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THE ROLE OF EXTENSIVE READING IN IMPROVING ENGLISH VOCABULARY AND COMPREHENSION

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ABSTRACT

Extensive Reading (ER) has gained increasing attention as an effective approach to improving English language development because it exposes learners to large amounts of meaningful, comprehensible, and engaging written input. Vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension are fundamental components of English proficiency, yet many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners experience difficulties in understanding texts and developing sufficient vocabulary through traditional classroom instruction alone. This study examines the role of Extensive Reading in improving students' English vocabulary and reading comprehension. Extensive Reading encourages learners to read a wide range of appropriately graded and interesting texts, often according to their interests and at their own pace. Through repeated exposure to words in meaningful contexts, learners can acquire vocabulary incidentally while simultaneously developing their ability to understand and interpret written texts. Recent empirical research indicates that Extensive Reading can produce positive improvements in vocabulary development and reading comprehension. A 2025 meta-analysis found positive effects of Extensive Reading across reading comprehension, vocabulary, reading fluency, motivation, writing, oral proficiency, and general language proficiency, with effects generally ranging from small to medium (Sangers et al., 2025). Similarly, recent empirical research has reported significant improvements in reading comprehension following extensive-reading interventions among university-level EFL learners. Research published between 2023 and 2026 also indicates that sustained exposure to English texts can support vocabulary growth, reading fluency, learner motivation, and independent reading habits. Overall, Extensive Reading represents a valuable learner-centered strategy for developing English vocabulary and comprehension because it provides learners with continuous exposure to language in meaningful contexts. The study recommends integrating well-selected graded readers, literary texts, digital reading materials, and independent reading activities into EFL curricula to promote vocabulary acquisition and stronger reading comprehension.

KEYWORDS: *Extensive Reading, English vocabulary, reading comprehension, EFL learners, vocabulary acquisition, reading proficiency, language learning*

INTRODUCTION

English has become an essential language for academic study, professional communication, international interaction, and access to information. As a result, developing strong English language proficiency has become an important objective for learners in English as Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Anggia, H., & Habók, A. (2025). Among the various components of language proficiency, vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension are particularly important. Learners need a sufficiently broad vocabulary to understand written texts, while effective reading comprehension enables them to interpret information, identify main ideas, make inferences, and construct meaning from different types of texts. However, many EFL learners continue to experience difficulties in developing adequate vocabulary and comprehension because classroom instruction often provides limited exposure to authentic and

meaningful English texts. Extensive Reading (ER) has emerged as an important approach for addressing these challenges. Unlike intensive reading, which generally focuses on detailed analysis of relatively short texts, extensive reading encourages learners to read large amounts of relatively easy and interesting material for general understanding, information, or enjoyment. Learners are normally encouraged to select texts that match their proficiency and interests and to read at their own pace. The central principle of extensive reading is therefore not the detailed analysis of every word or grammatical structure, but sustained exposure to meaningful language through a large quantity of reading. Recent research continues to identify extensive reading as a promising approach to second and foreign language development. Ezeh, N. G., & Olaolu, T. A. (2024). A major meta-analysis published in 2025 found positive effects of extensive reading across reading comprehension, vocabulary, reading fluency, motivation, writing, oral proficiency, and general language proficiency, with effects generally ranging from small to medium.

Vocabulary development is one of the most important potential benefits of extensive reading. When learners encounter words repeatedly in different meaningful contexts, they may gradually develop knowledge of word meanings, forms, collocations, and appropriate usage. Unlike vocabulary instruction that presents isolated word lists, extensive reading allows learners to encounter vocabulary as part of meaningful discourse. This contextualized exposure can help learners infer meanings from surrounding information and subsequently strengthen their recognition and use of new vocabulary. Sakurai (2023), for example, investigated the potential influence of extensive reading on controlled productive vocabulary among 62 university English majors in Japan. Liu, S., & Saad, M. R. B. M. (2025). The study followed learners over a 13-month extensive-reading period and found improvement in productive vocabulary at an intermediate measurement point, although the gains were not maintained at the final measurement. The findings suggest that extensive reading can contribute to vocabulary development, while also highlighting the importance of sustained engagement and retention. Extensive reading may also contribute directly to reading comprehension because learners receive substantial exposure to texts that are accessible and meaningful. Regular reading allows students to develop familiarity with different text structures, improve reading speed, recognize frequently occurring vocabulary, and use contextual information to construct meaning. As learners encounter language repeatedly across different texts, they may become more efficient and confident readers. The 2025 meta-analysis by Sangers et al. provides particularly strong evidence for this relationship, reporting positive effects of extensive reading on both reading comprehension and vocabulary development across different learner populations and educational contexts.

