

## Exploring English Language Teachers' Experiences on Extensive Reading: An Interpretive Inquiry

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### Abstract

This study explores teachers' perspectives and challenges they face in implementing Extensive Reading (ER) activities. It also explores whether extensive reading could enhance students' motivation to read in English and foster positive attitudes toward reading in English. The study involved two novice and two experienced teachers from private schools in Kathmandu. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers. The findings show that while teachers recognized the benefits of ER and supported its implementation, challenges like tough books, lack of libraries, and lack of knowledge about the selection of level-appropriate books for students. The study suggests that for ER to be successful, a coordinated effort and a shift in attitudes among students, teachers, and other stakeholders are essential. This study further attempts to contribute to the growth of future research on extensive reading in Nepal.

**Keywords:** extensive reading, EFL teachers, beneficial.

### Introduction

When I was at school, reading was one of the most enjoyable and engaging activities especially in my first language. In grade IX, I eagerly looked forward to the reading class every day. Through reading, our teachers took us to various places, transcending geographical boundaries. The lives of the characters in the books allowed me to live through their experiences. My classmates and I would spend hours discussing these characters, which became a part of our daily routine. We had two separate classes in first language one was poetry and another was short fiction. In the class of poetry, the teacher would simply read out the poem and by herself, she rarely asked for our participation. There was little or no discussion making it difficult to stay engaged.

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In contrary, literature class was more engaging, as the teacher encouraged us to select the particular story that we wanted to read in the class. Moreover, she created the platform for the debates, discussion, role play etc. We were asked to express our opinion and relate the story to our own experience. We were all fully engaged in the class.

Furthermore, through reading, I was introduced to the diverse socio-cultural and economic conditions of the Nepali people. The stories I read were rich with descriptions of Nepali cuisine, clothing, religious values, cultural norms, customs, and traditions, etc., which helped me understand my people better. Reading not only developed my language skills but also made me more empathetic and compassionate. Reading was not only a means of gaining knowledge but also a tool for personal reflection. It sharpened my ability to express my thoughts clearly and ultimately improved both my personal and professional life.

However, when I became a teacher later in life, I was very excited and shared about how reading helped me understand more and communicate effectively. However, my students were hesitant. When I presented different texts, their faces showed lack of interest, I could feel their reluctant to engage. Later, I spoke with other teachers and found out that many of them felt the same way. They knew the importance of reading yet they were stressed to teach the text. After observation and conversations with both students and colleagues, a question began in my mind with me: Why do students and teachers lack interest in reading and find it difficult even though they recognize its importance ? I reflected on my own experiences and realized that I had enjoyed reading as a student, but now I saw barriers that prevented others from feeling the same joy. I always aim to make reading less like a task and more like an opportunity and discovery.

In this process, I came across the concept of Extensive Reading, when I was in the second semester of M.Phil. class (ER) and its benefits in improving reading in ESL (English as Secondary Language) /EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms. Moreover, benefits of ER highlighted by researchers (Renandya & Chang , 2017) , (Day& Bamford, 2012), (Jacob & Renandya, 2014), (Phuoc, 2022), it improves reading comprehension, reading speed, vocabulary, writing speaking, and listening nearly all aspects of language.

As I studied extensive reading I realized how closely it is related to the teaching practices of my teachers, with which I was not familiar terminologically at that time. This connection developed my interest in exploring teachers' perspectives on ER as I believe their insights are crucial for understanding how to effectively implement ER programs in the classroom. Therefore, I decided to explore the English language teachers' perspective on extensive reading.

## **Practices and Challenges of Extensive Reading(ER)**

As Grellet (2008) states that reading is understanding the written text and making the required information from it as reading is a core receptive skill in learning language. Krashen, 2006 states, through reading students learn a wide range of vocabulary and syntax. Reading skill is important as it is the foundation of all other skills and it is the basic means of getting knowledge. (Assaly & Smadi, 2015 )

Extensive reading is one of the effective pedagogies to improve first and the second language of the students\learners and many writers have discussed the importance of ER in language learning especially second language acquisition. ER is a supplementary reading where learners are exposed to a wide range of interesting books for learners to read and enjoy (Day & Bamford, 2002). And this reading pedagogy is gaining popularity, recently in the EFL discourse in the Asian context.

