Extensive Reading
and Graded Readers

Paul Nation · Rob Waring

Extensive Reading and Graded Readers

Paul Nation · Dr. Rob Waring

Preface

Extensive Reading is booming in Asia. In the last decade in North East Asia, there has been a massive increase in the number of schools and education boards helping students to read extensively.

Nowadays, there are international conferences dedicated only to extensive reading and extensive listening; there are extensive reading associations in Korea, Japan, Taiwan and other places; thousands of Extensive Reading programs throughout Asia, and millions of students reading extensively. Moreover, a few years ago there were only a few hundred books suitable for extensive reading, now there are several thousand. So what has led to this huge increase?

A few years ago, many teachers had never heard of Extensive Reading (ER) but now that is changing fast. In Japan it is known as *tadoku* or *rakudok*u, in Korea it's called *Tadok*. Until recently, many teachers believed the only way to teach reading was by working intensively with short difficult texts sentence by sentence, or word by word, and through translation if necessary. This tradition still continues in many institutions in Asia and around the world.

Teachers realized that this only helps students build their knowledge *about* English, and it wasn't really helping them to actually read fluently and confidently, nor read quickly. Importantly, they realized that this knowledge-based approach to reading wasn't helping students do better on tests, nor help them read real-life materials. The skill of reading means fluently and confidently processing a text for its meaning, not using a text as a language exercise.

Teachers are not the only ones to understand this difference. Read what some students say about their extensive reading experiences.

> 'I never liked reading in English before. It was always so hard. But now extensive reading has helped me to read better, it's not tiring and I understand more, too.' *Mizuki Kameyama*

> 'I love reading graded readers. They are so much fun.' *Emily Tan*

> 'My TOEIC score went up 100 points in three month. I think it's because the graded readers helped me to read faster. This time I could finish the test.' *Ahn Jung-Oh*

The extensive reading boom doesn't look like ending soon. In some countries extensive reading and listening is part of the curriculum, and elsewhere it is taking hold very quickly. Even in some 'non-reading' cultures like Thailand, extensive reading is booming too. This is because teachers are beginning to realize that extensive reading and listening are essential components of the overall picture of language learning.

But soon extensive reading and listening will become a normal part of school life where children read fluently as well as study reading texts. Ministries of education in various countries are now deciding how to get students to read more and improve their reading ability. Soon, it seems, extensive reading will be a standard part of the curriculum(http://www.robwaring.org/er/ER_programs/index.htm).

This booklet answers a series of questions about extensive reading and graded readers with the purpose of (1) describing how to set up and run an extensive reading program and (2) explaining why language courses should include an extensive reading program. Wherever possible, the answers to the questions briefly refer to the available research.

Here are some of the questions.

1. What is extensive reading?
2. What are graded readers?
3. How do you set up an extensive reading program?
4. How can learners know what books are at the right level for them?
5. What should the teacher do during an extensive reading session?
6. How can we make sure that the learners are doing the extensive reading?
7. How should I organise an extensive reading library?
8. How do I set up an extensive reading scheme if my school has no budget to buy the books?
9. How much time should learners spend on extensive reading?
10. How many books should learners read?
11. Why should my course include an extensive reading program?

First, let us answer the most important question.

1_What is extensive reading?

The major aim of extensive reading is to get learners doing large quantities of enjoyable reading outside of class time.

An extensive reading program involves learners reading books at the right level for them, and reading large quantities of these books, or other graded materials. These two criteria of materials at the right level, and large quantities of reading are the most important criteria in an extensive reading program.

The essential features of an extensive reading program are, in order of importance,

1. the reading material is at the right level for the learners
2. the learners do a large quantity of reading
3. the learners have some choice in what they read.

For further features see **The principles of extensive reading**.

Extensive reading is sometimes called graded reading, because the learners read texts that are graded at the right level for them and gradually move up through levels (or grades) of texts. The kind of reading done in an extensive reading program is sometimes called SSR (sustained silent reading).

What kinds of reading are not extensive reading?

Some teachers consider that reading long difficult texts is extensive reading, but that clearly does not meet the first criterion of having texts at the right level for the learners. Some teachers use one graded reader as a class text and work through it with the teacher leading the class, but that does not result in a large quantity of reading and does not allow learners to choose what they read. If the learners are not reading many books, then this is not extensive reading,

because "extensive" means reading widely over a large number of texts. Both of these activities are acceptable classroom activities or outside reading activities, but they are not extensive reading.

The principles of extensive reading

The following list of principles which often characterize Extenisve Reading is slightly adapted from Bamford and Day (2002). The order has been changed so that the principles are ranked with the most important principles coming first, and a two strands principle (principle 5) has been added.

1. *The reading material is easy.*
2. *Learners read as much as possible.*
3. *Reading is individual and silent.*
4. *Reading is its own reward.*
5. *The extensive reading course has a meaning-focused input strand and a fluency strand.*
6. *Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower.*
7. *A variety of reading material on a wide range of topics must be available.*
8. *Learners choose what they want to read.*
9. *The purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information and general understanding.*
10. *Teachers orient and guide their students.*
11. *The teacher is a role model of a reader.*

See Prowse (2002) and Robb (2002) for largely supportive critiques of Day and Bamford's principles.

2_ What are graded readers?

