

Implementing an Extensive Reading Program to Existing Reading Program

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Introduction

This paper describes an extensive reading program and implements it to an existing intensive reading program at a university in Central Japan. The intensive reading program is part of a required English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course that prepares students to take the TOEFL ITP (Institutional Testing Program). Students in this course need to achieve a TOEFL score of 460 or better to meet the study abroad requirements for the program.

Thirty students between the ages of 19 and 20 years old with a beginner to intermediate English proficiency level met over an 80-minute course three times a week (i.e., Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays) for a total of 240 minutes a week over a 16-week school semester. The focus of the first eight weeks is to establish a foundation on all four skills (i.e., reading, writing, listening, and speaking), and on the last eight weeks, the syllabus shifts to TOEFL related activities (i.e., practice tests, test-taking strategies, and answer reviews). Students meet on Mondays for intensive reading, Wednesdays for writing, and Fridays for listening and speaking.

The book for their intensive reading class is *Making Connections Low Intermediate: A Strategic Approach to Academic Reading and Vocabulary* (Williams, 2011), which contains eight units focusing on developing students' lexical, syntactical, and reading comprehension abilities. The reading consists of topics that will most likely be encountered while traveling abroad (i.e., crossing borders, names, food, urban transportation, sleep, music, natural disasters, and leisure). The book uses Academic Word List (AWL) to source the vocabulary items on the reading and vocabulary sections.

In past EAP courses in this university, students have expressed frustration at the low English proficiency level of their reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge achievement. Past teachers of this course have described students' reading speed as slow while reading aloud exercises. However, there has not been any sort of reading speed measurement, and therefore the problem has not yet been addressed. These combined observations expressed by teachers and students led me to recommend an extensive reading program with the intended goals of improving students' reading amount, reading fluency, reading comprehension, and reading vocabulary.

Extensive Reading

Implementing a successful extensive reading program requires having goals, objectives, and associated pedagogical tasks. However, before expanding into the goals and objectives of the extensive reading program, it is necessary first to describe what extensive reading is. One easy-to-understand definition used to describe extensive

reading has its origins in Day and Bamford's (2002) ten principles for teaching extensive reading. These ten principles combined indicated that learners should have access to a variety of easy reading material and an opportunity to read them as much as possible. They posited that the purpose should be a pleasurable experience with reading as its reward. Day and Bamford (2002) also stated that reading speed should be incentivized to promote reading fluency and break the vicious cycle of a weak reader, that of not enjoying reading because of slow reading, which leads to lack of reading, and lack of understanding and results in slow reading. They also said that teachers who want to help their students improve their reading proficiency should consider these principles. Therefore, this program will be based using their principles.

Reading Amount Goals and Objectives

When developing an extensive reading program, it is essential to determine the number of reading students will perform in an academic year (Suk, 2017). Researchers (Beglar et al., 2012; Suk, 2017) have targeted a 200,000-word reading goal for their L2 participants for one academic year. Suk (2017) suggested that reading goals be based on one graded reader per week on a 15-week extensive reading program and provided a scale to follow depending on the number of words read at a certain graded reader level (See Appendix A). Suk (2017) adapted this scale using a table from The Extensive Reading Foundation (ERF, 2009). One problem with grader readers is that it is difficult to determine the number of words. Often, teachers state the number of pages. However, this is not so consistent as the number of words changes depending on the book level read. Instead, one can use Suk's (2017) scale to determine the number of words typically found on a grader reader of a particular level.

For example, if a student reads intermediate book levels, that will correspond to approximately 8,000 words per graded reader. Such student would then need to read 13,000 words per week which correspond to one intermediate grader reader, to reach 200,000 words in an academic year. However, Suk (2017) suggests that teachers set the reading goals high to encourage more reading. Hence, teachers can adapt the reading according to students' English proficiency levels. Therefore, for this course, the reading amount target objective will be set at 200,000 words.

Reading Fluency Goals and Objectives

One of the difficulties of the current EAP course is a lack of reading rate measurements for fluency. Grabe and Stoller (2020) defined reading fluency as "involving a combination of speed, accuracy, and fluidity processing" (p. 274), while Beglar and Hunt (2014) operationalized reading fluency as the combination of reading rate increases

with high English proficiency levels of comprehension. Suk (2017) suggested that reading rate and or comprehension improve due to extensive reading and cited Beglar et al. (2012) as a representative case supporting such suggestion.

