



Talking past each other: Chinese EFL Teachers' Understanding of Extensive Reading

HONGLI FAN

State University of New York at Cortland

Researchers have long been asking the question: Why aren't teachers doing Extensive Reading (ER)? A lack of knowledge on ER has been proposed as one of the reasons, but there is a scarcity of studies investigating teacher cognition in ER. Using quantitative questionnaires and qualitative interviews, this study examined attitudes and understanding of ER among a group of Chinese college professors. The results showed that these professors held a strong positive attitude toward ER. However, they looked down upon simplified readers, and regarded extensive reading as a means for linguistic study instead of a way for information or enjoyment. Because of these misconceptions, the ER in the mind of the participants resembled more Intensive Reading (IR) done by their students independently. The study revealed an urgent need for teachers in the Chinese EFL context to learn what ER really is and why it works.

Fan, H. (2023). Talking past each other: Chinese EFL Teachers' Understanding of Extensive Reading. *Journal of Extensive Reading*, 10(4).

Keywords: Extensive reading, ER in China, teacher cognition, attitudes toward ER, understanding of ER, implicit learning in ER

Why don't teachers do ER?

Many researchers in the field of Second Language Acquisition have remarked on the effectiveness of Extensive Reading (henceforth, ER) on language acquisition (Grabe, 2009; Krashen, 2004; Nation, 2014; Nuttall, 1982; Renandya, 2007). However, ER is still largely peripheral in language programs (Jeon & Day, 2016; Nation & Waring, 2020; Robb, 2022).

In an attempt to promote ER in classrooms, Robb (2022) reviewed seven articles discussing impediments to ER implementation and noted twenty-five reasons grouped into five factors: materials, time, motivation, knowledge, and culture. The present author agrees with Robb (2022, p.

189) that “knowledge about ER, or perhaps appreciation of the benefits of ER is a major issue”. The present author also believes that if a lack of knowledge is resolved, the other obstacles, namely culture, motivation, time, and materials will all crumble. For example, one cultural issue often cited as a major problem is exam orientation (Huang, 2015; Grabe, 2011; Renandya & Jacobs, 2002; Tien, 2015), namely ER does not result in immediate improvement in exams and therefore it is not well-received in exam-oriented settings such as Japan, Korea, and China. This issue is in fact also a knowledge issue because this reflects a lack of knowledge on the delayed impact of ER (Robb, 2022). ER does take time to have an impact, but what many do not understand is that this impact is long-lasting because it is the result

of implicit learning. Grabe (2011) emphasizes the importance of understanding how ER acts on the implicit learning system. He notes that it is with consistent recurring information in ER that learners build automaticity in word recognition, syntactic parsing, and discourse structure recognition. While Intensive Reading (henceforth, IR) will introduce learners to a new word, only ER will offer the frequent exposure necessary to master all the meanings and functions of that word (Nation & Waring, 2020). When people understand on a cognitive level the power of implicit learning from ER and its benefits on language acquisition, it is reasonable to expect them to trust the process and let ER do its magic over time.

In fact, there is considerable support for ER's effectiveness on test performance. One prominent example is a series of book flood studies carried out over decades and across diverse cultures (Elley, 2000). Evidence from these studies shows that a flood of children's books instead of a traditional textbook helped double the reading acquisition rate of the participants as measured by mostly standardized tests. Davis (1995) carried out similar studies in Singapore with significant improvements in students' O-Level English language examination results.

In China, a highly exam-oriented country, Gu and Johnson (1996) found a tiny group of students with exceptional performance. This group had only three members, representing 0.6% out of 486 college students in the study. Labeled as readers, these students used ER as their primary strategy for learning vocabulary. This group reported using the least amount of extracurricular time to study English and the least number of strategies to learn vocabulary. However, their vocabulary size score was 2.2 times the standard deviation above the mean and their CET Band 4 score (a college-level national standardized test for all non-English majors in China) was 1.8 times the standard deviation above the mean.

When it comes to the other factors mentioned in Robb (2022), namely materials, time, and motivation, the present paper agrees with Davis (1995, p.331) that "whether or not these problems are overcome is a matter of priorities". As a

matter of fact, the studies mentioned earlier were carried out mostly in resource-poor regions such as Niue, Fiji, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Solomon Islands, and Cameroon (Davis, 1995; Elley, 2000). When talking about his experience running an ER program in Indonesia in the early 1970s, Nation (Nation & Waring, 2020) specified that his program then was not at all complicated and it should be easier to duplicate it with all the technology we have nowadays including bilingual dictionary apps, free electronic reader apps as well as freely available readers online.

