

EXTENSIVE READING AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO VOCABULARY GROWTH IN EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the contribution of extensive reading to vocabulary growth in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners through a literature review approach. The method used was a literature review, reviewing various relevant scientific articles, books, and research reports related to extensive reading practices and vocabulary acquisition. The results of the study indicate that extensive reading has a significant impact on increasing the number and quality of learners' vocabulary, primarily through repeated exposure to words in meaningful contexts. Furthermore, reading activities that are independent, enjoyable, and appropriate to the learner's ability level have been shown to increase learning motivation and strengthen long-term vocabulary retention. Factors such as selecting appropriate reading materials, reading frequency, and a supportive learning environment also play important roles in optimizing learning outcomes. Thus, extensive reading can be an effective strategy for vocabulary development for EFL learners when implemented consistently and in a structured manner.

Keywords: Extensive Reading, Vocabulary Growth, EFL Learners, Language Acquisition

INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalization and the rapid development of information technology, English language proficiency has become a crucial competency for students, particularly in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environment. English serves not only as a tool for international communication but also as a

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means of accessing science, technology, and various global information sources. However, one of the main challenges faced by EFL learners is limited vocabulary mastery. Vocabulary is the foundation of language skills; without adequate vocabulary mastery, students will struggle to understand texts, communicate effectively, and express their ideas orally and in writing (Arifin & Huy, 2025).

Vocabulary mastery cannot be acquired instantly but rather through a continuous process and consistent exposure to the target language. In classroom learning practices, methods often focus on isolated vocabulary memorization or mechanical learning, thus lacking meaningful context for students. As a result, learned vocabulary is difficult to retain long-term and difficult to apply in real-life situations (Elvriza & Nurcholis, 2025). Therefore, a more effective, contextual learning approach is needed, one that increases student engagement in the language learning process.

One approach considered effective in improving vocabulary mastery is extensive reading. Extensive reading is the activity of reading large volumes of text at a level of difficulty appropriate to the reader's ability, carried out independently and continuously. Through extensive reading, students are exposed to a variety of vocabulary-rich texts in natural contexts, enabling them to implicitly understand word meanings without always having to rely on translations or direct explanations from the teacher. This approach also provides opportunities for students to develop reading habits, increase learning motivation, and broaden their horizons (Qizi, 2025).

Within the framework of EFL learning, extensive reading has significant potential in supporting vocabulary growth. Repeated exposure to words in various contexts facilitates more effective vocabulary acquisition, as students can understand contextual word usage, recognize language patterns, and internalize word meanings more deeply. Furthermore, extensive reading also allows for incidental vocabulary learning, a vocabulary learning process that occurs indirectly while students focus on understanding the text's content (Xodabande & Hashemi, 2023). This differs from explicit vocabulary learning, which often feels boring and uninteresting to students.

However, implementing extensive reading in EFL learning still faces various challenges. These include low student interest in reading, limited access to appropriate reading materials, and teachers' lack of understanding of effective strategies for implementing extensive reading. Furthermore, in some educational contexts, assessments that are still oriented toward exam results also hinder the integration of extensive reading activities into the curriculum

(Zhang & Huang, 2024). Therefore, more in-depth studies are needed to understand how extensive reading can be optimally implemented and to what extent it contributes to students' vocabulary growth.

This research is significant because it seeks to comprehensively examine the relationship between extensive reading and vocabulary growth in EFL learners. Using a literature review approach, this research will identify empirical findings from various relevant previous studies, thereby providing a clearer picture of the effectiveness of extensive reading in improving vocabulary mastery. Furthermore, this research is also expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions to the development of more innovative English language learning strategies based on learners' needs.

Furthermore, the results of this study are expected to serve as a reference for educators, curriculum developers, and researchers in the field of language education in designing and implementing learning programs that support sustainable vocabulary development. Thus, extensive reading is viewed not merely as a regular reading activity, but as a learning strategy that has a significant impact on the development of students' overall language skills. Ultimately, improving vocabulary mastery through extensive reading is expected to help EFL learners achieve better language competence and compete in the global era.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a literature review method to analyze the contribution of extensive reading to vocabulary growth in English as a foreign language (EFL) learners. Data were obtained from various relevant written sources, such as reputable international journal articles, academic books, conference proceedings, and previous research reports discussing the concept of extensive reading and vocabulary development. The data collection process was conducted systematically through searches of scientific databases such as Google Scholar, ERIC, and ScienceDirect using keywords relevant to the research topic. Inclusion criteria were established to ensure the sources used were highly credible, relevant to the research focus, and published within a specific timeframe to maintain contextualization with the latest developments in the field of language teaching.