The books which are typically used in an extensive reading program for learners of English as a foreign language are called graded readers. These are books which are specially written within a controlled vocabulary and use a grammatical syllabus at various levels of difficulty. Each major ELT publisher has at least one graded reader scheme which consists of several vocabulary levels with several books at each level. The lowest level can be less than 100 words, so that if the learners only know 100 words of English they can read these books without meeting too much unknown vocabulary. Typically however, schemes begin at around 300 words.

Some series, like the Cambridge English Readers, only have original texts. Other series, like other the Oxford Bookworms Series, have a mixture of adapted and original texts.

Some extensive reading programs include unsimplified texts, but it is worth remembering that even texts written for young children contain large amounts of vocabulary that are well outside the vocabulary level of most beginning and intermediate learners of English as a foreign language. Five year old native speakers of English have a vocabulary of around 3000 or 4000 word families and the books written for them take account of this substantial vocabulary knowledge, and are thus not very suitable for learners of English who have much smaller vocabularies.

So, when choosing books for an extensive reading program, it is good to make use of graded readers from a variety of schemes, both fiction and non-fiction and from a variety of levels. It is also important to choose books which tell a good story and which will be interesting for the learners.

Graded readers which are simplifications of existing stories have been criticised because they poorly represent the original story. In most cases this is probably true and it is one of the reasons why there has been a tendency

towards producing original graded readers rather than adapted texts. However, Claridge (2005) found that they were very comparable in many ways. It is best to view simplifications as texts in their own right in much the same way that a movie made from a book is often not exactly the same as the book but is still a very enjoyable experience, and provides very good models of language for language learners.

Because they are written within a controlled vocabulary, graded readers are a tremendous resource for learners of English. There are around 3500 graded readers currently available in print at a variety of language levels. While some graded readers are not very good at all, just as some novels written for native speakers are not very good, some graded readers are works of art. Most tell interesting stories that are easily comprehensible for a learner at that level of vocabulary knowledge.

3_How do you set up and run an extensive reading program?

How do I set up an extensive reading program?

The three most important things to give attention to when setting up an extensive reading program are that (1) there are plenty of texts at the right level for the learners, (2) the learners are given the time and encouragement to do plenty of reading, and (3) there are two strands to the extensive reading program – the meaning-focused input strand where learners read texts which are at the right level for them with a few words just beyond their present knowledge, and the fluency development strand where the learners read texts which are very easy but they read them as quickly as possible.

Very simply, the steps involved are these.

1. Get plenty of books at the right levels for the learners.

2. Set aside a regular time for silent reading, about 20 minutes at first, but later extensive reading should make up about a quarter of the total in-class and out-of-class learning time and should mostly be done out of class.

3. Get the learners to choose the book they want to read.

4. Let them get on with the reading.

5. Each time they finish reading a book, get them to fill in a brief report form or sit a short test on the book, and then let them choose a new book to read.

6. Encourage them to do plenty of reading.

You need to have plenty of books at the right level for your learners. That is, you need some books which contain a small amount of unknown vocabulary for them, and you need some books that are very easy for them to read and which contain little or no unknown vocabulary. At its most modest level, an extensive reading program involves having a few more books than there are learners in the class. So, if you have a class of 40 learners then you may need around 50 extensive reading books. This allows each learner to have a book to read, and allows the fastest readers to return their book and exchange it for another without having to wait for someone else to finish reading. Ideally, however, there should be plenty of extensive reading books available at the right levels.

How do I introduce the learners to extensive reading?

When learners are new to extensive reading, it is very useful to set aside a regular time for such reading. It is important to prepare learners for this reading by explaining that

1. it is a time for silent reading,

2. the main aim of the reading is to understand and enjoy the book they are reading,

3. they should choose a book which is at the right level for them. If a book is too difficult, it should be changed for one which is less difficult,

4. there are two types of extensive reading – reading where there are a few unknown words, and reading for fluency – and learners should do both kinds of reading at various times during the extensive reading program,

5. the reading is not assessed but the learners must keep a record of what they have read,

6. it is important to do large quantities of reading and the best learner is the learner who reads the most,

7. they can look up words in dictionaries while they read, but if they can guess the meaning of the word then they should just carry on without looking up the word.

At various times it is useful to hold class discussions about the goals and issues in extensive reading, so that learners can see the value in it and commit themselves to doing it properly.

The next step is to get the learners doing extensive reading. First, they choose a book which seems to be at the right level for them and which looks interesting. Then they sit down and quietly read the book. They can look up unknown words in their dictionaries if they wish (bilingual dictionaries and electronic dictionaries are very satisfactory resources for learners), but if they find that

they are looking up more than two or three words on the page, they have probably chosen a book which is too difficult for them and should exchange it for another more suitable one. At the end of the reading time they place a bookmark in the book to mark where they are up to, and continue to read the book for homework if they are allowed to take it home, or read it in the next extensive reading session in class. When they complete a book, they quickly fill in their report form for it, and choose another book to read.

An extensive reading session is as simple as that - the learners get on with the job of reading.

4_How can learners know which books are at the right level for them?

The easiest way to see if a book is at the right level is for a learner to choose a book and if it seems easy to read and there are only a small number of unknown words (no more than 3 or 4 words per page) and they understand almost everything, then that is a suitable book.