The popularity of the ER is visible as there of many associations, journals and conference have been organizing program for ER particularly, and Extensive Reading foundation (erfoundation) was established to foster the extensive reading.

The main objective of the ER is to make learners read to enjoy and not for any comprehension activity (Day & Bamford, 2002).

Extensive Reading is based on the ten characteristics outlines by Day and Bamford. First, students are encouraged to read as much as possible. A wide variety of reading materials is made available, giving students freedom to choose what they wish to read according to their interest. The primary purpose of the reading in this approach is for pleasure, information and general understanding, with pressure of an assessment. Reading is viewed as its own reward and students are encouraged to select books that are easy for them to understand. The reading process is individual and silent that

allows students to focus without distractions. It also emphasizes that students should read at a faster pace. Lastly, the teachers act as a role models by demonstrating their own reading habits, inspiring students to develop a love for reading.

The importance the English for education, job and social status is well known among teachers and students. And reading is a necessary skill to meet the requirements of job, education and social status in our context and globally. Apart from this, reading is one of the most critical skills one needs, to succeed in academic and employment pursuit. Pieces of evidence from the literature review, suggest that ER has the potential to change the students' attitude towards reading and to improve language proficiency.

(Extensive Reading Foundation,2021) describes extensive Reading as Learn to read which means, students read to get information and pleasure, without worrying about grammar, vocabulary etc. In ER students read level-appropriate books in large level quantities, selected by themselves at their own pace (Day & Bamford, 2011, Krashen, 2013, Nation, 2019). Depending on what interests them, learners choose their reading material and enjoy complete freedom to drop the book when they lose interest in the chosen books.

Benefits of Extensive Reading mentioned by researchers are: it enhances nearly every aspect of language proficiency, including reading comprehension, reading speed, vocabulary, writing, speaking, and listening ( Renandya & Chang, 2017, Day & Bamford 2002, Krashen 2006 and more Beniko & Krashen (1997) as researched extensive reading with graduate-level students to check the effectiveness of an ER. Its finding is, extensive reading is not only helpful to students who have a keen interest in reading, but it is helpful for reluctant readers to progress their language proficiency. (Renandya & Chang , 2017) Said though ER is used in many Asian countries like Japan, China, Indonesia, and Thailand. However, Teachers' perspective is hardly heard. This research was necessary to carry out as teachers are key aspects for success in improvements in reading and teachers' experiences can be useful to improve reading among students.

## Conceptual Foundations of Extensive Reading in Literature and Policy in Nepal

The National Policy (NEP) of Nepal, 2076 BS, focuses on improving education by promoting access to libraries and encouraging reading. This Policy highlights the need for schools to have well- equipped libraries with wide range of books to support students' learning. It aims to develop reading culture by making reading materials easily available integrating technology in libraries for an easy access to students to digital resources. It also emphasizes training library staff and teachers to organize reading activities and effectively manage libraries effectively.

The Basic Learning Conditions (BLC) in School Education Sector Plan (SESP) 2020-2030 highlight how important libraries are for building a reading culture in schools. The plan wants schools to focus on improving library resources and services to create a better learning environment. This helps students access to many types of books and reading materials. Libraries help students develop important skills like thinking critically, develop imagination. BLC aims to make students lifelong readers. National Curriculum centers emphasizes the importance of reading that focuses on developing essential reading skills like comprehension, vocabulary building and critical thinking. Therefore, these policies promote extensive reading as it play a vital role to foster love for reading that extends beyond the classroom.