Beglar et al. (2012) compared an intensive reading group with three pleasure reading groups. The students in the intensive reading group read about 40,000 standard words while the students in the pleasure reading groups read approximately 136,029.07, 158,993.56, and 200,000.00 standard words. The pleasure reading groups exhibited more significant reading rate gains than the intensive reading group, but their reading comprehension rates were maintained as their rates increased. Beglar et al. (2012) concluded that even making reading rate gains of 10 standard words per minute (wpm) would culminate with more proficient readers.

Beglar and Hunt (2014) compared pleasure reading and reading rate gains in a different study. They found that the group that read 208,607 words gained an average of 32.99 wpm. The second group read 176,490 words and gained an average of 18.71 wpm. Therefore, based on the results from this study and the Beglar et al. (2012) study, it could be reasonable to target an improvement of 20 wpm to students in this group.

Reading Comprehension Goals and Objectives

Nation and Waring (2019) stated that developing reading fluency without comprehension would make no sense and be challenging to define. They mentioned different methods to measure comprehension and encompass the reading section of English proficiency exams (e.g., TOEFL, TOEIC) to multiple-choice measures designed for a particular study. Nation and Waring (2019) also mentioned that comprehension should be monitored and that teachers should make sure that students strive for an amount that is not easy or difficult. Although an exact comprehension percentage was not stated, I interpreted their reasoning to equate to about 80% comprehension achievements on their comprehension assessments. Since the figure has not been defined, I will monitor students' performance and decrease between 70% and 75%. They claimed that achieving higher than an 80% indicated that the text they are reading is too easy for the student, and anything below 80% could indicate that the text is too difficult for them.

Suk (2017) developed her tests to measure comprehension regarding a comprehension test. Her comprehension test consisted of eight multiple-choice questions and was administered to an extensive and intensive reading group as part of a reading rate test. On one side of the test, students read an excerpt from their book and wrote down their time, and on the reverse side, students completed the comprehension questions based on the

passage from their textbook. Just as in the Suk (2017) study, the extensive reading program for this course will also include eight multiple-choice questions.

Reading Vocabulary Goals and Objectives

Although vocabulary learning can result from extensive reading, it is not as efficient as intentional vocabulary learning (i.e., flashcards). It is not primarily a vocabulary learning task. Nevertheless, extensive reading can be an essential source of vocabulary learning as it provides readers with ample opportunities of meeting the same word multiple times (Nation and Waring, 2019). Suk (2017) further elaborates that vocabulary acquisition occurs in extensive reading because of multiple exposures throughout an extensive reading program.

The Webb and Chang (2015) study is one example where vocabulary gains were seen in an experimental group participating in an extensive reading program. Participants in their study made 44% (19.72 words) of vocabulary gain, while the control group following a form-focused course made a 5% (4.43) vocabulary gain. The experimental group read one graded reader per week for 13 weeks in this study. Another example of extensive reading having a positive impact on vocabulary learning is Horst's (2005) study. In this study, the researcher investigated vocabulary growth among 21 adult immigrant ESL students through an extensive reading program. After taking pre-and post-tests, students gained 17 words. These studies support the idea that while it is possible to see vocabulary growth because of an extensive reading program, the number of words gained can be between 17 and 19 words.

In the Suk (2017) study, the vocabulary test administered to the participants consisted of a translation recall test. Participants received a list of 120 words written in English, and students needed to translate the Korean equivalent in the space provided. Although she found gains in vocabulary knowledge, Nation and Waring (2019) criticized that the Suk (2017) study could have been improved by administering a recall test as in the Pellicer-Sánchez and Schmitt (2010) study. In the Pellicer-Sánchez and Schmitt (2010) study, the researchers administered a set of 34 cards with target words written on one side and the same sentence bolded and underlined in a sentence. Participants needed to recall the word's meaning by choosing five possible answers. Nation and Waring (2019) claimed that using Pellicer-Sánchez and Schmitt's (2010) approach would allow the participants to display partial and more strongly established knowledge. Therefore, in this course, I also plan to implement a recall test as in the Pellicer-Sánchez and Schmitt (2010) study to measure students' vocabulary acquisition from the extensive reading program.