Ideally the teacher should know the vocabulary size of their learners, and learners should also know their current vocabulary size. This can be found by sitting the Vocabulary Size Test available online at http://www.lextutor.ca/tests/levels/recognition/1_14k or downloading the monolingual test or a bilingual version from http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/staff/paul-nation.aspx. The learners' vocabulary size can then be matched to the graded reader levels.

For fluency development, the learners should choose very easy books containing no or few unknown words. Re-reading books that they have read before is also good for fluency development.

5_What should the teacher do during an extensive reading session?

Some teachers recommend that they should also read quietly during an extensive reading session to act as a model for the learners. One advantage of doing this is that learners can see that if they talk or misbehave during the extensive reading session, they are interrupting the teacher's reading in the same way that they are interrupting their classmate's reading. This may encourage them to get on with their own reading.

Every so often, the teacher should look at learners' report sheets, or talk quietly with the learners to see that they are reading enough and that they are reading at the right level. The teacher should also check to see that each learner is doing some reading for fluency development (by reading very easy books quickly) and some reading for normal language development (by reading books which contain a few unknown words). This checking can be done during the extensive reading session, although the disadvantage of this is that it does interrupt some learners' reading.

The teacher can also use this time to quietly observe the learners and see who is reading well and who is not. It is highly likely that giving some individual counselling and attention to those who are not reading will result in a stronger commitment to the extensive reading program.

6_How can we make sure that the learners are doing the extensive reading?

You need some way of the learners keeping a record of what they have read and their brief reaction to it, so that the learners can see how much they have read and the teacher can monitor the amount of reading that they did. The simplest way to do this is to have a table like the following on an A4 sheet of paper.

Title of the book	Series & Level	Purpose	Date begun	Date finished	Comment on the book	Interest

In the column headed "Purpose" the learner can indicate whether the book was read for fluency development or for normal reading. In the column headed "Interest", the learner can give the book a ranking from 1 to 5 in terms of how interesting the book was for them. This gives the teacher some idea about which are the popular books and other learners can look at their friends' rankings to see what books they might want to read next (see Rob Waring's website <http://www.robwaring.org/er/ER_info/worksheets/worksheets.html> for other worksheets).

The learners can also to log on to a website that provides tests for each graded reader and keeps a record for the class that the teacher can access (http://moodlereader.org/index.html/).

7_How should I organise an extensive reading library?

It is important that an extensive reading program includes texts at a variety of vocabulary levels. Table 1 shows the levels in some of the better-known extensive reading schemes.

Table 1: The vocabulary levels in several extensive reading schemes

Oxford Bookworms	Cambridge English Readers	Penguin Readers	Foundations Reading Library	Compass Rainbow Readers
Six levels	Six levels	Six levels	Seven levels	Seven levels
1 400 words	1 400 words	1 300 words	1 75 words	1 200 words
2 700 words	2 800 words	2 500 words	2 100 words	2 500 words
3 1,000 words	3 1,300 words	3 1,050 words	3 150 words	3 700 words
4 1,400 words	4 1,900 words	4 1,650 words	4 200 words	4 1,000 words
5 1,800 words	5 2,800 words	5 2,300 words	5 250 words	5 1,500 words
6 2,500 words	6 3,800 words	6 3,000 words	6 300 words	6 2,000 words
			7 350 words	7 2,500 words

In Table 1, note that each scheme has a different number of levels and different numbers of words at each level. In addition, each publisher has their own word list and these are often unavailable to ordinary teachers. This unfortunately makes it difficult to do research on graded readers, and even more importantly makes it impossible for teachers to use graded readers as ways of setting vocabulary learning goals. In the past, publishers like Longman and Collins published their graded reader lists and currently Heinle Cengage Learning does.

Although publishers use different grading schemes and different lists, it is best if an extensive reading program does not limit itself to one series of readers but chooses the best from a variety of series. The matching of learners' vocabulary levels to graded readers is a very inexact process and always will be so. Any one graded reader only uses some of the words available at a particular level in the scheme, and so having graded readers from different schemes is not a big issue

when it comes to finding suitable texts for learners.

The books in an extensive reading library should be clearly labelled so that learners are aware of the level of each book. Although publishers put this information somewhere in the book, it is not always easy to find. Moreover, as not all publishers follow the same scheme, it is best if institutions use their own leveling system. One solution is to label the books with coloured stickers with each colour representing a different level, or with a number on the sticker to indicate a standard set of levels. The Extensive Reading Foundation provides an overall set of graded reader levels on its website at www.erfoundation.org and these levels can be used as a basis for coloured or numbered stickers (see Appendix 1).

Each class may have its own extensive reading library but this is probably a wasteful use of resources, and it is better to have a library on a trolley which can be wheeled from class to class, or an easily accessible central library where the learners can go to borrow books. The advantage of using a central library which has a formal book borrowing system is that the teacher then does not have to keep track of the books.

Whatever kind of library is used, it is important that the books are easily accessible and attractively displayed. Learners may need a lot of encouragement to begin doing extensive reading seriously, and the accessibility and display of books is one part of providing this encouragement.

8_How do I set up an extensive reading scheme if my school has no budget to buy the books?

The first thing to do is to see what graded readers are already available within the school. By looking carefully within the school library it may be possible to find some graded readers that the school already owns. If the school has

no graded readers and no money to buy them, then one alternative is to ask each learner to buy a graded reader and to make sure that each learner buys a different title. In this way learners can read the book that they have bought and then lend it to their classmates.