This research primarily focuses on subjective experiences of English language teachers. Interpretative inquiry focuses on teachers' personal experiences, beliefs feelings shape their approach to ER. The perspectives of the teachers' offers deeper insights regarding how these factors could either hinder or enhance the effectiveness of the ER program. By prioritizing the voices of the teachers, this research will contribute to holistic understanding of ER and highlight the need for professional development. This study aims to explore the perspectives and challenges of English language teachers in implementing Extensive Reading. Thus, I conducted this research and it attempts to answer the following questions:

- How do English teachers' personal reading experiences aligning with Extensive Reading enhance their reading skills?
- What challenges do they face while implementing Extensive Reading in their classes?

## Methodology

This is qualitative study which explored teachers experience on reading and extensive reading and benefits of extensive reading. The participants were purposely selected two novice and two experienced teachers in the field of ER. I conducted semi-structured interviews with participants because this method allowed me to understand my participants' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about particular topic i.e. ER. (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Similarly, (Datko, 2015) argues that in this method the participants and researcher talk and it's more like dialogue which is flexible and which can be supplemented by follow up questions to explore participants' experience. Another main tool of data collection was an interview which is guided by interpretative paradigm. The interpretative paradigm helped me understand my participants and their understanding of Extensive Reading from their worldview. Theoretical lens of this study is the engagement theory of (Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1998). The meaning of the study was created through explorations of participants' experiences and my reflection.

All participants are currently working in a renowned private school in Kathmandu Valley, having a minimum of 1-2 years to 12 years of teaching experience, novice means 1-2 years of experience, experienced i.e. 12 years of experience. This research study will focus on interviewing four teachers with varying levels of teaching experience, such as novice teachers to experienced teachers with an age range of 25 to 32. Pseudo names were used to protect their confidentiality. Themes are generated using ten principles of Extensive reading by Day and Bamford and participants experiences.

## Participants Teachers' take regarding Extensive Reading

All the participants shared, they had no environment for ER, but if the environment will be created then, undoubtedly, students will improve their language proficiency. (Jacobs & Renandya, 2014). Secondly, the implementation of the ER program in their class will have a positive impact on students. Furthermore, reading culture is in the school days is crucial to develop an interest in reading (Kamalova & Koletvinova, 2016). To establish the reading culture, it is important to introduced books easier for them and ER policy is give students an exposure of easy and giving a lot of interesting, level-appropriate books (i.e easy books) (erfoundation, n.d.). Moreover, a library, mini

or large is must in school to promote reading culture Reading is an essential skill to develop overall language proficiency thus, the participant had high expectation from ER. All these evidence say that my participants have a positive attitude towards ER, they are and willing to encourage and implement in their English language class, to engage students in meaningful learning. Moreover, the strong belief, regarding the ER to solve many reading-related problems in the English language classroom gives hope to my participant teachers to apply this method as new ELT pedagogy.

## **Understanding and Practices of Reading beyond the Curriculum**

Students should have the freedom to choose the books for them and teachers should be flexible with students and support their decision to quit reading books\text if they wish. But this freedom is not the part in many schools of Nepal. They have to read the prescribed text books of curriculum and other written documents under the strict rules of their English teachers. As novice teacher participants Rama shared “*There were particular guidelines to language learning, and we were limited to those guidelines of teachers*”. This gives a kind of view about the objectives of reading in her school days. It was more exam-oriented, teacher-centered like Bista, 2011 stated in his paper (Bista, 2011).

Furthermore, the success of the school was dependent on pass percentage of SLC, (School Leaving Certificate) therefore teachers provide no opportunity to choose the books and become creative. Menuka the participant shared “*Our main target of reading in language learning was to score good marks.*” Another participant Saraswati shared similar experience she said “*I used to do reading during exam days to pass the exam with good marks*”. This means that students did rote learning, and the method of instructions was mainly lecture. In this kind of environment, students cannot develop their language proficiency. (Bista, 2011, p. 5) Further says, “ELT (English Language Teacher) methodology may not bring desired results unless learning and teaching environment is smooth and supportive for both the instructors and the learners”.

