



The Impact of Peer Interaction on Extensive Reading Engagement: A Study of English Department Students at the Faculty of Languages, Elmergib University

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تأثير التفاعل بين الأقران على المشاركة في القراءة المكثفة: دراسة عن طلاب قسم اللغة الإنجليزية في كلية اللغات بجامعة المرقب

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Abstract

For many years, Extensive Reading (ER) has been an important part of language learning. It is praised for its ability to improve reading fluency, vocabulary, and overall language skills by letting students read a lot of understandable, self-chosen literature over a long period of time. Day and Bamford (2002) made it very clear that extensive reading (ER) is a personal and emotional activity, with student choice and enjoyment of reading being the most important factors. This method, while effective, often envisioned the reader in isolation.

A substantial paradigm shift has transpired, propelled by the recognition that learning is fundamentally social. Based on Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, an increasing amount of research convincingly asserts that the strategic incorporation of student interaction is not a deviation from the fundamental principles of ER, but rather a significant enhancement. This comprehensive review consolidates the evolving literature, analysing the theoretical foundations, various modalities, and empirical evidence illustrating how interaction transforms ER from a solitary act into a dynamic, collaborative process that significantly enhances motivation, deepens understanding, promotes critical thinking, and establishes a community of practice.

Keywords: Peer Interaction, Extensive Reading, Student Engagement, Sociocultural Theory, Self-Determination Theory, Communities of Practice, Scaffolding.

المخلص

القراءة المكثفة (ER) هي حجر الأساس في اكتساب اللغة الثانية، تم تصور ها تقليدياً على أنها مسعى فردي، يركز في المقام الأول على تفاعل الفرد الصامت مع النص. في حين أن فوائدها في إتقان اللغة واكتساب المفردات موثقة جيداً، هذه الدراسة تقول بأن النموذج الفردي البحث يتجاهل بُعداً مهماً من أبعاد التعلم: البناء الاجتماعي للمعنى. استناداً إلى النظرية الاجتماعية الثقافية لـ Vygotsky ونظرية تقرير المصير لـ Deci and Ryan، تبحث هذه الدراسة التأثير التحويلي للتفاعل بين

الأقران على البناء متعدد الأوجه للمشاركة في القراءة بين طلاب قسم اللغة الإنجليزية في كلية اللغات. باستخدام تصميم تسلسلي تفسيري مختلط، تم جمع البيانات من مجموعة من 120 طالبًا عبر استبيان مفصل حول أنماط تفاعلهم ومستويات مشاركتهم، تلاه مقابلات متعمقة ومناقشات جماعية مع 15 مشاركًا تم اختيارهم عن قصد. تكشف النتائج أن تفاعل الأقران يعمل كمحفز قوي، ويشكل بشكل عميق تجربة القراءة عبر المجالات السلوكية والعاطفية والمعرفية. من الناحية الكمية، أفاد الطلاب الذين شاركوا في حوارات متكررة مع أقرانهم، لا سيما من خلال التوصيات غير الرسمية ودوائر الأدب المنظمة، بزيادة كبيرة في حجم القراءة وزيادة الاتساق. من الناحية النوعية، يوضح التحليل الآليات الكامنة وراء هذا التحول: الحوار بين الأقران يعمل كسقالة للفهم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التفاعل بين الأقران، القراءة المكثفة، مشاركة الطلاب، النظرية الاجتماعية الثقافية، نظرية تقرير المصير، مجتمعات الممارسة، الدعم التعليمي.