Some publishers make the first chapter of a graded reader freely available on the web.

It is also possible to do fund raising activities in order to raise money for graded readers. Teachers should ask the school principal, the city education board, or the state board which often have grants for these types of projects. Sometimes generous companies will donate money or resources. This is likely to be more successful if teachers co-operate in the fund raising and in the subsequent use of the graded readers.

9_How much time should learners spend on extensive reading?

Ideally about one-quarter of the total course time (including class time and homework time) should be spent on extensive reading or listening. This includes extensive reading or listening for fluency development.

Spending about one quarter of the course time on extensive reading may seem like a lot but this is actually more of an under-estimate of the time needed than an over-estimate. Some researchers have suggested that almost all of the course time should be spent on extensive reading. There is good evidence however that important learning occurs through meaning-focused output and language-focused learning, and thus that these should be part of a well-balanced course.

While the time spent on extensive reading may initially be class time, over a period of time, extensive reading can become more of an out-of-class activity.

Should an extensive reading program include a speed reading course?

It is very useful if an extensive reading course is accompanied by a speed reading course. The purpose of this is to increase the learners' reading speed so that they can read more fluently and thus read more within the same time. A speed reading course involves passages followed by comprehension questions, and a free speed reading course at the 1000 word level can be found on Paul Nation's website (http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/staff/paul-nation.aspx), and free speed reading courses at the 2000 word level and 2000 plus Academic Word List level can be found on Sonia Millett's website (http://www.victoria. ac.nz/lals/staff/sonia-millett.aspx). The books in the *Reading for Speed and Fluency* series (Nation and Malarcher, 2007) are published speed reading courses at the 500, 1000, 1500, and 2000 word levels. Speed reading courses should only involve vocabulary that the learners already know because their aim is fluency development not language learning.

In a speed reading course, the learners read an easy text, note the time it took to read it, answer some comprehension questions, mark them, and then record their reading speed and comprehension score on a reading speed graph and a comprehension graph. They read around twenty passages in this way over several weeks. The speed goal of a speed reading course is around 250 words per minute. Most learners will achieve speeds greater than this, but the upper limit of normal reading where the majority of words are attended to is around 300 words per minute (Nation, 2005).

For some research on speed reading and its effects see Chung and Nation (2006), Macalister (2008b, 2010b), and Chang (2010).

10_How many books should learners read?

Research by Nation and Wang (1999) on the Oxford Bookworms Series suggested that learners should be reading one graded reader a week in order to get enough repetitions of the new words at a level in order to be sure that vocabulary learning occurs. So, when we say that learners should do large quantities of extensive reading, we mean that they should be reading at least one book a week. Books differ in their length and in the Nation and Wang study, the books at the easiest level were around 5000 words long. If the learners are reading really short books, then at the beginning level they should be reading around 5000 words a week. A list of the length of thousands of graded readers is available on the Extensive Reading Foundation website.

This sounds like a lot of reading and it is, but it must be remembered that such reading only involves a small number of unknown words (around 2 to 3 unknown words per hundred running words of text) and thus can be read quite quickly. If learners read at the very slow speed of 100 words per minute, it would take 50 minutes to read 5000 words.

Research by Waring (2011) shows that adding one or two graded readers per week to an existing course greatly increases the amount of vocabulary students meet, and increases the number of repetitions of many of the words which leads to higher rates of vocabulary learning.

Should learners look up unknown words in a dictionary as they read?

It is often strongly recommended that dictionaries should not be used during extensive reading. The main motivations for this piece of advice are the following.

1. If learners look up a lot of words, it means that they are reading a text which is not at the right level for them to read smoothly and quickly. Using a dictionary may encourage reading of text which is in fact unsuitable for extensive reading for that learner.

2. Using a dictionary discourages guessing the meaning of unknown words from context. Guessing from context is a very important vocabulary coping strategy that needs a lot of real-time practice.

3. Using a dictionary slows down reading and so less is read.

However, as long as learners do not need to look up many words, looking words up in a dictionary is good because it increases the chance of words being learned, and may contribute to improved comprehension. The best advice is to only use a dictionary during extensive reading when you really need to use it, and make sure that the dictionary is not used very often. Some teachers suggest learners only choose one word for every two pages to look up.

How do I measure if learners are learning from the extensive reading program?

Probably, the best measure for determining the success of an extensive reading program is observing how much the learners read and whether they read with enjoyment. If it is necessary to give learners a grade for extensive reading it could be based on the number of books or pages that the learners have read. The learners can be required to take an online test to show they have read and understood each book. Alternatively, a reading comprehension test could be given using the same kind of material that was used for extensive reading. See Rob Waring's website for further ideas on assessing extensive reading (http://www.robwaring.org/er/ER_info/assess.htm).

Should university students be reading graded readers?

Graded readers typically cover the 3000 most frequent and common words in English. Learners studying at university through the medium of English need a much larger vocabulary than this, ideally around 8000 words, but learners can succeed with vocabulary sizes as low as 5000 words, although they will struggle with their reading. It is thus important to test learners' vocabulary size using the Vocabulary Size Test (www.lextutor.ca; http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/staff/paul-nation.aspx) to see how many words they know before starting Extensive Reading.

If the learners know more than 3000 words, graded readers will only be useful for fluency development, and it would be much more useful for learners to read extensively in their subject areas. The technical vocabulary of their subject areas will cover a large proportion of the running words in their subject matter texts (Chung and Nation, 2003).