Though a lack of knowledge about ER has been proposed as one cause for why ER is not implemented widely, there is a scarcity of empirical studies that investigated how much teachers know about ER. Available studies have focused on teachers' attitudes or the difficulties they face (Arai, 2019; Chang & Renandya, 2017; Macalister, 2010).

Macalister's study (2010) touched upon this lack of understanding of ER among 36 college ESL professors in New Zealand. While three quarters of the participants claimed to know the definition of ER, their true understanding of ER was revealed when responding to how they incorporated ER in their classroom. Some saw ER as reading extended difficult texts with an IR approach while some others saw it as speed reading. Many regarded graded readers as inferior and qualified them as watered-down fiction. It was also discovered that teachers were not aware of research on ER.

Arai (2019) surveyed Japanese teacher trainees on their perceptions of ER. Results showed that these trainees had some misconceptions of ER and its practice even though 21 among the 34 participants had experienced ER as students. Participants seemed to have conflicting ideas as to how fast the reading should be in ER and how easy the materials should be. Only 10 of the participants reported having received training on ER in their program.

Researchers have long been asking the question: why don't teachers do ER in their classrooms? What are the difficulties they face? In view of this lack of understanding on ER, the question we should ask instead might be: Do teachers have adequate knowl-

edge on ER? Are they really convinced of ER's effectiveness?

College English reading instruction in China

In China, IR is heavily used in classrooms whereas ER is almost non-existent. In a typical classroom, teachers use IR for more than just in-depth comprehension, they also do exercises involving translation, text analysis, grammar, and vocabulary drills (Gu, 2003).

Interestingly, China is also the country where both IR and ER are offered as separate courses at the college level for English majors. Unfortunately, the ER course is not what ER researchers have in mind. Renandya et al. (2015) examined nine ER coursebooks in China. The study concluded that most of these books "contain reading passages and tasks that look more like those found in traditional intensive reading coursebooks, i.e., short and demanding texts that are specifically selected to teach reading comprehension skills or strategies and provide students with language practice" (Renandya et al., 2015, p. 272). This mislabeling is not limited to the context of China. Nation and Waring (2020, p. 140) point out that "the label of 'extensive reading' has been applied to a very wide range of variables, ..., and without much care". After reviewing 530 articles with ER in their title, Waring and McLean (2015, p.161) note that there is "a lack of a clear definition of ER and the confounding of its construct".

Research on ER in mainland China is in short supply, and to the best of the present author's knowledge, there are no articles available in English. All the studies reported below are in Chinese. Two studies (Li et al., 2004; Wang & He, 2001) investigating non-English majors' independent reading habits were conducted at two elite universities in China. It was found that a major category of "reading" materials used by students in both studies were test preparation materials. Wang and He (2001) also recommended that students not focus purely on meaning, but instead record unknown vocabulary and useful phrases. Duan (2006) echoed the same recommendation in his study investigating independent reading habits among English

majors in a Chinese college. He suggested that the most effective strategy in independent reading was active notetaking whereby students wrote down useful vocabulary, phrases, and main ideas.

These studies reveal that English educators in China in general seem to believe that the main function of any reading is linguistic study. It might be inconceivable for them to do ER where students read for the sake of reading. It is hypothesized in the present paper that it is this lack of understanding of implicit learning in general, and of ER in particular that accounts for the lack of practice of ER in China.

To test this hypothesis, the present study was carried out with twenty-four college professors in China. Using questionnaires followed by one-on-one interviews, the study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the Chinese professors' attitude toward ER?
2. What is the Chinese professors' understanding of ER?
3. Do the Chinese professors implement ER in their curriculum? If so, how?

This study fills two gaps in the literature. First, expanding on Macalister's study (2010) by explicitly asking the participants about their understanding and practices of ER, it provides an in-depth investigation on teacher cognition in the area of ER. Second, it offers a glimpse on the current situation of ER in China where ER research is practically non-existent.

Method

Participants

Twenty-four professors of English in a four-year university in northwest China were surveyed using a questionnaire followed by selective one-on-one interviews. All of them were native Chinese speakers. Among the 24 teachers, 18 were female and 6 were male. The average age of these professors was 40, and the average number years of experience teaching college English was 11.

Instruments

A questionnaire (Appendix A) as well as one-on-one interviews (Appendix B) were used in the study. There were in total sixteen items on the questionnaire. Fourteen items were on a Likert scale from 1 to 5 with 1 being strongly disagree, and 5 being strongly agree. Item 15 was a Yes/No question and item 16 was an open-ended question. The professors' opinions on the following issues were explored:

- a) Is ER beneficial to improve English proficiency?
- b) What and how should students read in ER?
- c) Is ER feasible in the curriculum?