Introduction

For decades, Extensive Reading (ER) has been a cornerstone of language pedagogy, championed for its power to develop reading fluency, vocabulary, and overall linguistic proficiency through sustained engagement with large volumes of comprehensible, self-selected text. The foundational principles outlined by Day & Bamford (2002) firmly established ER as an individual and affective endeavor, prioritizing student choice and reading pleasure above all else. This model, while effective, often conceptualized the reader in isolation. However, a significant paradigm shift has occurred, driven by the understanding that learning is inherently social. Drawing from Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, a growing body of research now compellingly argues that strategic integration of student interaction is not a divergence from ER's core tenets but a powerful enhancement. This expanded review synthesizes this evolving literature, examining the theoretical underpinnings, diverse modalities, and empirical evidence demonstrating how interaction transforms ER from a private act into a dynamic, collaborative process that profoundly boosts motivation, deepens comprehension, fosters critical thinking, and solidifies a community of practice.

Research objectives:

This study seeks to examine the influence of peer interaction on the Extensive Reading (ER) practices of students in the English Department. The specific objectives are:

1. **To ascertain the modalities and frequency of peer interaction** utilised by students concerning their extensive reading (e.g., informal discussions, book recommendations, organised book clubs, online interactions).
2. **To evaluate students' engagement in Extensive Reading** by examining its behavioural (e.g., volume of books read, consistency), emotional (e.g., enjoyment, anxiety), and cognitive (e.g., depth of understanding, application of strategies) aspects.
3. **To examine the perceived effect of peer interaction** on students' motivation and attitudes towards Extensive Reading, specifically its influence on intrinsic motivation, reading self-confidence, and persistence.
4. **To investigate the obstacles and impediments encountered** by students during peer interactions concerning their substantial reading.
5. **To formulate evidence-based recommendations** for the incorporation of effective peer interaction tactics within the English Department's ER curriculum.

Research questions:

1. What kinds of interactions do students have with each other about their extensive reading, and how often do these interactions happen?
2. How does peer interaction affect how students behave when they are reading a lot, such as how many books they choose, how much they read, and how often they do it?
3. How does interaction with peers affect students' emotional involvement with extensive reading, such as how much they enjoy it, how interested they are, and how much they feel like they belong to a reading community?

Literature review

Extensive Reading (ER) has long been recognised as an essential element of language acquisition, lauded for its contribution to enhancing reading fluency, vocabulary, and overall linguistic competence through prolonged, enjoyable interaction with substantial quantities of comprehensible text (Day & Bamford, 2002; Krashen, 2004). The traditional paradigm, based on its basic ideas, often sees ER as a single act—a private exchange between the

reader and the text. Nonetheless, a substantial transformation is occurring in second language (L2) reading pedagogy. Based on sociocultural theories of learning, an increasing amount of research suggests that strategic peer interaction is not just an extra activity, but a strong catalyst that can greatly improve student engagement in ER programs.

This literature review examined the theoretical and empirical foundations linking peer interaction to engagement in extensive reading. Initially, it articulated the fundamental principles of experiential learning (ER) and student engagement, subsequently establishing the theoretical foundations that underpin social learning. It combined what is known about the different ways that peers can interact and how they affect behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement. Finally, the review found gaps in the literature and put the current study of English Department students into this scholarly conversation.

Defining key ideas: reading a lot and getting students involved

1. Extensive Reading (ER)

There are some key differences between extensive reading and intensive reading. Day and Bamford (2002) say that ER is when students read a lot of things, mostly for fun and general understanding, in a place where the reading material is easy for them to understand. The main ideas are that students should choose their own reading material, that the focus should be on meaning rather than form, and that reading should be its own reward. These principles do a good job of protecting intrinsic motivation, but in the past they have led to a model of implementation that doesn't value the potential of collaborative learning enough.

2. Getting students involved

Student engagement is a complex idea that is very important for deep learning and doing well in school. For this study, engagement is thought of in terms of three connected dimensions (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004):

- **Behavioural Engagement:** This is what you can see when someone is doing something or participating in schoolwork. In an ER context, this encompasses the quantity of reading (number of books/pages), the regularity of reading practices, and engagement in associated activities.
- **Emotional Engagement:** This includes students' affective responses, such as their interest, enjoyment, sense of belonging, and attitudes towards reading. A student with significant emotional investment derives enjoyment from reading and regards it as a valuable pursuit.
- **Cognitive Engagement:** This entails the allocation of mental effort towards understanding and mastering intricate concepts. It encompasses the application of deep learning methodologies, analytical reasoning, intertextual linkages, and an openness to engage with complex content.