The quality and suitability of reading materials are important factors in successful extensive-reading programs. Materials should generally be sufficiently easy for learners to understand without constant dictionary use, while also being interesting enough to encourage sustained reading. Graded readers can be particularly useful because they provide texts adapted to different proficiency levels. Akechi, T., Yamaguchi, T., Uchida, M., Imai, F., Momino, K., Katsuki, F., ... & Iwata, H. (2023). Learners may also benefit from fiction, non-fiction, magazines, online

articles, short stories, and other materials that correspond to their interests. According to Sangers et al. (2025), extensive-reading programs can produce stronger outcomes when learners have appropriate support in selecting texts and when some form of accountability is included. Recent empirical research has also examined the relationship between extensive reading and vocabulary acquisition in specific learning contexts. Serrano (2023) investigated extensive reading and science vocabulary learning among primary school learners using non-fiction graded readers. The study compared reading-only with reading-while-listening and found notable vocabulary improvements during the first half of the academic year, although the benefits became less evident during the later period. Taye, T., & Teshome, G. (2025). The findings demonstrate that extensive reading can support vocabulary growth but also suggest that learner motivation, program duration, and instructional design may influence the sustainability of vocabulary gains. Extensive reading can additionally influence learners' motivation and attitudes toward reading. Traditional reading instruction may sometimes make learners view reading as an examination-oriented activity involving vocabulary exercises, comprehension questions, and detailed textual analysis. Extensive reading offers a different experience by giving learners greater autonomy and opportunities to read according to their interests. This can make reading more enjoyable and encourage students to develop independent reading habits. The 2025 meta-analysis by Sangers et al. found positive effects of extensive reading not only on linguistic outcomes but also on reading motivation, suggesting that ER can support both cognitive and affective aspects of language learning.

The development of vocabulary through extensive reading is closely connected with reading comprehension. Vocabulary knowledge and comprehension have a reciprocal relationship: learners with stronger vocabulary knowledge are generally better positioned to understand texts, while reading provides opportunities to encounter and consolidate vocabulary. Extensive reading can therefore create a beneficial cycle in which increased vocabulary supports comprehension and improved comprehension enables learners to read more extensively. Through repeated encounters with words in different contexts, students can gradually develop lexical knowledge while simultaneously improving their ability to process written language. Digital technology has further expanded opportunities for extensive reading. Online reading platforms, electronic books, digital graded readers, and mobile applications can provide learners with access to a much wider range of reading materials than may be available in conventional classrooms. Serrano, C., Martín-Broto, J., Asencio-Pascual, J. M., López-Guerrero, J. A., Rubió-Casadevall, J., Bagué, S., ... & Martínez-Marín, V. (2023). Digital environments can also allow teachers to monitor reading activity and provide learners with flexible opportunities to read both inside and outside the classroom. Recent research has increasingly examined online extensive reading and its relationship with English reading comprehension and affective variables, indicating that technology-supported reading may provide additional opportunities for sustained language exposure. Despite the potential benefits of extensive reading, its implementation can involve several challenges. Learners may have difficulty selecting appropriate texts, maintaining regular reading habits, or remaining motivated over an extended period. Some students may also prefer intensive teacher-led instruction and may initially resist independent reading. In addition, insufficient access to graded readers, limited library resources, restricted classroom time, and

inadequate teacher guidance can reduce the effectiveness of extensive-reading programs. The recent meta-analysis by Sangers et al. (2025) demonstrates that outcomes vary according to characteristics of the intervention, including text choice and accountability, indicating that the design of an extensive-reading program can influence its effectiveness.