If the learners know fewer than 3000 words, then reading graded readers is a very effective way of helping gain control of the very important high frequency words of English, as well as helping develop reading fluency.

11_Why should my course include an extensive reading program?

We have looked at extensive reading and graded readers, and how to run and set up an extensive reading program. We will now look at the goals and values of having an extensive reading program.

How can I convince other teachers that it is good to do extensive reading?

First, make sure that they really know what extensive reading is.

Next, mention some of the books and research about extensive reading to show them that this is a well-researched area. Much of this research is talked about below. It is worth mentioning the study by Elley and Mangubhai, the one by Nishizawa et al, and the books by Day and Bamford (see Further reading at the end of this booklet). If there is a local or national extensive reading group, it is worth letting them know about this.

Next, talk about the goals of extensive reading and why it is important to have a range of opportunities for learning across the four strands of meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development.

Finally, talk about how easy it is to organise and run an extensive reading program.

What are the goals of extensive reading?

When learners do extensive reading, they learn a lot of things without realising that the learning is going on. This is because they are focused on enjoying the book that they are reading. This kind of learning is called "incidental learning", because from the readers' viewpoint, this learning is not the main purpose of the reading. The main purpose is to understand and enjoy what is being read.

The goals of a language program can be classified under the headings of language, ideas, skills, and text. The first letters of these four words make up another word, LIST which is a useful way to remember this list of goals.

1. Language goals include the learning of spelling, vocabulary, and grammar.

2. Ideas goals include learning new ideas through reading.

3. Skill goals include the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and in a reading course these goals are particularly focused on the skill of learning to read with good comprehension and with fluency. As learners become more fluent in their reading, then they can more easily apply critical skills and application skills to what they are reading.

4. Text goals include becoming familiar with the text or discourse of the language that they are meeting. That is, learning how written texts and conversation are organised and the conventions that exist in such texts.

The classic study of learning from extensive reading is the book flood study by Elley and Mangubhai (1981). In this study, young learners of English as a foreign language spent three quarters of their class time reading interesting books. The learners only studied English for a total of less than four hours a week, and for the experimental group around three of these four hours were spent on reading. Elley and Mangubhai measured the results of the program using a wide range of tests which looked at reading comprehension, writing skill, grammatical knowledge, oral sentence recognition, and listening comprehension. Compared to a group of learners who followed the traditional class English program of largely teacher-fronted oral work, the learners in the book flood program made the equivalent of 15 months progress in nine months, and a year later still maintained these gains. The Elley and Mangubhai study focused on measuring language and skill gains. It did not include a measure of vocabulary growth. However, it was very clear from the study that if learners had reasonably large quantities of interesting language input, a very wide range of learning occurred. Since then, there have been other book flood studies with similar results (Elley, 1991), and there have been studies focusing on vocabulary growth from graded readers and extensive reading (Waring and Takaki, 2003; Pigada and Schmitt, 2006; Horst, 2005). These studies

have shown that vocabulary learning of different strengths occurs incidentally during the reading of texts which are at the right level for the learners. These studies also suggest that large quantities reading are needed in order for this vocabulary knowledge to strengthen and expand.

A study by Beglar, Hunt and Kite (2011 in press) of an extensive reading program carried out over a period of a year looked at the development of reading fluency. The learners who made the biggest gains in reading fluency were not the learners who read the most, but were the learners who read the most text written within a controlled vocabulary. The learners who read a lot of difficult unsimplified text did not make the same fluency gains.

It is clear from the research that teachers can expect more than just improvement in reading from an extensive reading program. They can expect that learners will grow in their knowledge of the language, will develop good reading skills, will come to enjoy reading, and will also show an improvement in other skills besides reading.

How much of the course time should be devoted to extensive reading?

A well-balanced language course spends an equal amount of time on each of the four strands of meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development (Nation, 2007). Meaning-focused input involves learning from listening and reading where the learners' main attention is focused on the message. That is, their focus is on comprehending what they listen to or read.

Meaning-focused input should make up one quarter of the time on a course. Around half of this time should be spent on reading (the other half is spent on listening) and most of this reading should be extensive reading. The fluency development strand should make up one quarter of the time on a course and this time should be shared between listening fluency development, speaking fluency development, reading fluency development, and writing fluency development. Most, but not all, of the reading fluency development time

should be spent doing extensive reading of very easy books where there are no unknown language items and where the topic is to some degree familiar to the learners. There should also be a small language-focused learning aspect to extensive reading where learners learn about the goals of extensive reading, about the importance of reading a lot, about the importance of reading at the right level, and about the importance of noting down any new words which are met on word cards so that they can be deliberately studied later. In total, adding these three strands together means that just under one quarter of the total course time (which includes time for doing homework) should be spent on extensive reading for meaning-focused input and for fluency development.

Why are teachers reluctant to set up extensive reading programs?

In spite of the large amount of research and writing on the benefits of extensive reading, there are not as many extensive reading programs in schools as there should be. Why is there this lack of extensive reading programs?