The questionnaire was in Chinese and the professors answered the questions in Chinese. One-on-one interviews were also carried out with eight professors based on availability. The interviews were semi-structured and were conducted in Chinese. The quantitative responses from the questionnaire were recorded and their means along with standard deviations calculated. Descriptive statistics can be found in the results section. All the qualitative responses were transcribed in Chinese, then translated into English by the author. A summary of the interview responses is also presented in the results section.

Results and discussion

The questionnaire

Items 1-8: Is ER beneficial?

With an average score of 4.62 on item 1, these professors strongly believed that ER could improve overall English proficiency. However, their response to item 2 (average 3.38) showed that they were less certain about the power of ER in test preparation.

The results from items 3 to 8 showed that the professors held strong positive attitudes towards ER believing that it improved reading comprehension (4.83), writing (4.63), listening (3.75), speaking (4.13), vocabulary acquisition (4.96), and grammar (3.88). This overall positivity was encouraging.

It was interesting to note that the score for grammar was 3.88, even lower than for speaking (4.13). This seemed to indicate that these professors were weary of implicit grammar learning through reading. This might also help explain why the professors were dubious of the power of ER in test preparation. The highest score was for vocabulary (4.96) which showed that they believed in the power of reading in acquiring words.

For most of the items in this group, there was a uniformity as shown by the high means and small standard deviations. It was understandable for ER effectiveness in listening and speaking to be relatively low because ER is indeed of a different mode. But the fact that ER effectiveness was also low with a relatively big standard deviation in test preparation and grammar showed a common thread that some professors were uncertain about the power of ER in improving grammar.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics concerning the effectiveness of ER (N= 24).

Item	M	SD	min	max
1. proficiency	4.62	0.56	3	5
2. test prep	3.38	1.18	2	5
3. reading	4.83	0.37	4	5
4. writing	4.63	0.48	4	5
5. listening	3.75	1.16	1	5
6. speaking	4.13	0.97	2	5
7. vocabulary	4.96	0.19	4	5
8. grammar	3.88	0.83	3	5

Items 9-13: What and how should students read in ER?

Items 9-13 ask how the professors think ER should be carried out, or more specifically, what to read and how to read. It is by asking teachers how ER should be carried out that we will find out more about their true beliefs in ER (Macalister, 2010).

The average score for Item 9 was 2.46 and the average for Item 10 was 2.79, suggesting that the professors did not favor either simplified readers or classics as ER material. The average for item 11 was 3.04, indicating an ambivalent view toward popular novels like *Harry Potter*. It was promising to know that the professors

believed classics were not suitable as ER material, but it was at the same time worrisome to know that they also avoided simplified readers. It seemed that the professors were underwhelmed by all three of the choices presented here. Then, what did they have in mind as suitable material? This issue was explored further in the last question and also in the follow-up interviews.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics concerning how ER should be carried out (N=24)

Item	M	SD	min	max
9. simplified	2.46	0.86	2	5
10. classics	2.79	0.86	1	4
11. popular novels	3.04	0.98	1	5
12. take notes	3.79	1.12	1	5
13. look up words	2.71	1.24	1	5

It is unfortunate that these professors appeared not to consider using simplified readers for ER. Nation and Waring (2020) suggest that if students have a vocabulary size of less than 3000 words, graded readers should be included in the curriculum. Webb et al. (2017) proposed a score of mastery of 29/30 (97%) at the 1000, 2000, and 3000-word levels for the updated Vocabulary Levels Test. Studies that used the Vocabulary Levels Test to gauge the vocabulary knowledge of students in Mainland China are hard to find and the descriptive statistics are often not reported. One longitudinal study (Zhang & Lu, 2013) investigating students' vocabulary knowledge at a university in Mainland China over 22 months found that their knowledge at the 3000 level started at 20.87/30 (69.57%) at the beginning of their freshman year, increased to 26.5/30 (88.37%) 11 months later and to 27.94/30 (93.13%) another 11 months later. Even with a previously recommended lower cutting point of 87% (Schmitt et al., 2001, as cited in Webb et al., 2017) or 80% (Xing & Fulcher, 2007, as cited in Webb et al., 2017), students from Mainland China still have some work to do at the 3000-word level, at least at the beginning of their college career.

A closer look at the results of item 10 showed that 5 professors (out of 24) still agreed (score=4) that students should read classics in ER with 11 professors on the fence (score=3). This is in direct contrast

with the first ER principle: the reading material should be easy (Day & Bamford, 1998).

It is worth pointing out that recommending classic literature for independent reading is far from being an anomaly in China. In fact, the Advisory Committee for College English Education in the Chinese National Ministry of Education recommended a reading list of independent reading for college English majors. In an article introducing the reading list, Jiang and Jian (2016) stated that the books should be classics with high-quality language. In devising a must-read list, the committee agreed upon *Jane Eyre*, *The Tale of Two Cities*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Woman in Love* as examples.