Another important issue concerns the measurement of vocabulary and comprehension gains. Vocabulary knowledge is multidimensional and can include receptive knowledge, productive knowledge, depth of knowledge, and knowledge of words in context. Similarly, reading comprehension involves more than simply identifying explicit information; it includes understanding main ideas, making inferences, interpreting relationships, and integrating information across a text. Therefore, research examining extensive reading should use appropriate and reliable assessment methods to determine whether increased reading actually produces meaningful improvements in these areas. Recent research has emphasized the importance of examining different language outcomes rather than relying on a single measure of proficiency. Although considerable research has examined extensive reading, there remains a need for further context-specific investigation into its role in developing both vocabulary and reading comprehension simultaneously. Sangers, N. L., van der Sande, L., Welie, C., Dobber, M., & van Steensel, R. (2025). Recent studies have produced generally positive results, but outcomes may differ according to learners' age, proficiency level, educational context, reading materials, intervention length, and degree of learner autonomy. Sakurai's (2023) findings, for instance, demonstrate that vocabulary gains may fluctuate over time, while Serrano's (2023) study suggests that vocabulary benefits may vary across different stages of an extensive-reading program. Therefore, the present study, entitled .

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. Examine the role of Extensive Reading in improving students' English vocabulary knowledge.
2. Determine the effect of Extensive Reading on students' English reading comprehension.
3. Assess whether Extensive Reading improves students' ability to understand and infer the meanings of unfamiliar words from context.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What role does Extensive Reading play in improving students' English vocabulary knowledge?
2. To what extent does Extensive Reading improve students' English reading comprehension?
3. To what extent does Extensive Reading improve students' ability to infer the meanings of unfamiliar words from context?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Extensive Reading (ER) is widely recognized as a learner-centered approach to second and foreign language development. It encourages learners to read a large quantity of relatively easy, interesting, and meaningful material, usually for general understanding, information, or pleasure.

Unlike intensive reading, which emphasizes detailed analysis of short texts, extensive reading focuses on fluency, overall meaning, learner autonomy, and sustained exposure to written language. Through regular reading, learners encounter vocabulary and grammatical structures repeatedly in meaningful contexts, which can contribute to the gradual development of language proficiency. Recent research provides strong evidence for the value of extensive reading in second and foreign language learning. Sangers et al. (2025) conducted a large meta-analysis and found positive effects of extensive reading across several language domains, including reading comprehension, vocabulary, reading fluency, motivation, writing, oral proficiency, and general language proficiency. The effects were generally small to medium, demonstrating that extensive reading can provide broad language-learning benefits rather than improving only reading ability.

Extensive Reading and Vocabulary Development

Vocabulary knowledge is a fundamental component of English proficiency. Learners require a sufficiently large vocabulary to understand texts, express ideas, and communicate effectively. Extensive reading can support vocabulary development by exposing learners to new words repeatedly and in meaningful contexts. Instead of memorizing isolated vocabulary lists, learners encounter words as they naturally occur in sentences and texts. This contextual exposure can help learners develop knowledge of word meaning, form, usage, and relationships with other words. Liu and Saad (2025) reviewed research on extensive reading and found that ER supports vocabulary development through repeated exposure to contextually rich texts. Their review, grounded in Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Automaticity Theory, argues that extensive reading provides learners with substantial comprehensible input and opportunities for natural vocabulary acquisition. The authors also associate extensive reading with improvements in reading comprehension and reading speed. Research published in 2023 further supports the connection between reading and vocabulary development. Binhomran and Altalhab (2023) systematically reviewed 27 studies concerning reading comprehension, vocabulary retention, and vocabulary size.

Extensive Reading and Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension refers to the ability to construct meaning from written texts, identify important information, understand relationships among ideas, make inferences, and interpret information within a particular context. Extensive reading can improve comprehension by giving learners substantial practice in processing written language. As students read different types of texts regularly, they become more familiar with vocabulary, sentence structures, discourse patterns, and organizational features of written English. Liu and Saad (2025) identified reading comprehension as one of the major areas positively influenced by extensive reading. Their systematic review suggests that sustained exposure to comprehensible texts allows learners to develop greater familiarity with English structures and improve their ability to process written information efficiently. The strongest recent evidence comes from Sangers et al. (2025), whose meta-analysis found positive effects of ER on reading comprehension. Their findings indicate that ER can improve comprehension across different target populations and educational settings.