One answer may be that teachers do not know of the research on the benefits of extensive reading. Another answer is that extensive reading does not involve teaching, and so when learners do extensive reading, teachers feel that they are not doing their job. That is, they feel they are not teaching in front of the class. They may think "How can I be earning my salary when I am just sitting here reading as the learners quietly get on with their reading". These teachers seem to think learning stops when they stop teaching. Learners may also have the expectation that the teacher should be teaching. This is related to the belief that learning only occurs as a result of teaching. This is clearly a false belief because there is plenty of evidence to show firstly that there is plenty of learning without direct teaching, and secondly that direct teaching is not particularly effective in encouraging learning. In a well-balanced language course, three quarters of the time should be spent on message-focused activities that do not involve the teacher in direct language teaching. These include extensive reading, extensive listening, and conversation and group work activities like ranking activities, problem-solving activities, and retelling activities. The

remaining one quarter of the time should be spent on language-focused learning which includes learning from word cards (a very effective and efficient learning procedure), individual learning activities involving prepared exercises and computer-based learning, and direct teaching as in intensive reading and the teaching of vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation, and grammar. Overall, as shown in Table 2, direct teaching should make up less than one 16th of the time in a language course (Nation, 2007).

Teachers need to realize that individual and group work activities are sources of learning even though they do not involve direct teaching.

Macalister (2010a) found that teachers also said that they did not have enough time in their program for extensive reading and that providing this time would require substantial curriculum and assessment change.

These attitudes to extensive reading are not easy to overcome, and it is probably most effective to introduce extensive reading as a classroom activity using only a small amount of class time, with the aim of increasing this time either in-class or using out-of-class time.

Table 2: The proportion of time in a course that should be given to vocabulary teaching

Meaning-focused input	extensive listening extensive reading communication activities	
Meaning-focused output	speaking activities communication activities writing activities	
Language-focused learning	pronunciation vocabulary grammar discourse	strategy development intensive reading word card learning **vocabulary teaching**
Fluency development	listening fluency activities speaking fluency activities reading fluency activities writing fluency activities	

Is there much vocabulary learning from extensive reading?

There is now an increasing amount of research on vocabulary learning from reading graded readers and from extensive reading. The best of this research measures vocabulary learning using at least two or three different tests of the same words. Using several tests allows researchers to see how strongly and how richly each word has been learnt (Nation and Webb, 2011). Typically such tests involve the test formats used in the Waring and Takaki study (2003) which include being able to recognise the form of the word as a familiar form, being able to choose the correct meaning for the word in a multiple-choice test, and being able to translate the word into the learners' first language. Scores on the translation test are typically quite low as a result of reading a graded reader. In the Waring and Takaki study, on the immediate post-test, the translation score was just over 4 out of 25. The multiple-choice test scores were predictably higher, with learners scoring around 10 out of 25. The recognition scores were even higher (15 out of 25). If we just look

at the translation scores, then these are somewhat low but still respectable scores. However, it is important to see vocabulary learning from extensive reading as being a cumulative process where each word that is met may have its knowledge strengthened in some small way through each meeting. As a result of several meetings this knowledge can become quite strong. From this perspective, in the Waring and Takaki study five words were learnt at only the form recognition level, another six were learnt at the multiple-choice level, and another four were strongly learnt at the translation level. This is a very good return for incidental vocabulary learning from reading, especially when we consider that there is also probably learning occurring for previously known words met in the reading at a subconscious level. Reading in this way would also aid the learning of typical inflected and derived forms of a word, its collocates and the kinds of words it collocates with, its range of meanings and its core meaning, the grammatical patterns it fits into, and any restrictions on its use.

A study by Pigada and Schmitt (2006) showed that extensive reading not only results in a change in the strength of knowledge of the form and meaning of a word, but also results in changes in grammatical and colligational knowledge of the word.

We also have to remember that the incidental learning of vocabulary is only one kind of learning that occurs from reading. Learners are also improving their reading skills, their knowledge of grammar, and their content knowledge of the world or the subject they are reading about.

How does vocabulary learning occur from extensive reading?

Incidental learning depends on the learning conditions of repetition, retrieval of previously met knowledge, and the meeting of words in contexts which are slightly different from those in which they have been met before. Incidental learning is helped if it is accompanied by a small amount of deliberate learning. This deliberate learning can be looking up the word in a dictionary, noting

the word on a word card, or deliberately trying to recall the meaning of a word. Extensive reading does an excellent job of setting up these conditions of repetition, retrieval, and creative use. Let us look at how this happens.

As learners read, they meet some words that they only partly know or that they have not met before. Each meeting provides a small opportunity to learn about the form, meaning and use of the word within the contexts in which it occurs. After the first meeting with the word, the learners may meet the word again in the book, and when they do, they have a chance to recall what they learnt from the previous meeting. This recall is largely done subconsciously. Each time a learner meets a word and is able to successfully recall some information from previous meetings, this is called a retrieval. Spaced retrievals help learning. Ideally, learners should read at least one graded reader every week, because this allows newly met vocabulary a chance to occur again before the learners have forgotten their previous meeting with it (Nation & Wang, 1999). Vocabulary learning is also helped if each meeting with the word is in some way different from the previous meetings (Joe, 1998). That is, if the word occurs again with a different inflection, in a slightly different grammatical context, in a different meaning context, or in a different collocation. Graded readers naturally provide these conditions. If we look at the occurrences of new words at a particular level in a graded reader (this can be done by running a computer text of a graded reader through a concordance program like AntConc or MonoPro), we find that such words typically occur in different contexts each time they occur. The different contexts help enrich knowledge of the words and make later retrievals easier. Sometimes when a learner meets an unknown word in a graded reader, they are not able to guess its meaning from the context clues, and so the learner may look in a dictionary to find the meaning. Looking a word up in a dictionary is a form of deliberate learning and this can make a strong contribution to knowledge of the word.