Reading Amount Pedagogical Tasks

One of the goals of this task is to allow students to increase their reading amount and achieve a target goal of reading 200,000 words in one academic year (i.e., 16 weeks). Students will be required to read at least one graded reader per week. (See Table 1).

Table 1.

Summary of Goal, Objectives, and Pedagogical Tasks for Reading Amount.

| Goal | Objectives | Pedagogical Tasks |
|--|---|---|
| Students will have an opportunity to improve their reading amount. | Students will read a total of 200,000 words in one academic year. | Students will read at least one graded reader per week. |

One of the issues at achieving this goal for this course is the lack of graded readers. According to Nation and Waring (2019), grader readers are books designed for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. The designers of these books pay particular attention to vocabulary and lexical factors. These books are also illustrated; the plot is simplified to enhance comprehensibility. The books are written as a series with multiple English proficiency levels, and their difficulty increases as their English proficiency level increases.

Nation and Waring (2019) stated that graded readers are written with the most frequent 2,000 or 3,000 words of English. Grader readers use word lists to control the vocabulary they use. However, not all grader readers disclose the type of word list they use. Although grader readers show a growing interest, there is a lack of implementation because extensive reading is not viewed as an important goal. The learning opportunities available from extensive reading are often not appreciated. An extensive reading library can be seen as a cost-prohibiting investment (Suk, 2017).

Extensive reading can be seen as an expensive investment because the amount of books needed to offer an appropriate selection to students is typically a lot. For example, according to the Library Calculator by the Extensive Reading Foundation (ERF, 2018), a school would need to have available at least 170 books for a class size of 30, with 17 books required to be read at an intermediate English proficiency level to reach a target of 232,500 words in an academic year. This number of books roughly equates to one graded reader per week on a 16-week course.

The reading of one graded reader per week aligns with the goal described in Suk's (2017) study.

Reading Fluency Pedagogical Tasks

In the Suk (2017) study, the researcher allocated 15 minutes of in-class scaffolded silent reading at the beginning of the class and gave 5-10 minutes for taking a quiz about the reading. I plan to allocate a similar amount of time (i.e., 30 minutes). (See Table 2).

Table 2.

Summary of Goal, Objectives, and Pedagogical Tasks for Reading Fluency.

| Goal | Objectives | Pedagogical Tasks |
|--|---|--|
| Students will improve their reading fluency. | Students will improve their reading fluency by 20 words per minute. | Students will read and measure the time taken to read a passage. |

As in Suk (2017), I will also provide a reading rate test to monitor students reading fluency. This reading rate test will consist of an excerpt from one of the books they have already read in the extensive reading program, *Footprints in the jungle and other stories* by Maugham et al. (1992) (see Appendix B). The reading rate passage will also consist of a 400-word passage. This constant monitoring will allow the teacher to make any necessary adjustments to the extensive reading program to make sure that everyone is making fluency progress and are improving their reading rates for the target objective of 20 words per minute.

Reading Comprehension Pedagogical Tasks

A comprehension test will be administered every time a student completes a graded reader in this course. In Suk (2017), the researcher administered a reading comprehension test and a rate test after completing a graded reader. (See Table 3).

Table 3.

Summary of Goal, Objectives, and Pedagogical Tasks for Reading Comprehension.

| Goal | Objectives | Pedagogical Tasks |
|--|--|---|
| Students will improve their reading comprehension. | Students will strive to maintain a comprehension score of 80%. | Students will take a reading comprehension test after completing a graded reader. |

A comprehension test sample is also included in Appendix B. Just as in Suk (2017), the test will also consist of eight multiple-choice questions with space for students to write their time.

Reading Vocabulary Pedagogical Tasks

Finally, the last pedagogical task implemented in this course is the vocabulary test. (See Table 4). A sample of the vocabulary test that will be administered can be found in Appendix C.

Table 4.