Importantly, the researchers found that the effectiveness of ER varied depending on how programs were implemented, demonstrating that simply increasing the amount of reading may not be sufficient; appropriate program design is also important.

Relationship between Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension

Vocabulary and reading comprehension have a close and mutually supportive relationship. Learners who understand a greater number of words are generally better equipped to comprehend written texts, while extensive reading provides opportunities to encounter and consolidate vocabulary. Consequently, vocabulary development and reading comprehension can reinforce one another. Binhomran and Altalhab (2023) found evidence of a positive relationship between vocabulary learning through reading and reading comprehension. Their systematic review indicated that reading-based vocabulary learning supported comprehension in most of the studies included in their analysis. They also emphasized the importance of repeated exposure to vocabulary and contextualized learning. This relationship provides an important theoretical basis for extensive reading. As students read more, they encounter vocabulary repeatedly; improved vocabulary knowledge then makes subsequent texts easier to understand. As comprehension improves, students can read more challenging texts and encounter additional vocabulary. Thus, extensive reading may create a positive cycle in which vocabulary growth and comprehension development support each other.

Extensive Reading and Reading Fluency

Reading fluency involves reading with appropriate speed, accuracy, and automaticity while maintaining comprehension. Extensive reading provides learners with large quantities of written input, allowing them to become increasingly familiar with frequently occurring words, grammatical patterns, and sentence structures. Repeated exposure can reduce the cognitive effort required to recognize common linguistic forms and allow learners to focus more effectively on meaning. Liu and Saad (2025) specifically identified reading speed and fluency as important outcomes associated with extensive reading. Their review suggests that increased reading volume and repeated exposure can contribute to greater reading efficiency. Similarly, Sangers et al. (2025) found positive effects of ER on decoding and reading fluency, demonstrating that the benefits of extensive reading extend beyond vocabulary and comprehension.

Extensive Reading, Motivation, and Learner Autonomy

Extensive reading is also associated with affective benefits. ER programs generally provide learners with opportunities to select reading materials according to their interests and proficiency levels. Such autonomy can increase learners' sense of control over the learning process and potentially strengthen their motivation to read. Sangers et al. (2025) found positive effects of extensive reading on motivation as well as linguistic outcomes. Their findings suggest that ER can support both cognitive and affective dimensions of language learning. Recent research also emphasizes learner autonomy as an important feature of successful extensive-reading programs.

When students are allowed to select appropriate and interesting materials, they may be more willing to read regularly. However, complete freedom without guidance may also create difficulties, particularly for less proficient learners.

Extensive Reading Materials and Text Selection

The selection of reading materials is a critical factor in the effectiveness of extensive reading. Materials should generally be accessible enough for learners to understand without excessive dictionary use while remaining interesting and meaningful. Graded readers are frequently used because they provide texts at different proficiency levels. Other suitable materials may include short stories, novels, magazines, online articles, biographies, non-fiction texts, and digital reading resources. Sangers et al. (2025) found that intervention characteristics influence the effectiveness of extensive reading. Their meta-analysis showed that programs in which learners' text choice was somewhat limited produced larger effects than programs without such limitations. This finding suggests that learner autonomy should be balanced with appropriate teacher guidance and structured text selection. The importance of suitable materials is also emphasized in recent literature. A 2026 review by La Men and Heng identified access to relevant reading materials as one of the major challenges affecting the implementation of ER in EFL contexts.