My participants' experiences shows that students don't have the freedom to choose their own reading materials, where they were required to follow the text prescribed by their English teachers. The exam- oriented and teacher – centered approach does not help students improve their language skills. To improve learning especially reading

stated by Day and Bamford, the teaching environment needs to be more supportive for both teachers and students.

## **Practice to Raising Reading Interest through Extensive Reading**

Interest is another basic element in language learning, as the interest of the students keep them engage in meaningful learning (Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1998). Unlike other participants, Kaushila has different experience she was interested in reading and that pushed her to more reading. She shared *“I was interested in reading English related text in my school days. That interest in reading English kept me motivated throughout my college and university days. I used to read a lot of novels, stories, even using the library card of my friends. I used to hide the extra book in between the textbook and I could finish the story in a whole night”*. In contrary to participant Kaushila Rama, said *“I was not interested in reading other than her textbook.”* Swastika also has same experience she said *“I never did reading, other than prescribed books from the teachers.”* Menuka Also has similar experience like being not into the reading.

The motivation has been essential to engage in teaching-learning activities. And one of the features of extensive reading is to engage the students in meaningful learning. (Nation , 2019) Says that to motivate the students it is crucial to provide with a range of level-appropriate reading materials.

The narrated story of participant reveals that if students get the books that they want to read, they will read without any pressure and teachers does not have to put extra effort. Whereas, three participants had no awareness about reading therefore they were not interested in reading.

## **Library is key factor to improve reading**

One of the participants shared, our schools are limited to reading resources, and sometimes it's difficult to get a library in a school. NCF 2007 highlights the importance of library as it is a source of reading resources. (National Curriculum Framework for School Education, 2007) Made a provision to provide rooms for reading and update reading materials. But my participant Rama has an interesting story to share she said *“interestingly there was no library in the school even though I studied in complete private boarding school”*. The smile on her face to express her amazement about the

absence of a library in a private boarding school was surprising to me. This gives me a space to think the works of school leaders and how conscious the school leaders are about their students' reading habit and reading skills. Furthermore, she did not get access to varieties of books to read that hindered her reading skills, as a result, she could not develop an interest in reading.

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## **Challenges and support in using Extensive Reading in their classes**

### **Appropriate Level of the Books to Learners' Ability**

The books in private schools are selected under CDC, and these books are not appropriate as they fail to address the diverse learners in the Nepalese context (Bista, 2011). And participants agreed with Bista, 2011, they stated *"Their students have enough English related books, but these are not level appropriate. The vocabulary is difficult, thus, most of the time they are stuck to get the meaning of the word and to make understand the message is the far fledged thing"*. They stressed that reading is always painful for the students and for them. Lack of level-appropriate books has been one of the biggest obstacles in developing reading skills in English language class.

As a teacher what I often find is the more difficult reading text the better English. And I experienced most of the schools' leaders choose books based on the level of books than the level of students. I and my participant experienced the same, Swostika particularly said: *"malai ta lagcha ki school reputation dhekhauna lai yesto garo books student lai prescribed gareko cha (translated in English: to regard the school position in the market, they prescribed very difficult books)"*. School seems blind to analyze the needs of the students, and students and even teachers are forced to have painful reading experiences at the cost of completing a designed course of school and curriculum. The prescribed books are above the student's level. But contrary to my participants (Day, 2011)says that students should be provided with books i.e I minus 1 means i= current level of English – 1 means a step lower than their current level of English for learning to take place. As per ( Day & Bamford, 2011) this helps students to become more

motivated to read on their own. Furthermore, ( Renandya & Chang , 2017) claimed that interesting books\ texts not only help them to master the reading skills but helps them to explore the world from different perspective.

