadjeb & Bouaziz (2014)	Yoshizawa et al. (2018)		
Listening	Wang & Ho (2019)				
Vocabulary	Pazhakh & Soltani (2010)	Modirkhamene, & Gowrki (2011)	Takase (2012)	Alavi & Keyvanshekouh, (2012)	Yen-Hui (2013)
	Rafatbakhsh, & Alavi (2013)	Naghibi & Moghaddam (2013)	Boutorwick (2013)	Song & Sardegna (2014)	Khonamri & Roostaee (2014)
	Resketi & Bagheri (2014)	Lien (2014)	Rashtchi & Pourmand (2014)	Forster (2014)	Teng (2015)
	Osman (2015)	Aisaoui & Bouaziz (2015)	Karimpour & Aidinlou (2016)	Shea (2016)	Park (2018)
	Shen et. al. (2018)	Razmjoo & Montasseri (2018)	Chavangklang et al. (2019)		
Attitude	Tamrackitkun, K. (2010)	Jones (2010)	Choi (2010)	Takase (2012)	Assia (2012)
	Johnson (2012)	Kargar (2012)	Lee et. al. (2015)	Graham (2015)	Shea (2016)
	Yoshida (2016)	Salameh (2017)	Dickinson (2017)	Endris (2018)	Endris (2018)
	Iftanti & Shofiya (2018)				
Motivation	Jones (2010)	Choi (2010)	Takase (2012)	Rahmany et. al. (2013)	Kirchhoff (2015)
	Al Damen (2018)	Hadiyanto (2018)	Pirih (2019)		
Reading habits	Graham (2015)				
Autonomy	Ningshi (2019)				
Critical thinking	Eftekhary & Kalayeh (2014)				
Reading strategy	Shih & Reynolds (2018)				
Teacher's views and attitudes	Kim & Kim (2015)				
Program design and evaluation	Harris (2011)	Assia (2012)	Kanda (2012)	Hinkelman (2013)	Birketveit et. al. (2018)
	Wang & Ho (2019)	Al Zeidi & Al Quraini (2019)	Puspitasari (2019)	Martina (2020)	

The number of research articles addressing vocabulary was the greatest（n = 23）, followed by motivation（n = 16）and reading comprehension（n = 15）. In particular, in a study with 46 students at a tertiary-level institution in Taiwan, Chen, Chen, Chen, and Wei（2013）reported overall gains in attitude towards reading, reading comprehension, and vocabulary as a result of completing a 10-week ER program. Later, Jeon and Day（2016）observed ER's effectiveness in improving reading proficiency during their meta-analysis of 49 research articles published from 1980 to 2014. Their results are informative not only given the rigorous inclusion criteria observed（e.g., the experimental or quasi-experimental design with quantifiable data）but also given their focus on the instruments used in ER programs. According to their results, ER has achieved the greatest effects when ER programs have been integrated into regular classroom hours instead of being an out-of-class activity.

Few studies, however, have examined issues in designing ER program designs, particularly concerning the role of teachers and the development of libraries for ER inside institutions. According to Day and Bamford（2002）suggest, teachers in ER programs are encouraged to play the role of a model reader and to guide students in building positive reading habits. The role also entails directing students to choose materials of an appropriate reading level and of sufficient interest to them to order to achieve pleasure reading, sometimes called *pressure-free reading*, one of the 10 principles at the core of ER practices（Day, 2015）and viewed as a prerequisite for ER. Nuttall（1996）has proposed the most convincing models of the so-called "virtuous circle of the good reader" and "vicious circle of the weak reader," one that encompass not only pleasure but also reading speed, another core principle of ER. As demonstrated in the models, Nuttall claims that weak readers cannot enjoy reading much, whereas good readers read quickly and therefore read more, understand better, and due to better comprehension, enjoy reading more. To foster the virtuous circle, ER programs need to provide opportunities to practice rapid reading so that students can become confident in reading quickly, even in such practice is unconventional in EFL classrooms. Instead, students in those contexts are accustomed to reading slowly but carefully in order to understand the structure, grammar, and vocabulary of syntactically, phonologically, and semantically challenging sentences.