Summary of Goal, Objectives, and Pedagogical Tasks for Reading Vocabulary.

| Goal | Objectives | Pedagogical Tasks |
|---|--|--|
| Students will improve their reading vocabulary. | Students will strive to improve their vocabulary by a minimum of 80 words. | Students will take a vocabulary test after completing a graded reader. |

The vocabulary test will be in the meaning recall, as in the Pellicer-Sánchez and Schmitt (2010) study. This test will consist of five sentences, and each sentence will have a target vocabulary word. The student will read the sentence and try to match the word's meaning by choosing one of the four choices provided, and the vocabulary test score will be recorded. The maximum score for all vocabulary tests is one point per correct word or 80 words. This target roughly follows the targets achieved in extensive reading programs by Webb and Chang (2015). They achieved a 19.72 word gain over a 13-week extensive reading course. This course is three weeks longer, so students have an opportunity to gain more vocabulary knowledge. The teacher will adjust reading materials if scores fall above or beyond this threshold.

Conclusions

Implementing an extensive reading program to an existing intensive reading program at a university that focuses on improving TEFL scores as a requirement to study abroad can be challenging. Many factors need to be considered, and an appropriate plan should be constructed based on empirical data if some school administration supports it. Some schools would be opposed to changing the status quo unless they can be convinced that the intended changes are performed by someone who already has the experience or can make a proposal based on evidence.

Some teachers might have a chance at making these changes by showing school administrators a plan of the proposed improvements to students in such a program, and this plan attempts to do just that. This program tries to improve various areas: establishing an extensive reading program, reading amount goal, fluency goal,

comprehension goal, and vocabulary goal. These goals are operationalized by their respective objectives and implemented using pedagogical activities.

The resources used to plan the extensive reading program consisted of guidance provided by the Suk (2017) study, reading amount and library calculators, and graded readers scales available on *The Extensive Reading Foundation* website <https://erfoundation.org>. These tools should be closely examined so that the prospective instructor has a better idea on the number of books the library will require.

This course plan relied on various empirical research studies for these implementations. For example, a target of 200,000 words was chosen for the academic year as it was a common goal recommended by a couple of research studies (Beglar et al., 2012; Suk, 2017). A reading rate of 20 wpm improvement goal was defined to meet the fluency goals of the program. This goal used the studies of Beglar and Hunt (2014) and Beglar et al. (2012) to arrive at an achievable reading rate target. This plan also relied on the recommendations of Nation and Waring (2019) to maintain an 80% comprehension target and used Webb and Chang (2015) as a reference to target 80 words as the vocabulary acquisition target.

Although there are a lot of factors to think about when implementing an extensive reading plan into an existing reading program, it is much better to carefully prepare and make changes along with the life of the program rather than depriving students of opportunities to improve their academic and life goals by not implementing an extensive reading program. It might be difficult initially, but our future students will appreciate our efforts.

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Appendix A

Based on Suk (2017; p. 86)

Suggestions for Reading Goals, Based on One Graded Reader per Week for a 15-Week Extensive Reading Program.

| Book Level (number of headwords) | Words in a graded reader* | Suggested reading goals |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| Elementary (401-800) | 4,000 – 8,000 | 60,000 – 120,000 |
| Intermediate (801-1,500) | 8,000 – 20,000 | 120,000 – 300,000 |
| Upper intermediate (1,501 – 2, 400) | 15,000 – 25,000 | 225,000 – 375,000 |
| Advanced (2,401 – 3,600) | 20,000 – 35,000 | 300,000 – 525,000 |

The Extensive Reading Foundation Graded Readers Scale. Retrieved from
http://www.erfoundation.org/scale/ERF_Scale.pdf.

Appendix B

Reading Rate and Comprehension Test

Passage below is from Maugham et al. (1992, pp. 5–7).

The Death of Bronson

In my travels round the world, I have stated in many strange and interesting places. One of the places I like best is Malaya. Malaya is a beautiful place. It is also a place where I have heard the strangest stories.

Once I was staying in a town in Malaya called Tanah Merah. It used to be a port, and it has a small, beautiful harbour and a long sandy beach on both sides of the harbour. When I was in Tanah Merah, I stayed with a man called Gaze. Gaze was the chief policeman in the district. And I was sure that he would tell me some strange stories.

I was not wrong. On my first evening in Tanah Merah, I went down with Gaze to the British Club. We had a drink and played cards with a married couple, Mr., and Mrs. Cartwright. Mr. Cartwright was a very quiet and ordinary man but Mrs. Cartwright seemed to be a very intelligent and determined woman. I did not think that they were in any way unusual.