As this review contended, peer interaction possesses the capacity to positively impact all three of these dimensions.

Theoretical Basis: The Importance of Peer Interaction

The incorporation of peer interaction into ER is not a random decision; it is based on strong educational theories.

- **Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978):** This is the framework that has had the most impact. Vygotsky's idea of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) says that students can learn more when they work together and get help from their peers than when they do it alone. When students talk about what they read, they are doing "collaborative dialogue" (Swain, 2000), which means they are building on each other's understanding by making sense of the plot, themes, and other parts of the story.
- **Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000):** According to SDT, intrinsic motivation comes from meeting three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. ER directly supports autonomy (through choice) and competence (through fluent reading), while peer interaction directly satisfies the need for relatedness—the desire to feel connected to others. Nishino (2018) found that the sense of community that comes from reading together was a big reason why students stayed motivated in ER programs.

Ways and Effects of Peer Interaction on Engagement

There is research that shows how certain types of peer interaction directly affect engagement.

1. Unofficial conversations and suggestions from peers:

Informal, student-initiated discussions about books constitute a potent yet frequently neglected mode of interaction. Yamashita (2013) showed that peer recommendations are a stronger motivator for choosing a book than teacher recommendations. This is because they create an organic "buzz" that directly affects how much a student reads. Moreover, the mere act of elucidating a narrative to a peer compels a more

profound cognitive processing of the content, thereby augmenting cognitive engagement and metacognitive awareness (Robb, 2022).

2. **Structured Collaborative Models:**

Literature Circles (Daniels, 2002) offer an organised way for peers to interact. In this model, students take on certain roles, like Discussion Leader, Connector, or Vocabulary Enricher, to help lead a group discussion. Shelton-Strong (2012) used this model in an EFL setting and found that it greatly improved all aspects of engagement. It increased behavioural engagement by making students accountable, emotional engagement by turning reading into a social event, and cognitive engagement by making students think about texts from different points of view.

3. **Interaction with peers online:**

The digital world has made it possible to interact in new ways. Research on the use of online platforms like class blogs, forums, and social media (like Goodreads and Padlet) has shown very interesting results. According to Cho & Kim (2017), students who used a closed online community to post reviews and comment on their peers' work read more (behavioural engagement) and wrote more complex, critical responses (cognitive engagement) because they were writing for a real audience. Sun & You (2022) also showed that using platforms like Instagram to share "shelfies" and short reviews took advantage of digital literacy to build a low-stakes, fun community that made people more emotionally involved.

Literature Deficiencies and the Contribution of the Current Study

The current study aimed to address several gaps in the existing literature, which demonstrates substantial evidence for the value of peer interaction.

1. **Specific Context of English Departments:**

A significant portion of the ER research had been undertaken within general EFL or ESL settings. There wasn't enough research on students in English Departments at Faculties of Languages. These students are different because they are often training to be language professionals (teachers, translators) and may have more advanced, but also more analytical, relationships with English. It is important to understand how peer interaction affects their engagement with ER, which is usually more focused on fluency. This is an important but under-researched area.

2. **Comprehensive Perspective on Engagement:**

Numerous studies concentrate on a singular aspect of engagement, often behavioural (e.g., reading volume) or attitudinal. This study seeks to conduct a comprehensive analysis by concurrently evaluating the behavioural, emotional, and cognitive effects of peer interaction on English majors.

3. **Finding Barriers That Are Specific to the Situation:**

In a demanding academic setting like an English Department, the challenges to peer interaction (such as curriculum pressure, perceived lack of time, and academic competition) may be distinct. This study will look at these possible barriers in detail to help design better local curricula.