Graded readers are texts written within a very controlled vocabulary. The main advantage of vocabulary control is that it excludes the many words that are well beyond the learners' present vocabulary level. If a learner tried to read an

unsimplified text that was way beyond their proficiency level, they would meet hundreds of words that are unknown to them. Most of these words would only occur once in the text and would therefore act as a barrier to reading without having much chance of being learnt (Nation & Deweerdt, 2001).

So, we can see that extensive reading naturally provides very supportive conditions for incidental vocabulary learning. By reading graded readers, learners meet a manageable number of unknown words and phrases in comprehensible contexts. By doing a reasonable amount of reading, they will have the chance to meet these words again and thus will have many opportunities to retrieve knowledge of the words that they have gained from previous meetings with them. They will also meet these words in a variety of contexts which will help enrich their knowledge of these words and increase their retention of them.

How can we maximize the vocabulary learning opportunities provided by extensive reading? The major way to maximize vocabulary learning from extensive reading is by getting the learners to do a lot of extensive reading. Ideally, as we saw before, just under one quarter of the time in a well-balanced language course should be spent doing extensive reading for meaning-focused input and fluency development (Nation & Yamamoto, forthcoming). Vocabulary learning can also be maximized by making sure learners are reading books which are at the right level for them. This will make sure that unknown words occur with plenty of helpful context around them and that learners can read reasonably quickly and thus read a lot of text. In addition, vocabulary learning from extensive reading will be helped if the learners combine a little deliberate learning with the incidental learning. That is, when they meet some new words in their extensive reading, they put them on word cards for later decontextualised study. Immediately they finish reading a graded reader, learners might like to spend a small amount of time to reflect back on any of the new words that they met during their reading.

Do graded readers provide learners with authentic reading experiences?

There are two meanings of "authentic" which are important in language teaching and learning. One meaning of authentic is used to refer to material which is written for native speakers or which is produced by native speakers. So, for example, we talk about authentic texts and authentic speech. The other meaning of authentic refers to something that a learner experiences. For example, when the learner has an authentic reading experience, this means that they read a text and experience it in the same way that it was intended to be read (for example, the way a native speaker or highly proficient reader would experience it). That is, they enjoy it or think it is a load of rubbish or boring, they can see how it relates to what they already know, and they can look at it critically. If a learner of English as a foreign language reads an authentic text, they are very unlikely to have an authentic reading experience because so many words and grammatical constructions in the text will be unfamiliar to them. Somewhere around 40% of the different words in a text, no matter how long it is, occur only once or twice, and are unlikely to occur again in a following text. Many of these words will be outside the learners' knowledge and any time spent dealing with them will be time wasted. The vocabulary burden of authentic text is far too heavy for meaning-focused input for learners who do not know at least 5000 or 6000 words of English (Nation, 2006). Because of this heavy vocabulary burden of authentic texts, texts within a controlled vocabulary are essential for the learning of English if learners are to have meaning-focused input at every level of their language proficiency development.

Some have argued that the discourse of graded readers is distorted as a result of the simplification process (Honeyfield, 1977). There is no evidence for this, and there is in fact evidence to show that they are like normal English writing (Claridge, 2005).

What were the first graded readers?

In the past, most graded readers were simplifications of existing texts. The first series of graded readers was produced by Michael West and published by Longman and was called The New Method Supplementary Readers because they accompanied The New Method English Course. The New Method English Course systematically introduced vocabulary through reading, but West realised that it was important to have an opportunity to enrich and strengthen knowledge of vocabulary that had already been met in the course, and so The New Method Supplementary Readers were designed to be used at various points in the course and were based on the vocabulary that the learners had already studied. The titles of these readers included *Robinson Crusoe, The Count of Monte Cristo, Robin Hood, English and Welsh Fairy Tales, and Seven Detective Stories*, and many were adaptations of existing stories. The major adaptation was that they were written within a very strictly controlled vocabulary so that most words outside of the learners' knowledge were not included. The books also were much shorter than the originals from which they were adapted. Some however were original graded readers and many extensive reading series contain books which do not draw on existing stories but are pieces of creative writing in themselves.

How can I learn more about extensive reading?

The two books by Day and Bamford *Extensive Reading in the Second Language Classroom* (1998), and *Extensive Reading Activities for Teaching Language* (2004) are excellent sources of information and ideas about extensive reading. There are also some very useful free handbooks on extensive reading (see for example http://www.oupjapan.co.jp/teachers/tebiki.shtml).

The Extensive Reading Foundation's Guide to Extensive Reading is also available at www.erfoundation.org/ERF_Guide.pdf.

The journal *Reading in a Foreign Language* is available free on the web (http://nflrc.hawaii.edu/rfl/) and is an important source of articles on reading, speed reading, and extensive reading.

Rob Waring's web site (http://www.robwaring.org/er/) has an enormous number of links and resources for extensive reading and is a good starting point for getting in touch with your nearest extensive reading group.

