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Cambridge Elements in Language Teaching: Extensive Reading

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Abstract

This book review explores and analyzes Extensive Reading by Jing Zhao (2024), which was published by Cambridge University Press as a part of the Cambridge Elements in Language Teaching series. The mentioned book is a comprehensive overview of extensive reading presenting it as an effective approach to second and foreign language teaching and learning. This review examines organization, theoretical contributions, clarity, research evidence, and practical relevance of the book, along with the strengths and places for improvements. Overall, the book is a valuable resource for students, language teachers, teacher educators, and researchers interested in understanding and implementing extensive reading.

***Keywords**: extensive reading, language learning, language teaching, second language acquisition, reading fluency*

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About the Book

Extensive Reading, written by Jing Zhou, published by Cambridge University Press in 2024, aims to provide a clear understanding of the key ideas behind extensive reading (ER). It explores benefits for learning a language, discusses the difficulties in putting it into practice, and suggests research-based solutions to overcome these challenges. This book targets language educators, graduate students, and researchers who are interested in incorporating reading for pleasure and proficiency into their teaching. It also provides a well-structured and in-depth analysis of the way extensive reading helps to enhance language learning, especially vocabulary acquisition, fluency, and motivation. In the same way, there is a combination of theoretical perspectives along with empirical research and practical strategies, which makes the book a useful guide for both recent and experienced educators. On one hand, Zhou's book is a beneficial contribution to the language education literature as shared previously. However,

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on the other hand, it would have been more comprehensive if the learners' perspectives and deeper discussions on technological tools were added.

A Look at the Chapters

This book is structured into seven chapters: introduction, what is extensive reading, the benefits of ER, ER across languages, ER across contexts, implementing ER, and epilogue: the potential of ER. In the introduction chapter, the author provides the outline of the book, pointing out what each section of the book contains. It talks about the scope, defining ER as reading large volumes of level-appropriate, interesting texts, and highlighting its role in linguistic and diverse educational contexts. The author promotes this book as a resource for pre-service and in-service teachers, graduate students, and researchers. Coming to the second chapter, she delves into definitions, underlying theories (Comprehensible Input Hypothesis, Lexical Efficiency Hypothesis, and Lexical Quality Hypothesis), and the ten ER principles by Day and Bamford (2002). Contrasting ER with intensive reading, it emphasizes that in ER, "students read large quantities of books and other materials that are well within their linguistic competence" (p. 2). Similarly, detailed ER's linguistics (vocabulary, fluency, grammar, writing), and non-linguistic (motivation, reading habits) benefits that are supported by meta-analyses by Nakanishi (2015) and Jeon & Day (2016) and empirical studies are presented in the third section.

The fourth chapter explores how ER is implemented in L2 English, Chinese, Spanish, French, Italian, German, and Japanese, identifying trends and gaps. Zhou noted that majorly ER research is still English-focused, however, she motivates others to further explore in other L2 contexts. ER use in rural schools, with advanced learners, in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs, and with digital platforms such as Xreading.com and Mreader has been examined in the fifth chapter. Here, she highlights the importance of aligning ER approaches to learners' needs and contexts. Likewise, in the sixth chapter, practical strategies are put forward alongside curriculum design, teacher training, student orientation, and digital tools. This chapter addresses challenges faced by students, teachers, institutions, and materials, suggesting solutions like setting achievable goals (e.g., reading one book per week), offering reading choices, teacher training, and integrating technology. It emphasizes the importance of orientation, guidance, and the teacher as a reading role model. Finally, Zhou sums up the seventh chapter with reflections on ER's potential with technology and other teaching approaches are integrated. She urges the teachers to take ER as a core language learning strategy that promotes autonomy, fluency, and enjoyment, not as an "extra" component.

Where the Book Shines

One of the strong points of Zhou is the well-combination of theoretical depth with practical balance, i.e., theory with classroom application. In the second chapter, she shares the influential theories like Krashen's (1981) Comprehensible Input Hypothesis: "only comprehensible input is effective in increasing proficiency" (p. 4), and Perfetti's Lexical Efficiency Hypothesis, emphasizing automaticity in word recognition for effective reading comprehension. Likewise, Lui and Zhang (2018) in their meta-analysis of 21 empirical studies with 1,268 participants concluded that ER had a significant positive effect on English vocabulary. Similarly, each chapter has been well-structured and accessible.