Methodology

1. **research design**

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach. This methodology employed as it enables a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

- **Quantitative Phase:** The first step surveyed with a large sample size to get quantitative data. This provided a thorough and generalisable overview of the types, frequency, and perceived impacts of peer interaction on reading engagement.
- **Qualitative Phase:** The second phase included follow-up semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with a small group of survey respondents who were chosen on purpose. This phase elucidated, expand upon, and contextualise the quantitative results, yielding comprehensive, profound insights into the students' experiences, motivations, and challenges.

The reason for this design is that the quantitative data gives a "big picture," and the qualitative data helps to "make sense of" the statistical trends and patterns, giving a more complete and nuanced answer to the research questions.

Research context and participants

• **Context:**

The research took place at the Faculty of Languages, specifically in the English Department of El-mergib University. The study concentrated on students currently enrolled in or having previously completed courses that include an Extensive Reading component.

• **Population and Sampling:**

- **Quantitative Sampling:** A stratified random sampling method employed to guarantee representation from various academic years (e.g., first-year to fourth-year). The goal is to ask about 100 to 150 students.
- **Qualitative Sampling:** A purposive sampling method employed to choose 12-15 students from the survey participants for comprehensive interviews and 2-3 focus groups (comprising 4-5 students each). The selection based on their survey responses to make sure that a wide range of experiences represented (for example, high vs. low engagement or frequent vs. infrequent peer interaction).

Research instruments

Three primary instruments used for data collection:

1. The Extensive Reading and Peer Interaction (ERPI) Questionnaire

This was a self-administered, closed-ended questionnaire with four sections:

- **Section A:** Demographic Information (for example, year of study, gender, and previous ER experience).
- **Section B:** Peer Interaction Patterns: This part used a Likert scale and multiple-choice questions to find out the types (like "I recommend books to peers" or "I participate in structured book clubs") and frequency (like "Never," "Rarely," "Sometimes," "Often") of peer interaction.
- **Section C:** Reading Engagement Scale: We used a 5-point Likert scale (from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree) based on existing scales (e.g., Fredricks et al., 2004) to measure the three dimensions of engagement (RQ2, RQ3, RQ4). Some examples of items are:
 1. **Behavioural:** "I read my ER books every week without fail."
 2. **Emotional:** "I like talking to other people about my ER books."
 3. **Cognitive:** "Talking about books with friends helps me understand the story better."
- **Section D:** Questions that don't have a clear answer: There was a few open-ended questions to get some initial qualitative data on how people think the program has affected them (RQ5) and what problems it has caused (RQ6) (for example, "What is the biggest challenge you face when talking about your reading with friends?").

2. Protocol for Semi-Structured Interviews

This guide used for one-on-one interviews to learn more about what each person has been through. Some questions to ask are:

- "Can you tell me about a time when talking to a friend about a book you were reading changed your mind or understanding of it?"
- "How does talking about books with your classmates, if at all, make you want to keep reading?"
- "What makes it easy or hard for you to talk about books in this way?"

3. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guide

The FGDs generated data through group interaction, enabling participants to enhance one another's ideas. The subjects included:

- Collective perceptions of the ER program.
- Norms and culture around sharing reading experiences within the department.
- Brainstorming solutions to common challenges identified in the surveys and interviews.

Data collection procedure

- 1) **Permissions and Piloting:** The university's ethics committee and the Head of the English Department gave their ethical approval. A small group of students (n=10) tried out the questionnaire to see how clear, reliable, and valid it was.
- 2) **Quantitative Phase:** The finished questionnaire sent out electronically (through Google Forms or a similar service) to the selected sample during a specific class session or through departmental mailing lists.
- 3) **Qualitative Phase:** After looking at the survey results for the first time, we got in touch with people who have been interviewed. Interviews and focus group discussions lasted about 30 to 60 minutes and recorded with the participants' permission. The transcripts have been made anonymous.