The average for Item 12 was 3.79, indicating a tendency in favor of note-taking during ER. Eleven professors agree (score=4) and seven professors strongly agree (score=5) with note-taking. This was not in line with the principles of ER as readers' focus should be on comprehension and information, not linguistic studying. Noting down expressions or grammatical structures would greatly slow down reading speed and impede fluid reading comprehension (Nation & Waring, 2020).

The result of this item showed to a certain extent that these professors did not seem to believe in the power of implicit learning by encountering the same linguistic elements frequently in context. This result is in line with the results of the studies cited in the literature review whereby the researchers in China also recommended that students take notes actively during independent reading (Duan, 2006; Wang & He, 2001).

The result for item 13 was 2.71 meaning professors tended to disfavor looking up unknown words, which was in agreement with the ER principles. However, the rationale behind it was not clear. Not needing a dictionary is a different concept from not using a dictionary. Did these professors believe the reading materials should be easy enough so students did not need to look up words? Or did they believe students should push on even when the text was scattered with unknown words? This will be explored further in the interview section.

In addition, the results from item 9 and item 13 seemed contradictory. Item 9 suggested that professors looked down upon easy reading; at the same time, item 13 suggested that professors believed students should not look up unknown words. It was unclear how students might be able to get through these difficult readings without looking up words.

The relatively lower averages and higher standard deviations in all the items in this group (items 9-13) indicated more diversity in the answers. Compared to the relatively uniformly positive attitudes toward ER, opinions seemed more varied regarding how ER should be carried out.

Items 14-16: Is ER feasible in the curriculum?

The mean for item 14 is 4.33 meaning that the professors overwhelmingly believed their students had time to do ER independently. Question 15 asked whether they required independent reading in their classes or not. Seven (out of 24) professors answered they did. It was unclear whether students were reading easy materials for information. It was also unclear whether they had effective methods to supervise students' reading. This will be explored further in the interview section.

Item 16 was the only open-ended question in the questionnaire. The professors were asked to give ER recommendations to college English majors. Sixteen professors (out of 24) recommended classics (*Jane Eyre*, *Old Man and the Sea*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Great Expectations*, *Wuthering Heights*, etc.) or simplified versions of the classics, while the others recommended newspapers and magazines for English learners published in China, or popular novels already adapted to the big screen. The fact that many of them could not provide any titles besides the classics showed that these professors might have limited knowledge about where to find reading resources. This will be further explored in the interview section.

Table 3. Results to questions 14-16.

Item	M	SD	min	max
14. time for ER	4.33	0.82	3	5
15. use ER in curriculum	Yes 7		No 17	
16. recommendations for ER	1. Classics or simplified classics; 2. <i>China Daily</i> , 21 st Century; 3. Popular novels adapted to movies.			

The interviews

To supplement the quantitative questionnaire with more details and clarification, one-on-one interviews were carried out. Because of time constraints, only eight out of the twenty-four professors were able to take part in the interviews which were conducted in Chinese. The questions explored in the interview included:

1. What is your understanding of ER?
2. Do you assign outside readings to students?
3. What should students read in ER?
4. How should students read in ER?
5. What materials do you recommend for students to read in ER?

It should be pointed out that one professor among the eight interviewed was an exception rather than the rule. She studied in Singapore for a year where she learned about ER. She understood the importance of easy material and graded readers. She was also familiar with ER research. In order to incorporate real ER into her courses, during the semester before this study was carried out, she assigned the *Bedtime Simplified Classics* series (a series of simplified classics published in China) at the 3000-vocabulary level to her freshman class, and required that they finish 6 books (average length about 150 pages) within a semester of 16 weeks. To check if students were actually reading, she had them do oral presentations and group discussions in class. At the end of the semester, she interviewed every student in her class. Some students still found the 3000-word-level books too hard to read on their

own while most believed it was appropriate. Unfortunately, because of the heavy teaching load (four classes with about 40 students in each class), she did not have a reliable system to assess her students. The result was a huge disparity among students: one student read twenty books while some read less than five. This professor was an exception and the rest of this section will focus on the results with the other seven professors.

How do they define ER?

During the interview, it became clear that these seven professors were not aware of the first principle of ER: the material should be easy. They acknowledged that ER material should be easier than IR material, but they did not know to what extent. They were shocked to hear that in ER, students should know at least 95% of the vocabulary and preferably 98%. They commented that their ER course books definitely had more than 5% of unknown words. Two professors who had experience teaching ER confessed that they taught the ER course more like another IR course because of the difficult readings.

