

# Promoting EFL Thai Undergraduates' Reading Comprehension and Reading Motivation through Extensive Reading

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## Abstract

The study examined the improvement of EFL Thai undergraduates' reading comprehension through extensive reading and investigated the enhancement of EFL Thai undergraduate students' motivation towards extensive reading in English. One hundred and nine Thai non-English major undergraduates participated in the study over ten weeks. Quantitative data were collected through the pre- and post-reading comprehension tests and pre-and post-Motivation for Reading questionnaires. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to get qualitative data. The results revealed that there was a significant enhancement in both EFL Thai undergraduates' reading comprehension and reading motivation after implementing extensive reading. The findings suggested that extensive reading is an effective method for EFL students in improving their reading abilities, particularly their reading comprehension skills. Therefore, extensive reading should be promoted in English classrooms.

**Keywords:** Extensive Reading, Reading comprehension, Reading motivation

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## 1. Introduction

Regarding the importance of language used for communication, the English language has been taught in schools and universities throughout Thailand. Reading skill is considered the most crucial skill among others as it is an instrument to acquire knowledge. However, ineffective reading methods have been implemented in the English classroom leading to a monotonous atmosphere and discouraging students to read. Extensive reading (ER) has been widely used and implemented in the teaching of EFL. Nuttall [1] believes that one of the best ways to enhance English language skills is to read extensively. Several research studies have suggested the benefits of ER on learners' English reading abilities and reading motivation. ER can improve reading comprehension, reading fluency, vocabulary acquisition, and better writing skills [2, 3, 4]. Apart from developing students' English abilities, ER promotes students' motivation to keep reading and to create an enjoyable atmosphere in learning second and foreign languages [5, 6].

It can be discovered that not many higher education institutions in Thailand encourage students to develop undergraduates' reading comprehension through ER, but through the grammar-translation method even though ER has been a popular approach to promote students' English language skills development among ESL and EFL teachers [7, 8, 9]. Moreover, a small

number of studies have been conducted on ER in Thai teaching and learning context and most studies did not concentrate on a large group of participants [10]. Furthermore, only a few research studies of ER have investigated students' reading motivation [11]. Although the studies conducted on ER in Thailand in tertiary education revealed that ER can be beneficial in promoting reading comprehension, students still perceived no practical value that ER can lead to their success in study or future careers, and less than half of students wish to continue reading extensively [8]. More importantly, Thai universities have not yet integrated ER with the students, but only intensive English [9]. Therefore, it was interesting to make use of ER with EFL Thai undergraduates to examine their reading comprehension and explore their reading motivation and whether ER could be successfully done with EFL Thai undergraduates who were novice readers. With the intention of filling the gap, the present research was conducted and its objectives were formulated to examine the improvement of reading comprehension of EFL Thai undergraduates by ER and to investigate the enhancement of the motivation of EFL Thai undergraduates towards ER in English.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Extensive Reading

Extensive reading (ER) is "reading in quantity in order to gain a general understanding of what is read, to develop good reading habits, to build knowledge of

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vocabulary and structure, and to encourage a liking for reading” [12]. ER is effective in acquiring foreign languages when learners choose the texts that meet their level of difficulty. Day and Bamford [13] determined the top ten successful characteristics of the ER program. They include easy materials, various reading materials with a wide range of topics, assurance of students’ choice in selecting books, maximum reading, speedy reading, pleasure of reading, individual and silent reading, reading in its own rewards, reading under teachers’ orientation, and guidance teachers’ role model. The aim of ER is to read for pleasure in which students enjoy reading the texts they choose by themselves to fulfill their personal enjoyment outside the classroom. Students will be enriched with their vocabulary and knowledge naturally from the context. In order to engage students in further reading and boost students’ reading motivation, followed-up activities should be provided after reading [14]. ER helps students improve their fluency, reading speed, and reading comprehension [15]. It is also believed that students can develop good reading habits, and improve positive motivations towards ER [16].

## 2.2 Extensive Reading and Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is “the construction of meaning of a written or spoken communication through a reciprocal, holistic interchange of ideas between the interpreter and the message in a particular communication context” [17]. The main purpose of reading is to comprehend the entire text rather than to examine every word and sentence. ER helps students improve their reading comprehension by reading quickly and enjoyably with adequate comprehension without a dictionary [18]. It is believed that learners can develop good reading habits, build up vocabulary knowledge, and improve their comprehension through ER which should be continued over a period of time. A number of studies have been conducted on ER in reading comprehension in EFL teaching and learning contexts. Nguyen [19], in line with Nutalak [4], found that the experimental group could read and understand the text better, and could recognize the meaning of the vocabulary than the control group after implementing ER over eight weeks. In addition, Endris [20] supported that the intervention group got higher scores on the reading comprehension test after implementing ER for 12 weeks even though there was no significant difference between the intervention and the control group during the first six weeks. Therefore, it can be suggested that students’ reading comprehension can be promoted through ER.