Figure 2 illustrates the relationships between the type of reading, percentage of known vocabulary, appropriateness of the materials' reading levels, reading speed, and comprehension （Uden, 2013）. When more than 98% of the vocabulary in a text represents known words, students can engage in ER – that is, they can enjoy the content while reading quickly and fluently without compromising understanding. When fewer than 90 % of words are unknown words, however, reading becomes a pain. Such students struggle to understand the meaning while reading very slowly, which only demotivates them to continue reading.

Type of reading	Reading pain	Intensive reading	Extensive reading	Speed reading practice
Percentage of known vocabulary	90	98	100	100
Appropriateness of materials' reading levels	Too hard Requires high effort De-motivating	Instructional level Learning new words and grammar is possible	Adequate comprehension Enjoyable	Natural reading Enjoyable
Reading speed	Very slow	Slow	Fast	Very fast
Comprehension	Very low	Low	High	High

Figure 2　Relationships between the type of reading, percentage of known vocabulary, appropriateness of materials' reading levels, reading speed, and comprehension (Figure adapted from Uden, (2013)).

Concerning the preparation of ER materials, Guo (2012) has argued that teachers should select the authentic reading materials on behalf of students to accommodate students' reading level, needs, and interests. Although that suggestion may be applicable in relatively small classes, most language classes have at least 15 to 20 students, and preparing adequate authentic materials for all students at various reading levels and with diverse interests remains a major obstacles to incorporating ER into EFL classes. An alternative solution may be developing pre-extensive reading materials such that beginner readers can experience two core principles of ER—fast reading and pleasure reading—and thereby recognize the importance of choosing materials of an appropriate reading levels and interests.

2.　Methods

To compare graded readers and a self-made pre-ER reading materials, I transcribed 12 randomly selected graded readers published by Cengage and Macmillan. In each book, three pages without illustrations or extensive blank space were randomly selected for transcription into a Microsoft Word file. Next, the transcribed texts were then copied and pasted into the online software VocabProfile by Lextutor and submitted for analysis. Applied to measure the vocabulary level of the graded readers and the pre-ER reading materials, VocabProfile sorts the vocabulary-related data into four categories: the 1,000 most frequently used words (i.e., K1), the next 1,000 most frequently used words (K2), the 570 most frequently used academic words (AW; as proposed by Coxhead, 1998), and other words (OFF). VocabProfile also provides data about lexical density (LD), which indicates the ratio of content words used (e.g., nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) to function words (e.g., articles and prepositions).

3.　Results and Discussion

The comparison of the graded readers and the self-made pre-ER materials revealed several similarities and differences in their linguistic features, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Linguistic features of the graded readers and the self-made pre-extensive reading materials

Graded readers	Linguistic features	Self-made materials
10	Average number of words per sentence	10
220	Average number of words per page	200
87	K1 (%)	82
7	K2 (%)	6
1	AWL (%)	1
5	OFF (%)	11
51	Lexical density (%)	50

*-*K1* refers to the 1,000 most frequently used words, *K2* refers to the next 1,000 most frequently used words, *AWL* refers to the 570 most frequently used academic words, and *OFF* refers to other words; lexical density refers he ratio of content words used (e.g., nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) to function words (e.g., articles and prepositions; Coxhead, 1998).

Amongst the similarities, the percentages of K2, AWL, and LD among the self-made pre-ER materials were either at the same level or below those of graded readers. However, the percentage of OFF was higher in the graded readers, possible due to the numerous place names and personal names used in them. Because the pre-ER reading materials takes place in a language center in Canada where students of diverse cultural background gather, the names use in them are often foreign and therefore categorized as "OFF."