Data Analysis

- **Quantitative Data Analysis:** Questionnaire data analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 26.
 - 1) **Descriptive statistics** (frequencies, percentages, averages, standard deviations) summarised demographic data and clarify patterns of peer interaction and levels of involvement.
 - 2) **Inferential statistics**, such as Pearson correlation employed to investigate the links between the frequency of peer interaction and the different variables of reading engagement.

- **Qualitative Data Analysis:** Interview and FGD transcripts examined using Thematic Analysis in accordance with the methodology established by Braun and Clarke (2006). This process includes getting to know the data, making initial codes, finding themes, judging themes, defining and naming themes, and putting together the report. This made it easier to see recurring patterns and themes related to impact, motivation, and challenges.
- Ethical considerations**
- **Informed Consent:** Everyone who took part got an information sheet and signed a consent form that explained the study's goals, methods, confidentiality, and their right to leave at any time without any consequences.
 - **Privacy and Anonymity:** All data must stay private. The data transcripts and the final report used fake names for the participants (for example, Student_A and Year_2).
 - **Data Security:** A password-protected computer stored audio recordings and digital data, and a locked cabinet kept hard copies safe.

Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the impact of peer interaction on the extensive reading engagement of students within the English Department. The results from the previous chapter showed that these two factors related in a complicated and very positive way. This discussion chapter examined these findings, incorporating them into the existing literature on experiential learning and sociocultural theories. We analyzed how the data either supported, complicated, or challenged prior research, and explored the educational ramifications of transforming solitary reading into a collective activity. The conversation was mostly about the main ideas that came from the data: how society views reading, how interacting with peers can help with understanding. The problems that came up, and how this affected the training of future language experts.

The Social Affirmation of Reading: Building a Community of Practice

A major finding of this research was the significant role of informal peer recommendations in promoting behavioural and emotional engagement. Students consistently expressed that understanding their friends' reading preferences and enjoyment provided a more persuasive motivation for book selection than any teacher-generated list or curricular requirement. This finding is in line with Yamashita's (2013) research, which found that peer recommendations are an important part of encouraging positive attitudes towards reading.

This phenomenon could be understood within the context of Lave and Wenger's (1991) communities of practice. In the English Department, students are not just learning a language; they are also new members of a group of language experts. When they talk about books they like, they aren't just sharing titles; they're doing something together that makes them all "readers." This meets the psychological need for relatedness, which is a key part of Deci & Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory, and this boosts intrinsic motivation. The evidence suggests that this organic, student-generated enthusiasm for literature is a crucial, albeit often underutilised, educational resource. It changes reading from a solitary activity into a social benefit, greatly increasing emotional involvement by making it a way to connect with others and enjoy things together.

Beyond Conversation: Peer Interaction as Cognitive Scaffolding

The results of this study showed that peer connection has important cognitive benefits, in addition to the clear motivational benefits. Students reported that clarifying a narrative to a confused peer or hearing a classmate's analysis of a character's motivation greatly improved their understanding. This provided significant empirical support for Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). During these discussions, peers acted as more knowledgeable people, helping each other understand and making it easier to understand complex stories and themes that they might have missed on their own.

This finding aligns with Swain's (2000) notion of "collaborative dialogue," in which language facilitates the learning process. To articulate their understanding, students had to reorganise their ideas, reinforce their vocabulary, and create logical stories. Furthermore, the effectiveness of structured interactions, as demonstrated by the constrained documented literature circles, supports Shelton-Strong's (2012) conclusions. The assigned roles in these models (e.g., Connector, Vocabulary Enricher) necessitate that students engage with the text on multiple cognitive levels—personal, linguistic, and analytical—thereby fostering a deeper and more critical cognitive involvement than is typically afforded by cursory reading.

Navigating the Challenges: The Gap between Potential and Practice

Despite the strong positive correlation, this study also found major problems that made it hard for peers to work together. The recognised challenges—lack of structured time, varying skill levels, and the persistent notion that "reading is solitary"—are substantial. They highlighted a major flaw in the implementation.

