



### EFL TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES OF EXTENSIVE READING IN UZBEKISTAN – THE NEED FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) INTEGRATION

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**Abstract.** *The current paper presents the role and benefits of extensive reading (ER) in English language learning and discusses how ER programs can evolve with the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) tools. We will also take a brief look at EFL teachers' experiences with ER in Uzbekistan based on small-scale research results and discuss how AI integration can enhance their ER practices. Although extensive reading has existed with its established principles for around thirty years and offers a number of benefits for foreign language learning, it remains an undervalued approach. The appropriate integration of AI in ER programs can leverage ER practices of both teachers and learners. For the effective practice of ER, and sustainable professional development opportunities for EFL teachers, the recommendations are presented in the conclusion section.*

**Key words:** *Extensive reading, EFL teachers' experiences, artificial intelligence, professional development*

#### **Introduction**

A wealth of research confirms that while many EFL teachers hold the belief in the benefits of extensive reading (ER), in some contexts, they remain reluctant to integrate ER in their teaching practices (Arai, 2019, Chang & Renandya, 2017). To the best of my knowledge, no research to date has investigated EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of extensive reading in Uzbekistan. My research as a master of education (MEd) student in TESOL, aimed to fill this gap to small extent. The findings of this small-scale research revealed that state school EFL teachers in Uzbekistan, although they believe in the benefits of extensive reading and willing to practice ER, due to the lack of expertise, time constraints, insufficient number of materials and exam-oriented nature of education in Uzbekistan, are facing the challenges in successful implementation of extensive reading at schools. Therefore, with the provision of proper training to raise EFL teachers' understanding and expertise of extensive reading principles, and by facilitating their use of AI tools, there is a belief that EFL teachers' ER practices can be enhanced.

#### **The Role of Extensive Reading in Language Learning.**

It is generally agreed that reading is an important area for language education, and thus it has gained an essential place in language programs and curricula globally (Robb & Ewert, 2024). Acquiring advanced reading skills enhance students' ability to comprehend complex texts and broaden their knowledge across a variety of subjects (Davis et al., 2016). Within this broader skill set, extensive reading (ER) is a very effective approach to develop learners' language skills such as grammar, vocabulary, writing and speaking. Beyond linguistic skills, successful extensive reading programs increase

students' worldview and positively influence affective factors such as self-efficacy and motivation (Zhou, 2024). In theory, to establish and run extensive reading program might seem straightforward: teachers need to provide an appropriate range of reading materials, encourage learners to select texts suitable to their level and create conditions where they can read these materials silently. Learners should enjoy the process without assessment or exam pressure. However, translating this theory into practice is often challenging due to various contextual constraints.

### **Why ER is Still Less Practiced**

Despite the long-time presence and research-confirmed benefits of this approach, it is not widely accepted, especially in the contexts where traditional education still dominates. This is not because this approach has less value, but there are many other factors why this approach has not yet become an essential part of language curriculum (Nation & Waring, 2019). The underlying reasons include EFL teachers' lack of expertise and time, the insufficient number of materials targeted for ER and the exam-oriented nature of the education (Fan, 2023, Huang, 2015, Macalister, 2010). In line with these challenges, Nation and Waring (2019) note that randomly typing "Learn English" (p,175) into an internet search results in materials that focus mainly on form and promote language courses. They also highlight the excessive attention given to coursebooks and the strong determination to finish them at all costs. As a result, the value of extensive reading is not sufficiently recognized. Even when it is practiced, it holds less significance compared to other intensive and form-focused methods.

In Uzbekistan, similarly, the exam-oriented nature of the education system has long shaped classroom reading instruction, with the primary emphasis on developing students' intensive reading skills which involves close, teacher-guided or task-driven analysis of a text, requiring detailed attention mainly to form and less on meaning. EFL teachers tend to emphasize intensive reading practices due to the pressure from school leaders and parents to prepare learners to get language certificates and complete the coursebooks. Another impediment to effective ER practices, as revealed in the research, is EFL teachers' limited understanding of ER principles and practices. Given these challenges, it becomes essential to revisit the core principles of extensive reading to see what constitutes effective ER practice and why these principles matter. The next section therefore outlines these key principles and explains how they inform and support successful ER implementation.

### **Extensive Reading Principles**

As noted earlier, extensive reading (ER) involves reading for pleasure, enjoyment, information, and encourages students to become autonomous readers in the long run. Prior to the discussion of ER in AI period, it is useful to review the nature and well-established principles of ER as they form the foundation of any ER program whether it is in a traditional or AI-assisted format. EFL teachers should be aware of these principles and have fundamental understanding of them for successful ER practice. Day & Bamford (1998), influential pioneers in extensive reading, proposed a list of ten principles, which is presented in Table 1.



## Section-1: Artificial Intelligence in Language Teaching

Extensive reading principles (Day & Bamford, 1998)

- 1 Students read as much as possible
- 2 A variety of materials on a wide range of topics is available
- 3 Students select what they want to read
- 4 The purposes of reading are usually related to pleasure, information, and the general understanding
- 5 Reading is its own reward
- 6 Reading materials are well within the linguistic competence of the students
- 7 Reading is individual and silent
- 8 Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower
- 9 Teachers orient students to the goals of the program.
- 10 The teacher is a role model of a reader for students

These principles were a turning point, encouraging language educators to recognize extensive reading as a valuable approach to language learning, and have since become the core guidance in establishing extensive reading programs worldwide. Macalister (2010) analyzed these ten principles and presented four broad categories into which they can be integrated (Table 2).