Next, the collected data were analyzed using content analysis techniques to identify patterns, themes, and key findings related to the relationship between extensive reading and vocabulary development. The analysis process involved several stages: data reduction, grouping information into specific

categories, and drawing interpretive conclusions. The researchers compared the results of various previous studies to identify consistencies and differences in the findings, thus providing a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of extensive reading in enriching the vocabulary of EFL learners. To maintain validity and reliability, source triangulation was conducted by comparing various references and ensuring that the resulting interpretations were supported by strong scientific evidence. The results of this analysis are expected to provide an in-depth overview and serve as a conceptual basis for further research in the field of English language learning.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Language Exposure in Enhancing Vocabulary Growth

The role of language exposure in enhancing vocabulary growth is a crucial aspect of language acquisition, particularly in the context of learning English as a foreign language (EFL) (Jahrani & Listia, 2023). Language exposure refers to the extent to which learners engage directly or indirectly with the target language, whether through reading, listening, speaking, or writing. The more frequent and meaningful this exposure is, the greater the individual's opportunity to recognize, understand, and internalize new vocabulary. In this process, vocabulary learning is not merely mechanical through memorization, but develops naturally through authentic and repeated contexts of use.

Intensive language exposure provides learners with the opportunity to encounter words in a variety of different contexts. When someone reads English texts extensively, for example, they not only encounter new vocabulary but also understand how the words are used in sentences, the nuances of their meaning, and their semantic relationships with other words. This process allows for incidental learning, namely the unconscious acquisition of vocabulary through activities focused on understanding meaning, rather than memorizing the words themselves (Enobio & Palma, 2025). Thus, language exposure serves as a bridge between passive knowledge and the active use of vocabulary in communication.

Furthermore, the frequency of exposure also plays a crucial role in strengthening vocabulary retention. Words that frequently appear in various contexts are more easily remembered and understood (Jing et al., 2023). In this regard, the principle of repetition is a key factor. However, effective repetition is not simply mechanical repetition, but rather repetition that occurs in varied contexts. For example, a word encountered in a reading text, then heard in conversation, and subsequently used in writing or speech, will be more firmly

embedded in the learner's long-term memory. In other words, diverse and continuous language exposure can enrich the mental representation of vocabulary in the brain.

On the other hand, the quality of language exposure is just as important as its quantity. High-quality exposure typically involves material that is appropriate to the learner's ability level, engaging in content, and relevant to the individual's needs or interests. When learners engage with material they can largely understand yet find challenging, they are more likely to be motivated to guess the meaning of new words based on context. This process of inferring meaning is an important strategy in vocabulary development, as it helps learners become more independent and less reliant on dictionaries (Mesgar, n.d.).

In formal learning contexts, teachers have a strategic role in creating an environment rich in language exposure. This can be achieved through the use of a variety of authentic sources such as articles, videos, podcasts, and real-life conversations that reflect everyday language use. Furthermore, approaches such as extensive reading and extensive listening have been shown to significantly increase language exposure. Through these activities, learners are encouraged to consume large amounts of material with a focus on general understanding, rather than detailed analysis, allowing them to enjoy the learning process while naturally expanding their vocabulary.

Language exposure is also closely related to the development of receptive and productive skills. In the initial stages, exposure contributes more to receptive skills such as reading and listening, where learners begin to recognize and understand new vocabulary. Over time, this vocabulary will move into the productive domain as learners begin to use it in speaking and writing. This transition process requires time and reinforcement through continued exposure (Sundqvist et al., 2024). Therefore, it is important for learners not only to be passively exposed to the language but also to be given opportunities to practice its use actively.

Furthermore, the development of digital technology has significantly expanded access to language exposure. Platforms such as social media, language learning apps, online videos, and international forums allow learners to engage with the target language anytime and anywhere. This digital environment creates a dynamic learning ecosystem, where language exposure is no longer limited to the classroom. However, the effectiveness of this exposure still depends on how learners use it strategically. Exposure that is

undirected or overly challenging can actually hinder comprehension and reduce learning motivation.

In addition to external factors, individual characteristics also influence how language exposure impacts vocabulary growth. Motivation, interest, learning strategies, and initial proficiency level all play a role in determining the extent to which exposure can be optimized. Highly motivated learners tend to be more active in seeking out and utilizing sources of language exposure, thereby acquiring a larger vocabulary. Conversely, low-motivated learners may require additional support to consistently engage in activities that increase language exposure.

Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of Extensive Reading in Learning

The effectiveness of extensive reading in learning English as a foreign language (EFL) is influenced by various interrelated factors, both internal to the learner and the learning environment. Extensive reading itself emphasizes reading activities in large volumes at a relatively easy level of difficulty and aims to improve comprehension, reading fluency, and vocabulary acquisition naturally (Anggia & Habók, 2025). However, the success of this approach does not occur automatically; it is highly dependent on certain conditions that support the learning process.

One of the main factors influencing the effectiveness of extensive reading is the learner's initial language proficiency level (Anggia & Habók, 2025). Learners with sufficient basic competencies will more easily understand the text they read, allowing them to enjoy the reading process without experiencing significant obstacles. Conversely, if the text's difficulty level is too high compared to the learner's abilities, the reading activity can actually lead to frustration and decrease motivation. Therefore, matching the reading difficulty level to the learner's abilities is key to creating a positive and effective reading experience. Texts that are too easy also don't provide enough challenge for language development, so the right balance is necessary.

Furthermore, learner motivation also plays a significant role. Learners with high intrinsic motivation tend to be more consistent in engaging in independent reading activities. They read not solely out of academic obligation, but out of interest and enjoyment in the activity. This motivation can be influenced by various factors, such as interest in the reading topic, learning goals, and perceptions of the benefits of reading in improving language skills. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation such as teacher support, academic assessments, or certain awards can also encourage learner engagement in

extensive reading, although their impact is often not as strong as intrinsic motivation in the long term (G. Ramiah & Maniam, 2024).

The availability of diverse and engaging reading materials is also a crucial factor in determining the effectiveness of extensive reading. Learners need access to a variety of text types, such as short stories, simple novels, articles, and digital reading materials that align with their interests. This variety allows learners to choose relevant and engaging reading materials, thereby increasing their engagement in the reading process. If reading materials are limited or do not align with learners' interests, reading can become monotonous and less engaging, ultimately reducing reading frequency.

The learning environment also plays an equally important role. A supportive environment, both inside and outside the classroom, can foster sustainable reading habits. The teacher's role in this regard is crucial, particularly in providing guidance, reading recommendations, and creating an atmosphere that encourages learners to read independently. Teachers can also act as facilitators, helping learners select appropriate reading materials and providing constructive feedback without diminishing the free and enjoyable essence of extensive reading (Permatasari & Wienanda, 2023). Outside the classroom, family support and access to reading resources also influence the intensity of reading activities.

Another factor influencing the effectiveness of extensive reading is the reading strategies used by learners. Learners who possess good reading strategies, such as the ability to guess word meanings from context, understand main ideas, and ignore unimportant details, will be more able to enjoy the reading process without relying too much on a dictionary. Conversely, learners who tend to translate every word will struggle to maintain reading fluency, thus failing to achieve the primary goal of extensive reading (Cai et al., 2024). Therefore, learning appropriate reading strategies is essential to implementing extensive reading.

In addition to strategies, consistency and frequency of reading also significantly determine the results. Extensive reading requires learners to read regularly over a long period of time. The more frequently learners are exposed to texts in the target language, the greater their chances of naturally internalizing vocabulary, sentence structures, and language patterns. However, in practice, many learners struggle to maintain consistent reading for various reasons, such as time constraints, lack of interest, or other academic demands (Yao & Wang, 2024). Therefore, good time management and support from the

learning environment are necessary to ensure the sustainability of reading activities.

Technological developments also influence the effectiveness of extensive reading. The presence of various digital platforms, such as e-books, reading apps, and language learning websites, provides easy access to a variety of reading materials. This technology allows learners to read anytime and anywhere, increasing flexibility in learning. However, on the other hand, distractions from digital devices can also be a challenge, especially if learners lack self-control. Therefore, the use of technology needs to be balanced with effective time management and focus strategies (Qureshi et al., 2023).

Affective factors such as self-confidence and anxiety also cannot be ignored. Learners with high levels of self-confidence tend to be more confident in dealing with foreign language texts, even if they don't understand all the words (Maheshwari, 2024). Conversely, learners with high levels of anxiety tend to feel pressured and afraid of making mistakes, which hinders the reading process. A supportive and non-judgmental learning environment is crucial to help learners overcome these affective barriers.