The absence of designated class time for book discussions indicated to students that peer interaction is secondary, rather than fundamental, to the academic pursuit of reading. This discovery serves as a cautionary narrative for educators, highlighting Robb's (2022) admonition that, in the absence of deliberate design, social activities may

be perceived as optional enhancements rather than essential elements. The anxiety experienced by lower-proficiency students highlights a constraint of entirely spontaneous discussion; it may unintentionally suppress certain voices. This requires educational intervention, such as allocating preparation time or offering structured prompts, to guarantee equitable participation. The enduring notion of the solitary reader indicates that a cultural transformation is necessary within the department, one that promotes collaborative knowledge construction while preserving the intrinsic, contemplative elements of reading.

Implications for the Education of Future Language Professionals

The context of this study—an English Department training future educators, translators, and scholars—added a unique and important aspect to these results. For these students, extensive reading goes beyond just learning a language; it also helps them build a professional identity. The ability to talk about literature, suggest books, and work together to figure out what something means is an important professional skill.

Therefore, adding peer contact to their ER program is not only a good way to teach language, but it is also a good way to learn about their profession. Being part of a dynamic reading community helps students develop important skills for their careers, such as moderating discussions, negotiating meanings, and building a curated understanding of texts. The proven effectiveness of digital interactions, including online forums, highlights the imperative to prepare students for 21st-century literary communities that primarily exist on online platforms such as Goodreads and BookTube. Not providing structured opportunities for collaborative engagement represents a substantial failure in sufficiently equipping them for their career opportunities.

Reconciling the Social with the Core Principles of ER

A possible conflict emerges between the social model presented here and Day & Bamford's (2002) core principle of "reading as its own reward." Can required conversations reduce intrinsic motivation? The results of this study show that the essence is in the traits of the interactive tasks. When people see encounters as real conversations instead of formal evaluations, they make things more fun instead of less fun. The goal is not to replace the calm, immersive pleasure of reading, but to add to it with the joy of discovery. The two experiences do not exclude each other; instead, they work together to make each other better. The solitary reading provides the essential material for dynamic social engagement, which in turn fosters the desire to reengage with the individual text.

Conclusion

The results of this study clearly showed that interacting with peers greatly improved all areas of ER involvement. It changed how people read by creating a system of social responsibility and support. It made the emotional experience better by meeting the need for community and connection. In addition, it helped with cognitive processing by making it easier to understand through collaborative discourse. For the English Department student, these exchanges function not only as a pedagogical tool but also as preparation for professional life. The identified issues are manageable and require a more intentional and strategic approach to the design of ER programs—shifting from merely anticipating contact to cultivating an environment that promotes its growth. This study corroborated that the most efficacious extensive reading programs recognise the reader as both an individual interacting with a text and a participant within a community collectively constructing meaning.

Recommendations

The results of this study show that peer contact has a very positive effect on Extensive Reading engagement, which leads to a number of useful suggestions. These are meant to link research and practice by giving a clear plan for making the ER experience better in the English Department and other similar academic settings. The suggestions were grouped by whom they are for. Lecturers and Curriculum Designers need to make Structured Peer Interaction a part of the ER Curriculum by changing it from optional to embedded formats. This will make sure that peer interaction doesn't happen by chance. Formally add it to the ER program syllabus, giving it a specific time and clear responsibilities. Use structured models like Literature Circles (Daniels, 2002) to carry out at least one module. Assign roles to students, such as Discussion Leader, Connector, and Passage Master, to make sure that everyone is fully and fairly involved and to help all students improve their discussion skills, especially those who are shy or less skilled. Set up regular "Book Discussion" meetings: Set aside 15 to 20 minutes of class time each week or every other week for informal, small-group discussions where students can talk about what they've read, what they think, and what they recommend.

Creating a digital space for the class by making a private group on sites like Padlet, Goodreads, or a special class forum. Use this for book reviews and ratings; students can write short reviews and give star ratings.

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Compliance with ethical standards

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