## 2.3 Extensive Reading and Reading Motivation

Motivation has a big influence on the foreign language learning process and it plays an important role since it provides the initial push to success [21]. When students have reading motivation, they will engage

more in ER because of their positive attitudes toward reading. To successfully develop a reading motivation model for ESL and EFL students, an effective ER program requires four major components [22]. The first component is materials. To lead to an increase in motivation, reading materials must be interesting and attractive. Interest should be a key factor in the selection of reading materials since interest greatly influences reading motivation [23]. Importantly, the level of the books must meet students’ reading competence. The second component is reading ability in L2. Students who have low reading ability tend to have low reading motivation since they are likely to have a low expectation of success. The third component is attitudes toward reading in L2. Teachers, classmates, and activities have a great impact on students’ attitudes toward reading in L2. Students who have more engagement in reading activities tend to have higher reading motivation [24]. Moreover, positive environments, such as a comfortable library, and easiness of accessing and searching reading materials, can increase students’ reading motivation. The last component is the socio-cultural environment. Students who are from the family that actively pursued literacy activities in foreign languages tend to value reading more than students whose families did not [25]. Nevertheless, it is advised that reading materials and attitudes towards reading in L2 have stronger effects than the other two components [22]. All in all, extensive reading, reading motivation, and reading abilities are related to each other. When ER is well-established, students are motivated to read.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Participants

The participants were limited to 109 undergraduate students at Nakhon Pathom Rajabhat University. Seventy-seven participants studied Mathematics as a major concentration and the rest of them were from Primary Education. Eighty participants were female. The majority of them were 19 years old. They enrolled in 1500011 Fundamental English II during semester 2 of the academic year 2021 in the researcher’s sections. Before enrolling in 1500011, they studied 1500010 Fundamental English I in the first semester of the academic year 2021. The majority of participants’ English language proficiency was A2 CEFR level, which was measured by a standardized English test that is aligned to the CEFR and is backed by Qualifications and Assessments International (QAI) in the UK. In order to achieve the research objectives, the researcher selected the samples by using intact sampling, non-probability sampling, which were four groups of students who enrolled in those four researcher’s sections.

### 3.2 Research Instruments

The instruments were pre- and post-reading comprehension tests consisting of six passages selected

from the textbooks published by reputable publishers which clearly stated that the contents and the passages were appropriate for A2 CEFR level. The reading comprehension test had 45 questions with each question worth one point. The pre- and post-MRQ on the 5 Likert's scale consisting of 26 statements were adapted from the Motivations for Reading Questionnaire (MRQ) constructed by Wigfield and Guthrie [26] and the Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) constructed by Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, Mazzoni [27] to be suitable for EFL students. Moreover, 5 open-ended questions for semi-structured interviews were created by the researcher to collect more details and opinions, and affirm the results of motivation towards ER. The reliability and validity of the research instruments were validated by three experts in the field of TEFL, and they were piloted with a group of students who shared the same characteristics.

### 3.3 Research Procedures

The researcher informed the participants about the purposes, the procedures of ER program, and ethical issues. They were given consent forms and were informed that they could withdraw at any time without negative consequences. Then, a pre-reading comprehension test and a pre-MRQ were given. During the study, students formed a group of four based on their choice. Then, they were given a variety of online graded readers with various genres and topics on Xreading. They could select what they wanted to read by themselves, and were requested to read at least 5 graded readers from level 6 – 9, (A2 – B1 CEFR level) in their leisure time. After finishing each graded reader, they took an online quick quiz and recorded what they read on a reading record individually to recheck their comprehension. Plus, a 25-minute group discussion was allocated to talk about the summary, their favorite character, the most interesting thing, and difficulties and challenges to gauge their reading comprehension. At the final stage, students were asked to take a post-reading comprehension test and a post-MRQ. Finally, 12 students were randomly selected for the semi-structured interviews related to their motivation toward ER. The interview was conducted in Thai in order for students to feel comfortable, to give clear explanations, and not to have any language barrier.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

The SPSS was used to analyze data obtained from pre- and post-reading comprehension tests by using t-test for dependent samples in order to get descriptive statistics, as well as the pre- and post-MRQ. Moreover, data obtained from the open-ended questions from the semi-structured interview were transcribed and analyzed by using content analysis, and were summed up using a grouping technique.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Results from Pre- and Post-Reading Comprehension Test

Table 1 shows that the mean score of the pre-reading comprehension test was 20.64 (SD = 7.968). After implementing ER, the mean score of the post-reading comprehension test was 31.55 (SD = 7.045). The mean score of the post-reading comprehension test was higher than the mean score of the pre-reading comprehension test, and the significant difference was found at the .05 level ( $t = 18.641$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). The result indicated that EFL Thai undergraduates' reading comprehension has increased significantly. It can be suggested that ER helped EFL Thai undergraduates promote their reading comprehension.