Using Level-Appropriate Reading Materials in Extensive Reading

Using reading materials appropriate to the learner's ability level is a key element in the successful implementation of extensive reading, particularly in the context of learning English as a foreign language (EFL). The concept of graded readers is based on the principle that learners will gain maximum benefit from reading activities if the material used is at a level of difficulty appropriate to their linguistic abilities (Zhou, 2024). In practice, these reading materials are simplified in terms of vocabulary, sentence structure, and content complexity, allowing learners to comprehend the text more fluently without being hampered by excessive linguistic barriers. This aligns with the comprehensible input theory, which emphasizes the importance of exposure to language slightly above the learner's ability level for optimal language acquisition.

In the context of extensive reading, the use of graded readers plays a strategic role in building sustainable reading habits. One of the main goals of extensive reading is to encourage learners to read extensively with a high level of comfort. If the reading material is too difficult, learners tend to become frustrated, lose motivation, and ultimately become reluctant to continue reading. Conversely, when the text read is appropriate to the learner's ability level, learners can enjoy the reading process, understand the overall content,

and indirectly improve their language skills (Rezky Naing et al., 2025). Therefore, graded readers serve as a bridge between the learner's initial abilities and the desired competency targets.

In addition to increasing reading comfort, the use of graded readers also significantly contributes to vocabulary development. Because the text is tailored to the learner's ability level, words appearing in the reading tend to be more easily understood through context. Repetition of vocabulary in various story situations allows learners to strengthen their understanding without having to rely on a dictionary. This process encourages implicit vocabulary learning, which has been shown to be more effective in the long term than explicit memorization (Astutik et al., 2025). Thus, graded readers not only aid text comprehension but also naturally enrich vocabulary.

Furthermore, graded readers also contribute to increased reading fluency. When learners read texts that are appropriate to their ability, they can process information more quickly and efficiently. This allows them to focus on the overall meaning rather than getting bogged down in word-by-word analysis. Over time, reading speed increases, and understanding of the text deepens. This fluency is crucial in language learning because it lays the foundation for developing other language skills, such as writing and speaking (Munir et al., 2024).

From an affective perspective, the use of graded readers also has a positive impact on learning motivation. Engaging and easy-to-understand texts can boost learners' self-confidence. When they feel they can comprehend the text without significant difficulty, they tend to be more motivated to read more. Furthermore, many graded readers are designed with engaging, relevant, and varied stories, adapting to learners' interests. This factor is crucial because interest in the reading material is a key determinant of successful extensive reading.

However, implementing graded readers in extensive reading also requires careful planning. Teachers need to ensure that the difficulty level of the reading material truly matches the learners' abilities. Inappropriately setting levels can reduce the effectiveness of reading activities. Therefore, an initial assessment is necessary to determine students' reading ability levels, so that the selected reading materials can provide sufficient challenge without creating an excessive workload. Furthermore, it is important to provide a variety of reading materials to prevent learners from getting bored and to maintain their motivation to read.

On the other hand, developments in digital technology have expanded access to graded readers. Currently, many digital platforms provide leveled reading materials with additional features such as audio, interactive illustrations, and comprehension quizzes. These features not only increase learner engagement but also help strengthen comprehension of the text. Integrating technology into the use of graded readers can be an effective solution to address resource constraints, especially in learning environments with limited access to printed books (Taye & Teshome, 2025).

However, the use of graded readers also has several limitations that need to be considered. One of these is the potential lack of exposure to authentic language. Because the text has been simplified, learners may not be fully accustomed to the complexities of language used in real-life situations. Therefore, the use of graded readers should be combined with authentic reading materials at a more advanced stage, so that learners can develop their skills more comprehensively. With a balanced approach, learners can benefit from both types of reading materials.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study indicates that extensive reading significantly contributes to vocabulary growth in English as a foreign language (EFL) learners. Through consistent exposure to a variety of texts appropriate to their ability level and interests, learners indirectly acquire new vocabulary in meaningful contexts. This process not only increases vocabulary knowledge but also deepens understanding of word usage in various communication situations. Furthermore, extensive reading encourages independent and sustained learning, thus strengthening long-term vocabulary retention.

Furthermore, this study confirms that the success of implementing extensive reading is strongly influenced by factors such as the availability of diverse reading materials, the appropriateness of the texts, and learner motivation. A supportive learning environment and appropriate teaching strategies can enhance the positive impact of this reading activity. Thus, extensive reading can be used as an effective approach in teaching English, particularly in improving vocabulary mastery, while simultaneously fostering productive and enjoyable reading habits for EFL learners.

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