Every section has "Points to Ponder", encouraging readers' reflection and engagement, such as after explaining the Chinese saying "读万卷书, 行万里路" (Read ten thousand books, travel ten thousand miles), Zhou asks readers to consider ER in their cultural context (p. 2). Likewise, the book stands out for its rich use of meta-analyses, where the author cites Nakanishi (2015) and Jeon & Day (2016), who found medium to large effect sizes in ER's influence on

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reading proficiency and vocabulary acquisition. It also has diverse implementation models for the readers, like multiple ER types - pure, modified, light, and fringe ER- and formats like Replacement ER, Additive ER, Supervised ER, Independent ER, and Blended ER. Also, chapter 4 of the book is praiseworthy in presenting ER in languages beyond English, which shows a rare inclusion in ER literature.

Points to Consider

Though the book is rich in research, there is limited focus on personal narratives or learner voices, which could have offered deeper insights into the experiences of the learners with ER. Coming to chapter 6, even though challenges during the implementation have been mentioned, a list of solutions is read instead of a critical engagement with systematic barriers. For example, institutional limitations, exam-oriented curricula, and teacher workload are acknowledged but not analyzed in depth. So, it is important to understand that the success of extensive reading approach depends on how it is implemented in actual classrooms. Similar findings are found in the review of classroom based extensive reading by Robb and Ewert (2024). They mention that learners do not always become motived and independent readers automatically. Learners usually need teachers to guide and support through classroom activities in order to develop independent reading habits. So, it is necessary to adopt extensive reading approach as per learners' educational backgrounds, language proficiency, and access to reading resources.

Another place for improvement is the use of digital reading as digital reading alone (a wide range of reading materials online) does not guarantee vocabulary development or effective comprehension. In a systematic review of 31 studies, Reiber-Kujipers et al. (2021) highlighted gaps in research on learner's strategy that they use during second-language digital learning. This indicates that research needs to be conducted not only on the access to technology, but also on the way learners interact with digital texts. Similarly, Day & Bamford (1998) and Krashen (1981) are foundational but out-of-date studies that indicate more room for innovative research in individualized ER programs, artificial intelligence, and digital reading platforms. Similarly, in today's tech-driven classrooms, Zhou's suggestion to integrate ER with digital platforms such as Xreading.com and Mreader is a missed opportunity since it fails to consider the pedagogical consequences of these platforms.

Recommendations

From the above-mentioned points missing from the book, the following recommendations can be drawn out. Firstly, the author or others can include interviews with ER participants, giving a human approach to the theoretical and empirical discourse in the next editions or publications. Secondly, for the practitioners, so they can have support for practical implementation, a detailed evaluation of the systematic and policy-related constraints, such as high stakes, resource scarcity, and teacher resistance, could be added. Thirdly, Zhou could study more about the tools like AI tutors, adaptive learning systems, and gamified platforms, which would expand ER practices and engagement in this digital learning era. Lastly, taking into account the multilingual learners or graded readers who have limited access, the author might ponder providing region-specific or language-specific guidelines to implement ER.

Closing Remarks

Overall, Jing Zhou's *Extensive Reading* presents valid reasoning supporting the significance of extensive reading along with practical guidance for the implementation of ER. In the same way, the book is beneficial for those language teachers, language learners, researchers, curriculum designers, and policymakers who desire to improve their language learning through reading. In spite of having a few limitations (digital tools and practical

difficulties), this book is useful for individuals who have a curiosity and concern toward second language acquisition and extensive reading. As Zhou herself notes, "I hope it serves as a valuable starting point for those who share a passion for language teaching and learning" (p. 1), a goal this book has certainly fulfilled. It points out how reading for pleasure or enjoyment can be an effective strategy to teach that promotes the development of language in all its forms.

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AI Declaration

During the drafting of this book review, the author has used AI to correct the minor grammar, spelling and punctuations mistakes. The author used the outlines to draft the book review, go through the articles provided so review has no AI-generated texts.

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