The findings of the study were correlated with the results of previous studies which found that Thai and EFL students' reading comprehension can be enhanced through ER [9, 10, 15, 20]. One of the possible reasons that ER could help students improve their reading comprehension was because students could select the graded readers they were interested in by themselves [13, 20]. Providing students with a wide variety of reading materials is the foundation of a successful reading program [28]. Another possible reason was group work activities. They are useful components of language practice activities that allow students to enjoy learning languages with their peers [29]. To do ER effectively in order to improve students' reading comprehension, engaging in a group discussion with their peers and teacher was necessary when performing ER tasks since it helped students verify their understanding [11, 30]. Self-logs were also important to promote students' reading comprehension. Although reading logs was a bit tiring due to a lot of assignments from other courses, students agreed that self-logs also forced students to read regularly [31]. From the interview questions, most students agreed that reading for pleasure is a great way to improve their English language proficiency, specifically in reading comprehension skills.

### 4.2 Results from Pre- and Post-Motivation for Reading Questionnaire

#### 4.2.1 The Overall Motivation Towards Extensive Reading

Table 2 revealed that the mean score of overall reading motivation before implementing ER was 3.25 (SD = 0.510) while the mean score after implementing ER was higher, accounting for 3.44 (SD = 0.444). The mean score of pre- and post-reading motivation towards ER was significantly different at the .05 level ( $t = 2.972$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ). Therefore, the results of paired t-test indicated that EFL Thai undergraduates' overall reading motivation after implementing ER was higher. It can be concluded that EFL Thai undergraduates' overall motivation towards ER was enhanced after the implementation.

**Table 1.** The overall mean, standard deviation, and mean differences of EFL Thai undergraduates' reading comprehension test before and after implementing ER

Reading Test	Students (N)	Pre-test		Post-test		Mean diff.	SD	t-value	p
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
Reading Comprehension Test	109	20.64	7.968	31.55	7.045	10.908	6.109	18.641	.000*

\*Significant at the .05 level ( $p < 0.05$ )

**Table 2.** The overall mean, standard deviation, and mean differences of EFL Thai undergraduates' reading motivation before and after implementing ER

Motivation for Reading Questionnaire	Students (N)	Before Implementing ER		After Implementing ER		Mean diff.	SD	t-value	p
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
Motivation towards Extensive Reading	109	3.25	0.510	3.44	0.444	0.19	0.670	2.972	.004*

\*Significant at the .05 level ( $p < 0.05$ )

#### 4.2.2 Each Aspect of Reading Motivation

Apart from the overall motivation towards ER, three aspects of reading motivation were also administered and analyzed quantitatively.

Table 3 revealed that the post-MRQ mean score was significantly higher than the pre-MRQ mean score in two aspects of reading motivation – Competence and Reading Efficacy, and Achievement Values and Goals. Regarding Competence and Reading Efficacy, the mean score from pre- and post-MRQ were 2.89 and 3.12, respectively, which the significant difference was found at .05 level ( $t = 2.788$ ,  $p = 0.006$ ). Another aspect of reading motivation which the significant difference was found at .05 level ( $t = 3.429$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) was Achievement Values and Goals which the mean score from pre- and post-MRQ were 3.59 and 3.81, respectively. In terms of Social Aspect of Reading, the mean scores from pre- and post-MRQ were 3.26 and 3.39, respectively. Unlike other aspects of reading motivation, the significant difference was not found at .05 level ( $t = 1.671$ ,  $p = 0.098$ ). Thus, it can be concluded that ER had a large effect on students' reading motivation of Competence and Reading Efficacy, and Achievement Values and Goals.

The findings of the study were correlated with the results of previous studies. Extrinsic academic compliance, extrinsic test compliance, and intrinsic motivation were the first three highest that helped drive students to read [30]. Uraiman [14] and Anh [32] advised that the importance of reading, extrinsic utility value of reading, intrinsic value of reading, and reading efficacy could be influenced by ER.