Macalister's (2010) reclassification of ten principles of extensive reading by Day & Bamford (1998)

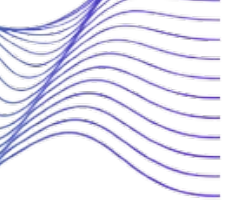
- 1 the nature of reading material (principles 1-2)
- 2 the nature of the reading (principles 5-8)
- 3 the learners' behaviour (principles 3-4)
- 4 the teacher's behaviour (principles 9-10)

The analysis of Macalister's grouping suggests that EFL teachers who want to integrate extensive reading in their English language classes need to understand the nature of reading materials, reading process, as well as how learners behave and what teachers should do during these practices.

While it is important that EFL teachers are familiar with these principles, Nation & Waring (2019) note that these principles should not be seen as prescriptive. EFL teachers can modify or adapt them depending on their contextual circumstances. For example, according to Day & Bamford (1998), learners need to choose the materials themselves. However, teachers' intervention in the material selection and book recommendations are also acceptable providing this does not hinder but facilitates extensive reading activities (Nation & Waring, 2019).

### **Extensive Reading in the Era of Technology and Artificial Intelligence**

The advent of artificial intelligence (AI) is encouraging educators in different areas of language learning to reconsider approaches they have been using for decades. The



same is true for experts in extensive reading (ER). The nature of reading is expected to change as a response to learners who are increasingly considered "digital natives". There are already several online extensive reading platforms emerged to respond to this new direction (Nation & Waring, 2019). This indicates the tendency to shift from traditional extensive reading approaches toward blended or fully digitalized formats.

In the light of these changes, it is sensible to consider how this digitalization and AI inclusion will impact traditional ER practices, experiences and processes. According to Renandya (2025), AI use will present new dimensions to ER. when employed skillfully, it offers numerous opportunities that can help address the challenges faced in traditional extensive reading experience. For example, teachers are better able to monitor learners' progress, the time they devote to reading, the number of words they read. AI tools can be used to create materials that are engaging, level-appropriate and personalized, offering readers a wide selection. There are already websites such as <https://ReadTheory.org> which uses algorithms to recommend texts based on a learner's previous reading experience and interests, and [www.xreading.com](http://www.xreading.com), online library combining graded readers from a range of ELT publishers. When used skillfully, these systems can serve as curators – providing suitable materials that consider the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) of learners and also encouraging learner autonomy (Renandya, 2025). This support system is particularly valuable in Uzbekistan's teaching context, where many schools lack libraries with sufficient books suitable for ER programs (e.g., graded readers) and where EFL teachers often struggle to monitor students' progress due to time constraints and large class sizes. Using AI-facilitated ER platforms can help compensate for limited resources by automatically tracking reading time, progress, and vocabulary growth. In short, the inclusion of AI in ER programs offers promising opportunities to strengthen the effectiveness, accessibility, and sustainability of extensive reading in Uzbekistan.

Though AI tools offer a range of benefits that can enhance learners' practice in ER, they are not without concerns. These tools are more effective and yield the intended results when both teachers and learners have sufficient technological background and skills that allow them to use AI tools aptly and flexibly. Those who lack technological skills remain struggling to get the best out of these technological advancements. In addition, educators need to ensure that learners do not become over-reliant in AI tools, and ER practices followed by human interaction and sufficient teacher support. It is important that both teachers and learners need to know about ethical issues regarding AI use (Al-Smadi et al., 2025). Furthermore, the increased use of personalized recommendation, may restrict learners to only a few specified text types, which limits the exposure to a range of topics (Hu et al.2022). It has also to be ensured that all the processes happening in traditional reading experience exist in technology-integrated reading as well. For example, instant translation support through AI apps should not hinder guessing and inferencing skills (Renandya, 2025). These concerns suggest that ER programs that integrate any kind of technology or AI, should be delicately and strategically balanced ensuring that learners are still engaged in deeper processes of reading, gaining all the benefits that students would get in traditional reading classes.



### Conclusion

This article reflects the findings of research results on state school EFL teachers' experiences with extensive reading in Uzbekistan. The results suggest that the sparsity in practice and research in extensive reading in Uzbekistan can be attributed to the limited support and guidance provided for EFL teachers rather than their resistance to integrate ER in their practices. To address this gap and enhance EFL teachers' knowledge and practice of ER, the following recommendations are proposed,

1) A series of professional development sessions should be organized to introduce and raise EFL teachers' awareness of the nature of extensive reading, the materials, teachers' role in extensive reading practices and the cognitive processes that learners undergo

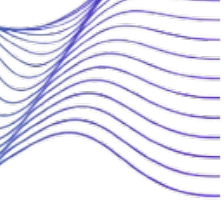
2) These professional development sessions should not be in a prescriptive manner, teaching teachers "one-size-fits-all" strategies, but provide them with a range of lenses through which they can approach extensive reading practice with critical evaluation considering what might be suitable and what needs to be slightly modified so that their learners get the best out of extensive reading classes

3) EFL teachers need to know how to use artificial intelligence in their extensive reading practice. They should develop necessary skills to critically evaluate their own and their learners' engagement with AI. They should be provided training how to use AI to personalize learning, provide adaptive scaffolding, design materials, integrate the existing resources meaningfully, and track learners' progress. It should be ensured that AI scaffolds the core principles of ER: reading materials at an appropriate level and enjoying the process.

Extensive reading requires no more validation to prove its value and impact in native, second or foreign language learning. However, it still remains behind other language-focused approaches in many contexts including state schools of Uzbekistan. With the appropriate and sustainable professional development opportunities that enhance in-service EFL teachers' expertise in ER practices as well as their ability to use technological tools in this process timely and meaningfully will have a beneficial impact on English language learning in Uzbekistan's context.

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