(Sellars, 2012) States that, the most powerful, reliable, and effective change agents are teachers, and through reflective practice they have capabilities to reform teaching-learning experiences of students and themselves. In a similar way, participant reflects on their teaching reading practices and they are willing to change their pedagogy in ELT in their respective context to improve reading skills. They assumed reading as a crucial skill to develop other language skills in students. Therefore, they are willing to improve the reading habits of students, motivate them to read take them to the library. All the participants shared, we are planning to take them to the library when I believe exposure to ER will help students to have a clear direction in life, will make them active, improve listening and writing etc. Similar to my participant's assumption the findings of ( Renandya & Chang , 2017) proves that extensive is beneficial to improve four skills of language and overall language proficiency.

Further, the second educator Kaushila shared *“I have not heard the terminology, but implemented it in a different form, when, we implemented Early Grade Reading (ER) I found student developed their interest in reading, they read in their free time too with their own interest, they developed their own story and there are many other benefits of it. The most noticeable difference I found was, Grade Three could read better, and express their intentions through writing and speaking than of higher grades like VII, IX. Therefore ER could be beneficial for students to improve English language skills”*

The implementation of ER in school, she witnessed many benefits of ER Interesting books\ texts not only help them to master the reading skills but helps them to explore the world from a different perspective. Thus students should read and as it the basic element in language learning and Children who do not develop the ability to read proficiently in early grades are less likely to complete compulsory education than those who do (Nepal & Maharjan, 2015).

My participants had no environment for ER, and their students too, but if the environment is created undoubtedly, students will improve their language proficiency. (Jacobs & Renandya, 2014). Secondly, the implementation of the ER program in their class will have a positive impact on students. Thus, they favor ER in their English language

classroom. Furthermore, reading culture in the school days is crucial to develop an interest in reading (Kamalova & Koletvinova, 2016). To establish the reading culture, it is important to introduce books easier for them and ER policy is to give students an exposure of easy and giving a lot of interesting, level-appropriate books (i.e. easy books) (erfoundation, n.d.). Moreover, a library, mini or large is must in school to promote reading culture. Reading is essential skills to develop overall language proficiency thus, the participant had high expectation from ER. All these evidence say that my participants have a positive attitude towards ER, they are and willing to encourage and implement in their English language class, to engage students in meaningful learning. Moreover, the strong belief, regarding the ER to solve many reading-related problems in the English language classroom gives hope to my participant teachers to apply this method as new ELT pedagogy.

Findings suggest that students often can't choose their reading materials, which makes learning less engaging. Teachers want to encourage and incorporate extensive reading, but issues like lack of libraries and tough text book is making it hard. However, participants agree that promoting ER can improve students' language skills.

## Conclusion

To conclude, both the teachers have positive attitudes regarding ER and its benefits. (Huang, 2015) Furthermore, my research has come with certain findings. Firstly, Self-motivated, interest-based readings outside the prescribed curriculum, make them life-long readers. Secondly, it is suggested that language teachers perceive that ER is a vital tool for language learning and are willing to incorporate extensive reading in their English Language classroom. However, there are some of the significant challenges in implementing ER with limited access to libraries and level-appropriate books being the major obstacle. Teachers are ready to create an environment in students' reading learning beginning with the mini step. Lastly, students' needs are not analyzed, and reading is taught in the traditional method that makes reading a painful experience for both students and teachers, despite its potential benefits. Therefore, ER could be an interesting approach to teach reading in ESL classroom. Unlike, traditional methods ER emphasizes on making reading fun and giving students the freedom to choose what they read. As an ESL teacher, I am convinced that providing practical ways of learning

reading will help to change their attitudes towards reading.

This small scale study with a limited time frame is a preliminary one and cannot provide a conclusive evidences on language teachers' perspective on ER in general. Nevertheless, it can represent the specific context and place and may be relevant to those who share the same context and place like research participants.

To conclude, ER can be one of the right options in English language class context to make learning more meaningful to students. The more ER program is promoted in English language classroom, the more knowledge will be created about the pros and cons of this approach in the context of Nepal.

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