I went back with Gaze to his villa and we had a pleasant meal. Gaze was rather quiet at first but, as we sat outside on the verandah after the meal, he started to talk. He asked me a question and it really surprised me.

‘If I told you that you were sitting with a murderer this evening,’ Gaze asked me, ‘would you believe me?’

‘I don’t think I would,’ I replied with surprise in my voice.

‘Well, let me tell you a story,’ continued Gaze. ‘After I have told you the story, perhaps you will believe me.’

This was what I had been hoping for. Gaze was going to tell me a story. I sat back in my seat with my coffee and a glass of brandy, and I waited for Gaze to begin.

‘I first met Mrs. Cartwright twenty years ago,’ said Gaze. ‘Her name then was not Cartwright. It was Bronson. She was married to a rubber planter called Bronson.’

‘You were not living here at that time?’ I asked.

‘No,’ replied Gaze. ‘We were living a long way from here in the rubber-growing area. I was a policeman in a little town. Bronson was the manager of a rubber estate five miles away. He and his wife lived in a house there.’

Reference

Maugham, W.S., Sinclair, R., & Milne, J. (1992). *Footprints in the jungle and other stories*. Heinemann International.

Directions: Think about the passage you just read. Circle the best answer. Do not look back!

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>1. The town of Tanah Merah used to be a(n) _____. a. Port. b. Farm. c. Fish market. d. Amusement Park.</p> | <p>2. Where did Maugham go with Gaze on his first evening in Tanah Merah? a. To the amusement park. b. To the fish market. c. To the British club. d. To the mountains.</p> |
| <p>3. What did Maugham and Gaze do on his first evening?</p> | <p>4. What surprising thing did Gaze tell Maugham about the Cartwrights? a. That Maugham was sitting with a murderer.</p> |

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>a. They went hunting with Mr. and Mrs. Cartwright.</p> <p>b. They had a drink and played cards with Mr. and Mrs. Cartwright.</p> <p>c. They met each other at the fish market.</p> <p>d. They met each other at the amusement park.</p> | <p>b. About Maugham's first teaching job.</p> <p>c. How Mrs. Cartwright got married to Mr. Cartwright.</p> <p>d. how Gaze became successful.</p> |
| <p>5. What type of drinks did Maugham had on his table when he heard Gaze's story?</p> <p>a. A glass of orange juice and a cup of tea.</p> <p>b. A glass of milk and a cup of coffee.</p> <p>c. A glass of beer and a glass of brandy.</p> <p>d. A coffee and a glass of brandy.</p> | <p>6. Who was Mrs. Cartwright married to 20 years ago?</p> <p>a. Mr. Cartwright.</p> <p>b. Bronson.</p> <p>c. Gaze.</p> <p>d. Maugham</p> |
| <p>7. What type of work did Gaze have 20 years ago?</p> <p>a. He was a dock worker.</p> <p>b. He was a policeman.</p> <p>c. He was a manager at a rubber estate.</p> <p>d. He was a doctor.</p> | <p>8. What type of work did Bronson do 20 years ago?</p> <p>a. He was a dock worker.</p> <p>b. He was a policeman.</p> <p>c. He was a manager at a rubber estate.</p> <p>d. He was a doctor.</p> |

Time: _____

Appendix C

Meaning Recall Test

Based on Pellicer-Sánchez and Schmitt (2010)

- 1) I went back with Gaze to his **villa** and had a pleasant meal.
 - a) hotel room
 - b) house
 - c) country
 - d) I don't know

- 2) Gaze was rather quiet at first but, as we sat outside on the **verandah** after the meal, the started to talk.
 - a) balcony
 - b) couch
 - c) chair
 - d) I don't know

- 3) If I told you that you were sitting with a **murderer** this evening,' Gaze asked me, 'would you believe me?'
 - a) banker
 - b) killer
 - c) police officer
 - d) I don't know

- 4) She did not look so **determined** as she does now.
 - a) sick
 - b) healthy
 - c) serious
 - d) I don't know

- 5) Bronson was the manager of a rubber **estate** five miles away.
 - a) marina
 - b) property
 - c) school
 - d) I don't know