› References

- Beglar, D., Hunt, A., & Kite, Y. (2011 in press). The effect of pleasure reading on Japanese university EFL learners' reading rates. *Language Learning*.

- Chang, A. C. S. (2010). The effect of a timed reading activity on EFL learners: Speed, comprehension, and perceptions. *Reading in a Foreign Language, 22*(2), 284-303.

- Chung, T. M., & Nation, P. (2003). Technical vocabulary in specialised texts. *Reading in a Foreign Language, 15*(2), 103-116.

- Chung, M., & Nation, I. S. P. (2006). The effect of a speed reading course. *English Teaching, 61*(4), 181-204.

- Claridge, G. (2005). Simplification in graded readers: Measuring the authenticity of graded texts. *Reading in a Foreign Language, 17*(2), 144-158.

- Day, R., & Bamford, J. (2002). Top ten principles for teaching extensive reading. *Reading in a Foreign Language, 14*(2), 136-141.(www.nflrc.hawaii.edu/rfl/)

- Day, R. R., & Bamford, J. (1998). *Extensive Reading in the Second Language Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Day, R. R., & Bamford, J. (2004). *Extensive Reading Activities for Teaching Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Elley, W. B. (1991). Acquiring literacy in a second language: the effect of book-based programs. *Language Learning*, 41(3), 375-411.

- Elley, W. B., & Mangubhai, F. (1981). The *Impact of a Book Flood in Fiji Primary Schools*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

- Honeyfield, J. (1977). Simplification. *TESOL Quarterly, 11*(4), 431-440.

- Horst, M. (2005). Learning L2 vocabulary through extensive reading: a measurement study. *Canadian Modern Language Review, 61*(3), 355-382.

- Hu, M., & Nation, I. S. P. (2000). Vocabulary density and reading comprehension. *Reading in a Foreign Language, 13*(1), 403-430.

- Joe, A. (1998). What effects do text-based tasks promoting generation have on incidental vocabulary acquisition? *Applied Linguistics, 19*(3), 357-377.

- Macalister, J. (2008a). Implementing extensive reading in an EAP programme. *ELT Journal, 62*(3), 248-256.

- Macalister, J. (2008b). The effect of a speed reading course in an English as a second language environment. *TESOLANZ Journal, 16*, 23-33.

- Macalister, J. (2010a). Investigating teacher attitudes to extensive reading practices in higher education: Why isn't everyone doing it? *RELC Journal, 41*(1), 59-75.

- Macalister, J. (2010b). Speed reading courses and their effect on reading authentic texts: A preliminary investigation. *Reading in a Foreign Language, 22*(1), 104-116.

- Nation, I.S.P. (2005). Reading faster. *Pasaa, 36*, 21-37.

- Nation, I. S. P. (2006). How large a vocabulary is needed for reading and listening? *Canadian Modern Language Review, 63*(1), 59-82.

- Nation, I. S. P. (2007). The four strands. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching, 1*(1), 1-12.

- Nation, I. S. P., & Deweerdt, J. (2001). A defense of simplification. *Prospect, 16*(3), 55-67.

- Nation, P. and Malarcher, C. (2007) *Reading for Speed and Fluency. Books 1-4.* Seoul: Compass Publishing. Book 1, 115 pages, ISBN 978-1-59966-100-1; Book 2, 115 pages, ISBN 978-1-59966-101-8; Book 3, 115 pages, ISBN 978-1-59966-102-5; Book 4, 115 pages, ISBN 978-1-59966-103-2.

- Nation, P., & Wang, K. (1999). Graded readers and vocabulary. *Reading in a Foreign Language, 12*(2), 355-380.

- Nation, I. S. P., & Webb, S. (2011). *Researching and Analyzing Vocabulary*. Boston: Heinle Cengage Learning.

- Nation, P. and Yamamoto, A. (in press). Applying the four strands.

- Nishizawa, H., Yoshioka, T., & Fukada, M. (2010). The impact of a four-year extensive reading program. In A. M. Stoke (Ed.), *JALT2009 Conference Proceedings*. Tokyo: JALT.

- Pigada, M., & Schmitt, N. (2006). Vocabulary acquisition from extensive reading: a case study. *Reading in a Foreign Language, 18*(1), 1-28.

- Prowse, P. (2002). Top ten principles for teaching extensive reading: A response. *Reading in a Foreign Language, 14*(2), 142-145.

- Robb, T. (2002). Extensive reading in the Asian context -- an alternative view. *Reading in a Foreign Language, 14*(2), 146-147.

- Waring, R. (2011) How much vocabulary can students learn by reading graded readers in addition to finishing a course book series? KAPEE Conference Proceedings, January.

- Waring, R., & Takaki, M. (2003). At what rate do learners learn and retain new vocabulary from reading a graded reader? *Reading in a Foreign Language, 15*(2), 130-163.

› Appendix 1 ———————————————

The Extensive Reading Foundation Graded Reader Scale

	Beginner			Elementary			Intermediate			Upper Intermediate			Advanced		
	Alphabet	Early	Mid	High	Early	Mid	High	Early	Mid	High	Early	Mid	High	Early	Mid	High
Headword[1] count	1-50	51-100	101-200	201-300	301-400	401-600	601-800	801-1000	1001-1250	1251-1500	1501-1800	1801-2100	2101-2400	2401-3000	3001-3600	3601-4500

(source: http://www.robwaring.org/er/ER_programs/index.htm)