When asked to define ER, it was found that five of the professors saw ER as reading fast to have a superficial understanding. All of them gave examples of scanning and skimming as important ER activities. In fact, ER is different from scanning or skimming, but similar to reading for general comprehension defined by Grabe (2009). This is also called normal reading by Carver (1992). Examples include everyday activities such as reading a novel, a magazine, a newspaper or an email in the L1 for entertainment or information. In this sense, ER is reading where readers comprehend not only the gist, but also the details; not only the discrete parts, but also the connection and cohesion of the whole. When classroom instruction focuses on IR only, we get the false impression that L2 reading is supposed to be slow and painful. Introducing ER will allow us to experience what normal reading feels like in an L2.

In addition, the participants were not aware of any research in ER. They had not heard of the Book Flood studies, nor any other ER research since then. In summary, though they knew the term ER, their understanding of ER was more like reading a lot of

difficult materials independently while studying the language.

What ER materials to use?

During the interview, it was discovered that while these professors did not have an official ER component in their courses, they did encourage independent reading and often assigned readings for students to do independently outside of class. Most of them assigned readings from the textbook that they did not have time to cover in class. Since these textbook readings were meant for IR under the guidance of the teacher, they were not at or below the students' level. In order to encourage reading outside of class, one professor assigned chapters from *Great Expectations* to her students, only to learn that most of her students copied chapter synopses found online. She used to blame the students for being lazy, but after learning about the importance of accessible material, she realized that the assigned reading was too difficult.

Although these professors learned about the importance of easy material during the interview from the author, most of them still did not trust simplified readings. Two of them believed that first-year college students should start with graded readers, but the other five believed that they should move on to books in unabridged versions right away. One of them said bluntly, "anything easier than Shakespeare is a waste of time!".

Professors again were asked to recommend readings to their students. Most of them recommended publications available in China, such as newspapers for English learners (e.g. *China Daily* and *21st Century*). Although of high quality in terms of language, these newspapers are not the most interesting for college students. They also recommended websites from English speaking countries, such as *BBC News* and *New York Times*. However, these might be too difficult for students to comprehend independently. All of them recommended classics such as *Pride and Prejudice* even though they recognized the imposed difficulty. Nevertheless, they believed students should just grind through classics despite the pain. When asked to recommend some books other than classics, most of them drew a blank. Some mentioned the books that had

been adapted to the big screen, such as *Joy Luck Club*, *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings*, and *The Hunger Games*, but they were dubious about letting students read these “easy” materials. One professor mentioned the simplified Bookworm series by Oxford, but said immediately that they might be too easy and changed her recommendation to *Pride and Prejudice*. It appeared that most professors oscillated between simplified classics and original classics with almost nothing in between. For fear that students would not learn anything from simplified readings, they leaned toward classic literature as a safer choice. One professor’s comment below summarized this very well:

Are there simplified books appropriate for college students? I don't think so. I don't allow students to choose books themselves because they often choose something too easy.

Some of the professors also commented that in this digital age, it was so easy to find materials online that if students did not read, it was only because they were unmotivated and lazy. Professors provided the following remarks:

Students nowadays are too pragmatic. Reading does not help them get a good job nor does it help them get into a master's program, so they are not interested.

The student population in our school is unfortunately not top-notch and our students would rather focus on extracurricular activities such as clubs and sports.

However, the fact that these professors themselves could not come up with appropriate recommendations showed how unfair it was to blame students for not finding materials themselves.

What should students do during ER?

On one hand, all seven professors agreed that students should not look up words in a dictionary while doing ER. On the other hand, they acknowledged the difficulty of their assigned readings and admitted that it would be hard for students to comprehend these readings without the help of a dictio-

nary. They admitted that this might constitute an important reason why students were reluctant to read the assigned materials. They also thought that students should take notes while reading. They believed it was always beneficial to write down idiomatic expressions, grammatical structures and new words. Learning linguistic elements by way of frequent exposure was a new concept to them. They were not aware of the power of frequent exposure and they were not familiar with research on implicit learning. For example, they had not heard of the idea that meeting a word about 10 times in context would help a learner develop a relatively rich knowledge of it (Webb, 2007).

Answers to Research Questions

Answer to research question 1: What is the Chinese professors’ attitude toward ER?

The results of the questionnaire confirmed the findings in previous studies (Chang & Renandya, 2017; Macalister, 2010) regarding attitude: the participants generally held a strong positive attitude toward ER. They believed in the effectiveness of ER in a variety of areas of language learning including reading comprehension, writing, vocabulary, listening, speaking, and grammar. They did seem to be the least enthusiastic regarding ER’s efficacy on grammar and as a result, they were not sure whether ER was useful for test preparation.

Answer to research question 2: What is these Chinese professors’ understanding of ER?