The self-made pre-reading materials had several advantages compared with the graded readers. For example, because each page contained 200 words and therefore, the students did not need to count the number of words, number of pages after ER. Moreover, because each story contained approximately 1,200 to 1,700 words and average beginner EFL readers read 80 to 100 words per minute (Uden, 2013), one story could be read in 15 to 22 minutes, which afforded time for post-reading activities for in class. Providing students with opportunities for fast reading and pleasure reading can thus prepare them for future ER, while students' knowledge of their reading speed and reading level can guide them in choosing appropriate books to read. Beyond that, the more books that they read fast for pleasure, the more that their language proficiency, including vocabulary and reading comprehension, will advance and the more they are to enter the virtuous circle of good reader (Nuttal 1996).

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Zarei, M.（2017）. The effect of task-based extensive reading on Iranian EFL learners' writing accuracy. *Journal of Teaching English for Specific and Academic Purposes, 4*（3）, 573-580.

A list of graded readers
The Stranger（Cengage Learning Level 12）
Battle for Big Tree Country（Cengage Learning Level 11）
The Boathouse（Cengage Learning Level 10）
The Yellow Field（Cengage Learning Level 9）
The Run from the Sky（Cengage Learning Level 8）
A New Song for Nina（Cengage Learning Level 7）
Best Friend（Cengage Learning Level 6）
Gone（Cengage Learning Level 5）
All or Nothing（Cengage Learning Level 4）
The Lift（Cengage Learning Level 3）
He's Mine（Cengage Learning Level 2）
Somebody Better（Cengage Learning Level 1）
Around the World in Eighty Days（Macmillan Language House Level 1 Starters）
A Tale of Two Cities（Macmillan Language House Level 2 Beginner level）
Christmas Carol（Macmillan Language House Level 3 Elementary Level）
A Midsummer Night's Dream（Macmillan Language House Level 4 Pre-intermediate）
Bristol Murder（Macmillan Language House Level 5 Intermediate Level）
Anna Karenina（Macmillan Language House Level 6 Upper intermediate）

Appendix
An excerpt of pre-ER reading materials

Case 1

On the first day of September, Yumi walked down the alley of Loadine Airport, Canada. The sun shone bright and the trees and flowers were beautiful. *The views are so nice. So different from where I am from*, Yumi thought. She had just arrived from Osaka, Japan, after fifteen hours of travel on trains and planes. The journey was not easy with two big suitcases and a heavy backpack. *I should not have brought this much but my mom kept telling me that Canada would be freezing and I should bring heavy sweaters and coats. She worries too much*, thought Yumi.

Around eleven in the evening Yumi checked in to a university residence hall called Everton Hall, one of Hammerson University's residences for students living away from home. The lady in the entrance helped her greatly by giving Yumi a brief but informative explanation about how to set up Wi-Fi and how to contact the university staff in an emergency. The receptionist also offered an accommodation guide with more information. *So this is my room. It's not too bad. The window is big and I have a view of beautiful trees and flowers*, Yumi thought when she opened the door.

1

The room had everything the university accommodation handout said it would: fully-furnished including a slightly small but clean bed with sheets, a medium-sized study desk with a light, and a small-sized wardrobe. *I don't want to share a bathroom with other people. My room fee is a bit expensive but it's worth it. I can take a shower and dive into a bed without caring about other people who might be using it.*

Yumi is exhausted but excited about her new experience in Canada. She will attend a four-week pre-sessional course at a language center attached to the University of Hammerson. In October, Yumi will enter the faculty of Information Technology as a freshman. She went to bed after she pulled out pajamas from her suitcase and a laptop from her backpack.

When Yumi woke up the next morning at seven she was as hungry as a tiger. *I missed my dinner last night. I'm starving. Well, that's okay. The residence is fully-catered and I will have a big breakfast.* Until she got to the communal dining room on the first floor she didn't realize that it was Sunday and that the hall didn't serve breakfast on Sunday morning.

2