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# Exploring teachers' practices and students' perceptions of the extensive reading approach in EAP reading classes



Eunseok Ro

Department of Second Language Studies, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Honolulu, HI 96822, USA

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## ABSTRACT

The ability to teach effectively relies on understanding both teachers' classroom practices and students' motivation (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). This study focuses on the extensive reading (ER) approach in the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) context. It explores two teachers' classroom practices and the impacts of these practices on their students' second language (L2) reading motivation and reading amount. A quantitative analysis indicates that the reading motivation of one of the classes significantly increased, particularly in regard to values of intrinsic motivation, while the students in the other classes read comparatively larger amount with less of reading motivation enhancement throughout the course. A qualitative analysis shows that specific elements of these teachers' practices (e.g., the ER classroom activities and the degree and type of teacher guidance) as well as inherent characteristics of ER (e.g., reading for enjoyment, and the benefits to language skills of extensive L2 reading) affected the students' motivation and the amount they read. The study concludes by discussing its findings' pedagogical implications for ER in EAP settings.

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## 1. Introduction

Teachers and researchers have been implementing extensive reading (ER) approaches in their own teaching and research settings ever since Palmer (1964) introduced the term. Though ER practitioners define and use ER differently depending on their own beliefs and teaching contexts, the general consensus among practitioners is that ER requires students to read a lot, as the term *extensive* implies (for detailed discussions of what constitutes ER, see the April and October 2015 discussion forum issues of *Reading in a Foreign Language Journal*). Many ER studies have reported positive learning outcomes. For instance, Mason (2004) reported that students who read a thousand pages of graded readers per semester learned on average nine words per week (i.e., about 450 words a year), and those who listened to stories for 15 min learned an average of 20 words per story (i.e., about 1000 words a year from weekly stories). Beglar, Hunt, and Kite (2012) found that reading one book every two weeks was the most efficient amount for learners to develop their reading rates. Moreover, according to Nation (2015), repeatedly encountering the same words has been reported to foster vocabulary learning. Because ER provides opportunities for multiple encounters, it increases learners' opportunities to gain new vocabulary knowledge, which in turn leads to improved reading fluency and comprehension (Day & Bamford, 1998; Grabe, 2009; Grabe & Stoller, 2011; Jacobs & Farrell, 2012; Nuttall, 2005).

E-mail address: [eunseokr@hawaii.edu](mailto:eunseokr@hawaii.edu).<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2016.01.006>

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Richard Day and Julian Bamford along with several colleagues have written widely on the benefits of ER as a means to an end, claiming that ER supports cognitive and affective development as well as listening, speaking, and writing language skills (e.g., Day & Bamford, 1998; Jacobs & Farrell, 2012; Maley, 2008). In fact, Park (2015) found that the integration of ER in an academic writing class with associated writing activities for one semester improved students' use of content (12.67% increase from pre- to post-writing test), organization (12.25%), and vocabulary (9.25%), as well as their overall language use (7.85%). Park showed that ER could be beneficial to second language (L2) learners even in an English for academic purposes (EAP) context. Other empirical studies that show the benefits of ER in many different areas of language learning are reviewed in Nakanishi (2015, pp. 35–36) meta-analysis.

One question that arises for teachers interested in ER approaches is how we can help our students read a lot. This is where the *teacher's role in ER* and the *student's motivation to read* come into play. Kirchoff (2013, p. 194) defines motivation as the “mental and emotional processes that precede a person's decision to act and the intensity in which to continue the action.” By investigating how we as teachers influence students' reading motivation, we can better understand what teachers do that affects students' cognitive and psychological processes of reading, thus informing our pedagogical choices in order to better help learners develop good reading habits as part of their language development.

## 2. Overview of research on L2 reading motivation in ER

Recent studies on ER have focused on examining students' L2 reading motivation (e.g., de Burgh-Hirabe & Feryok, 2013; Judge, 2011; Kirchoff, 2013; Komiyama, 2009, 2013; Mori, 2002; Nishino, 2007; Ro, 2013; Takase, 2007). According to Kirchoff (2013), for instance, “ER is a teaching practice that is likely to positively influence L2 students' reading motivation” (p. 196). In her investigation of Japanese university students' flow experiences while reading (i.e., “an intense engagement in a text”; McQuillan & Conde, 1996; see Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, for more information on flow experience in learning), Kirchoff highlighted that the learners were able to experience flow and be “intensively engaged” in reading graded readers. She also noted that the main contributor (40%) to the students' flow experiences was their liking of book content (based on their responses to an open-ended questionnaire designed to understand the reasons students experienced flow). This finding implies that university students can enjoy reading simplified L2 books.

Moreover, both Judge (2011) and Nishino (2007) showed a close association between reading motivation and reading for a prolonged time in their studies. The main reasons the participants in these studies gave for reading extensively and voluntarily over two and a half years suggested that they were intrinsically (and extrinsically, for Judge's participants) motivated to read through their ER experience. Similarly, in an investigation of 219 Japanese high school girls' reading habits and motivation, Takase (2007) found that the best predictors for L2 English reading were intrinsic motivation to read in their first language and in their second language. In line with these studies' results, Ro (2013) study also showed that an unmotivated L2 reader (a Korean female), who had never read English for pleasure before the study, started to like reading English books for fun after 24 ER tutoring sessions. The author found that the participant's pleasure reading experience reduced her anxiety and increased her motivation to read in English. The study suggested several factors that contributed to these changes, including both intrinsic (e.g., comfort and enjoyment) and extrinsic (e.g., usefulness) motivational factors. These five studies not only show a positive link between ER and reading motivation, but also demonstrate that ER can lead learners to enjoy reading in English as a target language.

Despite the previous research's contributions, there is still a lack of understanding of what teachers can do to influence students' reading motivation and the amount that they read, particularly in ESL/EAP settings. Existing research on ER and L2 motivation has been conducted exclusively in EFL settings (e.g., Japan and Korea) and has not focused on teachers' roles. One reason for the dearth of ER research in ESL contexts could be that ER scholars tend to favor practicing ER in EFL settings (particularly in Asia) for its *context-specific* pedagogical benefits. As noted by Lee (2011) and Suk (2015), students in EFL contexts (particularly in Japan and Korea) generally have limited opportunities for L2 input and no freedom to choose their own reading in their FL classrooms; readings are often assigned by the teachers to whole classes, without considering students' individual differences (e.g., interests and proficiency). In other words, the opportunity for pleasure reading is often missing in EFL classroom contexts (Krashen, 2004). The shortage of ER studies in ESL/EAP could also be due to general misbeliefs that ER downplays the centrality of the teacher (see Yamashita, 2013) and is better integrated into elementary or junior secondary school contexts (see Macalister, 2008). Other reasons for the dearth of ER research in ESL/EAP contexts no doubt exist (e.g., curricular demands, time constraints, lack of support for acquiring the necessary book resources). Nevertheless, continued research on ER in diverse contexts is critical to gain a more detailed understanding of how ER can be implemented as well as whether and how ER is beneficial, and to what extent, in various situations. In particular, ER's potential contribution in ESL settings with EAP students is an important area to investigate, as these students “often experience tremendous pressure to become proficient L2 readers in a timely manner” (Komiyama, 2009, p. 36). With this goal in mind, the following research questions guide the present research:

1. Can an ER experience increase EAP students' reading motivation? If so, what specific elements of ER contribute to enhancing reading motivation?
2. How do EAP teachers' classroom ER practices affect students' reading motivation and reading amount?

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