This study differs from previous studies because it showed that the superficial positive attitude toward ER was only a facade. There was a lack of understanding of ER among the participants. More specifically, there were two misunderstandings. First, the professors did not necessarily know how easy the reading materials should be. While they generally agreed that classics might be too difficult for students as ER material, some of them were adamant about primarily using classics. There was also a tendency to look down

upon simplified readers as well as popular novels. Second, the professors were treating ER mainly as a means of studying the language because they believed students should record idiomatic expressions, useful collocations, and grammar structures while reading. They did not seem to believe in the power of implicit learning. Because of these two misconceptions, many professors had trouble coming up with ER recommendations besides classics. Previous studies show that both Japanese and Chinese students commented that their biggest problem was a lack of suitable material (Mikami, 2017; Li, Zhang & Cheng, 2004; Wang & He, 2001).

Answer to research question 3: Do these Chinese professors implement ER in their curriculum? If so, how?

As mentioned earlier, there is a separate ER course in China for English majors, but the course resembles an IR course in its reading materials and instructional activities. The participants confirmed that their ER course was taught more like an IR course because of the difficulty of the readings.

Some participants did encourage independent readings outside of class, but they realized during the interview that their assigned readings were way above their students' current level. They did not know that students should understand at least 95% of the words in a text intended for ER. The "ER" they had been doing was actually IR done outside of class by students independently while taking notes. They were not aware of any ER research either.

Without this most important feature of ER: the material should be easy (Nation and Waring, 2020), readers are doomed to be in a vicious circle repeating the following steps (Guide to Extensive Reading, 2011): 1. Since the material is too difficult, students do not understand the reading; 2. Students read slowly and painfully; 3. Students do not enjoy reading; 4. Students do not read much and reading remains difficult (Figure 1).

This study suggests that a similar vicious circle exists among teachers: 1. Since they do not understand the importance of easy materials, they assign difficult readings to students; 2. When students do not finish the assigned reading, they blame students for

being lazy; 3. They become frustrated with their students; 4. They believe the problem lies with the students and they do not change their own behavior (Figure 2).

Figure 1

The vicious circle of the weak reader

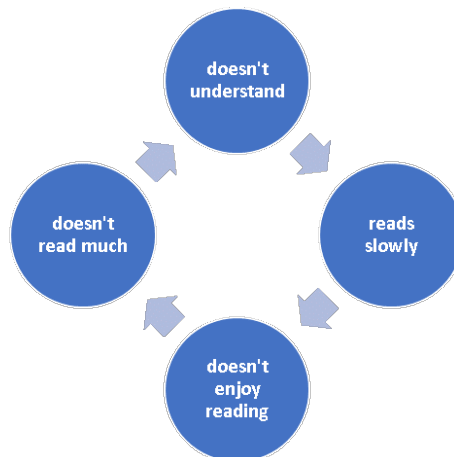
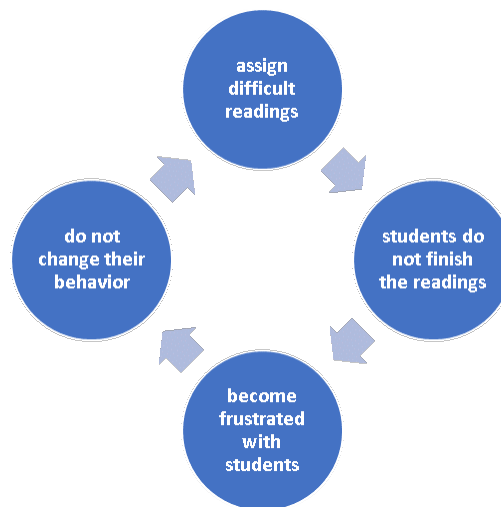


Figure 2

The vicious circle of frustrated teachers



Limitations and implications

One limitation of the study stems from the small number of participants concentrated in just one university in China, so it is impossible to generalize the results. More studies need to be done to involve more teachers from a wide variety of colleges. Nevertheless, the results corroborate the findings in the literature showing a widespread lack of fundamental understanding of ER in China.

Based on the findings of this study, the present paper recommends that ER be part of in-service teachers' professional development as well as pre-service teachers' training program (Arai, 2019). It is imperative for teachers in the field to be aware of the decades of research on ER showing its effectiveness. More important, it is crucial for teachers to understand what ER really is, how it works and why it works.

The present author agrees with Robb (2022) that there needs to be a top-down model to implement ER, but first, we need to convince the administrators of ER's effectiveness. Since administrators are in general not specialists on language acquisition, it is important to educate teachers so they feel the need to bring the issue up to their administrators.