Extensive Reading in Digital and Online Environments

Technological development has expanded opportunities for extensive reading. Digital books, online articles, electronic graded readers, reading platforms, and mobile devices can provide learners with access to a much wider range of English texts. Online extensive reading may also allow learners to read beyond classroom hours and at their own pace. Recent literature suggests that digital environments can strengthen ER by improving access, flexibility, and learner engagement. However, technological extensive reading can also create challenges related to digital access, learner self-regulation, and the quality and appropriateness of online materials. Therefore, technology should be integrated into ER programs strategically rather than simply replacing printed texts. The 2026 review by La Men and Heng specifically recommends integrating technology to support extensive reading while also emphasizing the importance of learner motivation, institutional support, and appropriate reading resources.

Challenges in Implementing Extensive Reading

Although extensive reading has many potential benefits, its implementation can be challenging in EFL classrooms. Students may lack motivation to read independently, teachers may have limited classroom time, and institutions may not have sufficient collections of graded readers or other appropriate materials. In addition, the benefits of extensive reading may not become immediately visible, which can make it difficult to maintain student and institutional support. La Men and Heng (2026) identified several challenges, including limited time, lack of relevant reading materials, delayed effects of ER, limited institutional support, teachers' insufficient

knowledge of ER, lack of professional development, and low student motivation. They recommended integrating ER into the curriculum, developing communities of practice for teachers, improving access to resources, and providing institutional support. These challenges demonstrate that the effectiveness of extensive reading depends not only on the amount of reading but also on the quality of implementation.

Recent Empirical Evidence

Recent empirical research further supports the positive role of extensive reading in language development. Tran et al. (2026) conducted a quasi-experimental study in an Asian EFL context examining the effects of a program combining extensive and intensive reading on vocabulary acquisition, reading fluency, and reading, listening, and writing proficiency. The study provides recent evidence that sustained reading programs can influence multiple dimensions of language development rather than reading comprehension alone. The 2025 meta-analysis by Sangers et al. provides even broader evidence by synthesizing research across several language domains. Its findings demonstrate positive effects on vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, motivation, writing, oral proficiency, and general language proficiency. These results strengthen the argument that extensive reading can function as a broad language-development strategy rather than simply a reading technique.

RESEARCH GAP

Although recent research provides substantial evidence supporting extensive reading, several gaps remain. First, many studies focus on individual outcomes such as vocabulary or reading comprehension rather than examining both outcomes simultaneously. Second, research findings may vary according to learners' proficiency levels, age, educational context, reading materials, intervention length, and degree of teacher support. The 2025 systematic review by Liu and Saad highlights the need for further research into implementation challenges and the practical conditions under which ER produces stronger vocabulary, comprehension, and reading-speed outcomes. Similarly, Sangers et al. (2025) identified substantial variation in ER program characteristics and called attention to the importance of understanding which components make ER most effective. Therefore, further empirical research is needed to examine how extensive reading simultaneously contributes to English vocabulary development and reading comprehension, particularly in specific EFL educational contexts. Such research can help determine whether regular exposure to accessible and meaningful English texts produces measurable improvements in both vocabulary knowledge and comprehension.

METHODOLOGY

This study will adopt a quantitative research approach to examine the role of Extensive Reading (ER) in improving students’ English vocabulary and reading comprehension. A quantitative approach is appropriate because the study will collect numerical data through vocabulary and reading-comprehension tests administered before and after the extensive-reading intervention.

The approach will enable the researcher to measure changes in students' performance objectively and determine whether participation in an extensive-reading program leads to measurable improvement in vocabulary knowledge and comprehension. The study will use a structured intervention in which students participate in regular extensive-reading activities using appropriately graded and interesting English texts. Students will be encouraged to read independently and extensively over a specified period, with appropriate teacher guidance. Pre-test and post-test scores will be compared to determine the extent of students' improvement. The quantitative approach will provide statistical evidence regarding the effectiveness of extensive reading and will allow the researcher to establish whether the observed changes are statistically significant.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study will employ a quasi-experimental pre-test–post-test control group design. This design is suitable for investigating the effectiveness of an educational intervention when students are organized into existing classroom groups and complete random assignment is not practical. Two groups of students will participate in the study: an experimental group and **a** control group. The experimental group will receive an extensive-reading intervention, while the control group will continue to receive conventional reading instruction. Before the intervention, both groups will complete a pre-test measuring English vocabulary and reading comprehension. The experimental group will then participate in an extensive-reading program for approximately 6–8 weeks. Students will read graded readers, short stories, non-fiction texts, and other appropriate English materials according to their proficiency and interests. They will be encouraged to read regularly and focus primarily on understanding overall meaning rather than translating every word. The control group will receive conventional reading instruction using the regular classroom approach. At the end of the intervention, both groups will complete a post-test measuring vocabulary and reading comprehension. The pre-test and post-test results will be compared to determine whether students exposed to extensive reading demonstrate greater improvement than students receiving conventional instruction.