Competence and Reading Efficacy increases when students choose the graded readers by themselves and monitor their own progress since challenges arise [33]. It was supported that students' motivation tended to increase when students read challenging books even though the books' level was a bit further than their language competence [34]. Quizzes and reading logs or book reports are the most common forms of monitoring or checking student reading. When students committed to goals, they felt challenged to attain goals leading to forming a virtuous cycle of reading and in-

creasing reading motivation [13]. From the interviews, students agreed that they wanted to select the books by themselves and it led to the willingness to engage with complex reading materials. Plus, a wide variety of reading materials helped increase their motivation toward ER since they had more than one interest.

In terms of Achievement Values and Goals, curiosity has a great influence on driving students to read. The more reading materials attract students' curiosity, the more motivation rapidly increases [35]. In addition, the compliments and positive feedback from teachers and friends encouraged and motivated them to perform well in ER. Reading recognition is one of the main reasons that foster students to read more and even better since they will feel proud when they receive recognition from teachers, friends, and parents [26, 36]. Regarding the interview results, students agreed that teachers and classmates had a big influence on who got them interested and excited about reading English-graded readers.

Social Aspect of Reading emerged as the weakest component of reading motivation of ER among the three dimensions. It was suggested that the influence of peers on students' reading motivation weakens in the late teens, and students perceived reading not as a social activity, but more individualized [37]. Students probably don't prefer to read as their social activity. They read because they are interested in the topic or enjoy reading, not because they want to spend time reading with peers and family or to connect with their groups [38]. However, although the enjoyment of working with peers and teachers can improve students' reading comprehension, it was not sufficient to increase their social aspect of reading motivation [11, 30]. To promote this, cooperative group work should be added more sufficiently so that students have more chances to discuss and share their ideas with their peers. Moreover, reading compliance was relatively low since students have to read because they are assigned to do the assignment. In this study, students did ER voluntarily since students made their own decision to participate in ER and they acknowledged that it was not a requirement and did not have any effect

**Table 3.** The mean, standard deviation, and mean differences of EFL Thai undergraduates' reading motivation of each aspect of reading motivation before and after implementing ER

Aspect of Reading Motivation	Before Implementing ER		After Implementing ER		t-value	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Competence and Reading Efficacy	2.89	0.604	3.12	0.587	2.788	0.006*
Achievement Values and Goals	3.59	0.597	3.81	0.549	3.429	0.001*
Social Aspect of Reading	3.26	0.586	3.39	0.557	1.671	0.098

on any subjects they were studying. Therefore, they were committed to reading the graded readers on the specified amount and completing them by the specified deadline.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendation

This study aimed to examine the improvement of reading comprehension of EFL Thai undergraduates by implementing ER, and to investigate the motivation of EFL Thai undergraduates toward ER. The results obtained from the pre- and post-reading comprehension tests revealed that ER affected the students' reading comprehension positively. Moreover, the results from the pre- and post-MRQ showed the students' positive effects toward ER. Achievement values and goals reading, and competence and reading efficacy were the main reading aspects that were motivated by ER.

The researcher tried to set an appropriate ER program according to Day Bamford [22], including a number of books, timelines, and activities, for EFL Thai undergraduates, who were novice readers, to improve students' reading comprehension and enhance their motivation toward ER. Firstly, students should select books by themselves as interests greatly influence motivation. Secondly, the book levels should not be too low or too high, compared to students' English language proficiency. Thirdly, tasks should be assigned to students in order to follow up on their reading progress. To do this, students are able to recheck their comprehension and develop their comprehension as well. Recording their reading activities on self-logs is another effective way that helps students develop their comprehension and can be used as a primary instrument. Lastly, teachers should provide students with good reading environments. Specifically, they should be encouraged to engage in reading activities with their peers, and have a teacher as a facilitator. Group work activities help students verify their understanding and had a great time having a group discussion. However, although group discussion can help students improve their comprehension, it is suggested that other cooperative group activities should be added to enhance their motivation toward ER. Moreover, group activities should be done more often since five-time group discussions per semester may not be sufficient enough to enhance their reading motivation. More importantly, although the findings revealed the positive effects on EFL Thai undergradu-

ates' reading comprehension and reading motivation, it is recommended that the study should be done in the long term or at least two semesters. This is to gradually investigate the progress and affirm the outcomes of ER whether or not the results are comparable to the findings of the current study. Moreover, researchers should conduct ER which has both experimental and control groups so that the results can be affirmed that ER can help students enhance their reading comprehension and reading motivation.

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