Conclusion

Previous studies might give us the impression that while teachers understand how important ER is, they simply do not have the time, the energy, or the resources to implement ER in their curriculum. The present paper reveals that maybe the problem is that teachers do not really understand what ER is or how it works and therefore are not at all convinced of its benefits. Lurking behind this was a lack of knowledge on how implicit learning works in language acquisition. The professors in the study were found to be skeptical about using easy materials because they did not understand how students could possibly learn if the material was at or below their current proficiency level. Even though most of them strongly agreed with the power of ER to improve vocabulary knowledge, they did not understand the importance of practicing vocabulary already known. This implies a lack of understanding of the importance of fluency and automaticity in language development. The positive attitudes found in the questionnaires reflected nothing more than a general idea that reading is good for you (Macalister, 2010). Without the same understanding of ER, teachers and researchers will forever be talking past each other and ER may forever remain underused.

Of course, having the right understanding of ER alone will not guarantee that ER will

be implemented in the curriculum right away, nor will it guarantee the success of an ER program. There will always be students who are not motivated no matter what the proposed activity. There will also be resistance from teachers who struggle to fit everything in their classes.

Nevertheless, once teachers realize how important appropriate material is and why ER is essential on a cognitive level, it is reasonable to expect them to be excited to implement this "new" method into their curriculum. One encouraging sign from the current study is that many professors involved in the study were enthusiastic about using ER to maintain and improve their own proficiency in English and some of them bought books to read immediately. It is my sincere hope, therefore, that they will find enjoyment in their own reading in English and pass it on to their students.

References

- Arai, Y. (2019). Extensive reading definitions, effectiveness, and issues concerning practice in the EFL classroom: Japanese teacher trainees' perceptions. *Journal of Extensive Reading*, 7, 15-32.
- Carver, R. (1992). Reading rate: Theory, research, and practical implications. *Journal of Reading*, 36, 84-95.
- Chang, A. & Renandya, W. (2017). Current practice of extensive reading in Asia: Teachers' perceptions. *The Reading Matrix*, 17(1), 40-58.
- Chui, S. Y. (2006). A study of the English vocabulary knowledge of university students in Hong Kong. *Asian Journal of English Language Teaching*, 16, 1-23.
- Davis, C. (1995). Extensive reading: An expensive extravagance? *ELT journal* 45(4), 329-336.
- Day, R. & Bamford, J. (1998). *Extensive Reading in the Second Language Classroom*. Cambridge University Press.

- Duan, Z. L. (2006). 英语专业学生课外阅读策略调查与后摄自主课外阅读. [An investigation on English majors' extracurricular reading strategies and a recommendation on teacher-guided autonomous reading groups]. *Foreign Language World*, 3, 19-23.
- Elley, W. B. (2000). The potential of book floods for raising literacy levels. *International Review of Education*, 46, 233-255.
- Fan, M. Y. (2001). An investigation into the vocabulary needs of university students in Hong Kong. *Asian Journal of English Language Teaching*, 11, 69-85.
- Grabe, W. (2009). *Reading in a Second Language: Moving from Theory to Practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press
- Grabe, W. (2011). Extensive reading: Why isn't everyone doing it? *Plenary address at the First Extensive Reading World Congress. Final draft of notes*. https://erfoundation.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Grabe-ERWC1-Plenary_Notes.pdf
- Gu, P. (2003). Fine brush and freehand: the vocabulary-learning art of two successful Chinese EFL learners. *TESOL Quarterly*, 37(1), 73 - 104.
- Gu, P & Johnson, R. K. (1996). Vocabulary learning strategies and language learning outcomes. *Language Learning*, 46(4), 643-679.
- Guide to extensive reading (2011). *Extensive Reading Foundation*. Available at: https://erfoundation.org/guide/ERF_Guide.pdf
- Huang, Y. C. (2015). Why don't they do it? A study on the implementation of extensive reading in Taiwan, *Cogent Education*, 2(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2015.1099187>
- Jeon, E. Y. and Day, R. (2016). The effectiveness of ER on reading proficiency: A meta-analysis. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 28(2), 246-265.
- Jiang, H. X. and Jian, G. Y. (2016) 关于制定《英语专业本科生阅读参考书目》的几点思考.[Thoughts on Recommendations on books for English majors at the college level]. *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 48(4), 606-613.
- Krashen, S. (2004). *The Power of Reading: Insights from the Research (2nd edition)*. Westport: Libraries Unlimited.
- Li, R. F., Zhang, Y., & Cheng, M. S. (2004) 清华大学非英语专业学生课外阅读情况调查研究. [An investigation on non-English majors' extracurricular reading habits in Tsinghua University]. *Foreign Language World*, 2, 35-40.
- Macalister, J. (2010). Investigating teacher attitudes to extensive reading practices in higher education: Why isn't everyone doing it? *RELC Journal*, 41(1), 59-75.
- Mikami, A. (2017). Students' attitudes toward extensive reading in the Japanese EFL Context. *TESOL Journal*, 8(2), 471-488.
- Nation, I. S. P. (2014). How much input do you need to learn the most frequent 9,000 words? *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 26(2), 1-16.
- Nation, I.S.P. & Waring, R. (2020) *Teaching Extensive Reading in Another Language*. New York: Routledge.
- Nuttall, C. (1982). *Teaching reading skills in a foreign language*. London: Richard Clay Ltd.
- Renandya, W., Hu, G. & Xiang, Y. (2015). Extensive Reading Coursebooks in China. *RELC Journal*, 46(3), 255-273.