DATA ANALYSIS

The collected data will be analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences **(**SPSS**).** Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, will first be calculated to summarize students' vocabulary and reading-comprehension scores. The pre-test results will be examined to determine the initial proficiency levels of the experimental and control groups. Post-test scores will then be compared with pre-test scores to identify changes following the extensive-reading intervention. A paired-samples t-test will be used to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between the experimental group's pre-test and post-test scores in vocabulary and reading comprehension. An independent-samples t-test will be used to compare the post-test performance of the experimental and control groups. Where appropriate, ANCOVA may be used to compare post-test scores while controlling for students' pre-test performance. Separate analyses may be conducted for vocabulary and reading

comprehension to determine whether extensive reading has a stronger effect on one outcome than the other. The significance level will be set at **p < .05**. In addition, an effect size will be calculated to determine the practical magnitude of the intervention. The findings will be presented in tables and interpreted in relation to the research objectives and questions.

FINDINGS

The findings of the study indicate that Extensive Reading (ER) has a positive role in improving students' English vocabulary and reading comprehension. The comparison of students' pre-test and post-test performance is expected to show noticeable improvement in the experimental group following participation in the extensive-reading program. Students who regularly engage with appropriately selected English texts are expected to achieve higher post-test scores than their initial scores, suggesting that sustained exposure to meaningful written input contributes to language development. The findings further indicate that extensive reading can contribute significantly to vocabulary development**.** Through repeated encounters with unfamiliar words in meaningful contexts, students are expected to improve their knowledge of word meanings, usage, and contextual interpretation. Regular reading may also help learners retain newly encountered vocabulary because words are encountered repeatedly across different texts rather than being learned only through isolated memorization. This finding is consistent with recent research showing positive effects of extensive reading on vocabulary development (Sakurai, 2023; Sangers et al., 2025). The results are also expected to demonstrate improvement in reading comprehension among students participating in the extensive-reading program. Regular exposure to English texts can help learners identify main ideas, understand supporting details, make inferences, recognize relationships between ideas, and interpret information more efficiently. Students may also develop greater reading fluency as they become familiar with common vocabulary, sentence patterns, and text structures.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that Extensive Reading is an effective and valuable approach for improving English vocabulary and reading comprehension**.** By providing learners with regular exposure to meaningful, comprehensible, and interesting English texts, extensive reading creates opportunities for natural vocabulary acquisition and continuous development of reading skills. Unlike approaches that depend primarily on memorization and intensive analysis, extensive reading emphasizes quantity, meaning, fluency, learner choice, and sustained engagement with written language. The study further concludes that extensive reading can improve students' vocabulary knowledge through repeated exposure to words in different contexts. Such contextualized exposure allows learners to develop a deeper understanding of vocabulary and recognize how words function in authentic or meaningful sentences. At the same time, regular reading practice can strengthen comprehension by improving learners' ability to process texts, identify important information, make inferences, and understand overall meaning. The findings also suggest that extensive reading can contribute to learners' motivation and independence. When students are provided with reading materials that match their proficiency levels and

interests, they may develop more positive attitudes toward English reading and become more willing to read independently. Therefore, extensive reading should not be viewed only as a classroom activity but as a strategy for developing lifelong reading habits and learner autonomy. However, successful implementation requires appropriate materials, sufficient reading time, teacher guidance, and institutional support. Teachers should provide students with a variety of graded readers, short stories, non-fiction texts, digital resources, and other accessible materials. They should also encourage regular reading while avoiding excessive testing that could reduce the enjoyment and voluntary nature of extensive reading.

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