- Renandya, W. (2007). The Power of Extensive Reading. *RELC Journal*, 38(2), 133-149.
- Renandya, W. & Jacobs, R. (2002). Extensive reading: why aren't we all doing it? In Richards, J. & Renandya, W. (eds.) *Methodology in language teaching: An anthology of current practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 295-302.
- Robb, T. (2022). Encouraging schools to adopt extensive reading: How do we get there? *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 34(1), 184-194.
- Tien, C. Y. (2015) A large-scale study on extensive reading program for non-English majors: Factors and attitude. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, 4(4), 46-54.
- Wang, L. & He, N. (2001) 非英语专业学生英语课外阅读情况调查与研究. [An investigation on non-English majors extracurricular reading habits in Nanjing University]. *Foreign Language World*, 4, 11-18.
- Waring, R. & McLean, S. (2015). Exploration of the core and variable dimensions of extensive reading research and pedagogy. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 27(1), 160-167.
- Webb, S. (2007). The Effects of Repetition on Vocabulary Knowledge. *Applied Linguistics*, 28, 46-65.
- Webb S., Sasao, Y. & Ballance, O. (2017). The updated vocabulary levels test: Developing and validating two new forms of the VLT. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 168(1), 33-69.
- Zhang, X. & Lu, X. F.(2013) A longitudinal study of receptive vocabulary breadth knowledge growth and vocabulary fluency development. *Applied Linguistics*, 35(3), 283-304.

Appendix A Questionnaire

1. 想提高英语整体水平，大量课外阅读非常有效。
Extensive reading is effective in improving students' overall English proficiency.
2. 想考好英语专业四级考试，大量课外阅读非常有效。
Extensive reading is effective in helping students do well on Test for English Majors (TEM) level 4.
3. 大量课外阅读有助于提高英语阅读理解能力和阅读速度。
Extensive reading helps improve students' reading comprehension and reading rate.
4. 大量课外阅读有助于提高英语写作能力。
Extensive reading helps improve students' writing abilities.
5. 大量课外阅读有助于提高英语听力。
Extensive reading helps improve students' listening abilities.
6. 大量课外阅读有助于提高说英语的能力。
Extensive reading helps improve students' speaking abilities.
7. 大量课外阅读有助于提高英语词汇量。
Extensive reading helps improve students' vocabulary size.
8. 大量课外阅读有助于提高英语语法能力。
Extensive reading helps improve students' grammar abilities.
9. 大学生课外阅读，应该读简写本。
College students should read simplified readers in ER.
10. 大学生课外阅读，应该读名著（比如：简爱，了不起的盖茨比，老人与海，等）。
College students should read classics such as Jane Eyre, the Great Gatsby, Old man and the sea, etc. in their original version in ER.
11. 大学生课外阅读，应该读国外流行小说（比如：阿甘正传，饥饿游戏，哈利波特，等）。
College students should read popular novels such as Forest Gump, the Hunger Games, Harry Potter, etc. in ER.
12. 课外阅读时，大学生应该记笔记，记录优美词句，新词组和新语言点。
While doing extensive reading, students should take notes recording useful idiomatic phrases, new expressions, grammatical structures, etc.
13. 课外阅读时，大学生应该查并且记录生单词。
While doing extensive reading, students should look up words they do not know and record them in a notebook.
14. 我认为要求大学生每天课外阅读至少30分钟英语是可行的。
I believe it is feasible to require my students to read independently for at least 30 minutes per day.

15. 我所教的英语课上都要求学生进行课外阅读。
I require extensive reading in my classes.

16. 请分别给您所在大学英语专业学生推荐些英语课外阅读材料。
Please recommend some extensive reading materials for college English majors.

Appendix B

Semi-structured Interview questions:

1. What is your understanding of ER?
2. Do you assign outside readings to students?
3. What should students read in ER?
4. How should students read in ER?
5. What materials do you recommend for students to read in ER?