

# Exploring Bhutanese Teachers' Perceptions of Extensive Reading

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## Abstract

The study empirically examined the perception of extensive reading among Bhutanese teachers. Thirty-four Bhutanese teachers responded to an online questionnaire and rated their level of agreement on the characteristics and benefits of extensive reading (ER). Participants' questionnaire responses were analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics. The results showed that the majority of the teacher participants accepted most of the characteristics of ER but disagreed with a few others that contradicted the widely accepted views of ER. Most of the participants agreed with the benefits of ER for the overall development of language proficiencies in terms of reading, writing, speaking, vocabulary, grammar, and motivation, while the majority disagreed with its benefits for listening proficiency. However, the mixed results of the study indicated misconceptions among teacher participants regarding extensive reading. Therefore, these findings suggest the need for extensive reading programs and workshops for Bhutanese teachers to clarify any misinterpretations of ER.

**Keywords:** *Extensive Reading, Benefits of Extensive Reading, ER characteristics*

## INTRODUCTION

The study of extensive reading perceptions has become an essential aspect because many recent ER researchers (Arai, 2019; Chang & Renandya, 2017; Sun, 2020; Waring & Vu, 2020) have found varying ER perceptions among teachers. These further demand exploration of teacher perceptions in other second language contexts. If the ER concerns of the teachers are resolved, then the ways to support teachers would be most effective for the successful implementation of extensive reading. Moreover, Macalister (2010) states that though the importance of teacher cognition has become one of the most recognized interests, however, a limited number of studies have been found examining teachers' knowledge concerning teaching

reading in second and foreign language classrooms. Teacher cognition, according to Borg (2003), is an unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching that influences the way teachers teach in the class. Further, Macalister (2010) strongly supports that the cognitive studies in extensive reading did not receive explicit attention. Therefore, exploring teacher perception of extensive reading in various L2 contexts is of paramount importance.

The perceptions in these studies, however, explored the knowledge and understanding of extensive reading in various second-language contexts. Waring and Vu (2020) found that some of the teachers in Vietnam were unaware of the benefits of extensive reading and its role, although some teachers were aware of it. The researchers also found that many participant teachers were unable to differentiate between extensive reading and intensive reading. Besides, the longitudinal study conducted by Sun (2020) indicated that Chinese participant teachers needed ER training programs to implement extensive reading effectively, and some of the participants in the study preferred challenging books over easy books to read, contradicting the view of ER. Further, Waring and Vu (2020) particularly examined the understanding of extensive reading among Vietnamese teachers and found that some teachers were confused with the principles of ER. Thus, the study suggests a need for an awareness campaign and training programs to develop the ER community in Vietnam.

In Bhutan, to cultivate a reading culture, every school began constructing library rooms and allocating library periods in 1984, alongside the initiation of various intensive reading programs (Shaw, 2005). According to Brown & Lee (2015), the trend of intensive reading that focuses on linguistic details seems prevalent in Bhutanese second-language classrooms, unlike extensive reading that is purely for pleasure. Besides, the Bhutanese national English curriculum guide for grade IV authored by the Royal Education Council (2018) depicts that the reading materials are preselected and prescribed; the activities in the curriculum guide are mostly pre- and post-reading tasks, answering comprehension questions that only foster intensive reading. Additionally, Shaw (2009) also reveals that students have just one library period in a week, and sometimes even that is replaced by other content subjects to cover up the syllabus. Such an event indicates that pleasurable reading time for students seemed suppressed.

However, Bhutanese schools are undergoing drastic changes to foster a reading culture. The schools in Bhutan observe reading week and reading year, and as well as conduct winter reading retreats with the theme, "Reading is Fun and aim at

making reading an enjoyable endeavor for our children” (Daily Bhutan, 2020). The implementation of such programs overlaps with some of the ER characteristics of Bamford and Day (2002). However, it can neither be surmised nor assumed that the teachers of Bhutan are well-informed about extensive reading. In Bhutan, the term ‘Extensive Reading’ is not popular, so, it questions whether Bhutanese teachers have any awareness or understanding of extensive reading.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore Bhutanese teachers’ perception of extensive reading and their understanding of the ER.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This study aims to explore Bhutanese teachers’ perceptions of extensive reading on the understanding of Extensive Reading (ER). Extensive reading is reading large quantities of easy and pleasurable text materials that focus only on meaning and a general understanding of a text (Bamford & Day, 1998; Grabe & Stoller, 2011; Suk, 2017). Interestingly, its popularity spread across all the second language classrooms due to the drawbacks of the traditional reading approach which is intensive reading (Arai, 2019). Intensive reading is reading a text line by line, focusing on grammar, translating, comparing, and analyzing every bit of information it contains by repeatedly using the dictionary (Palmer, 1921). The purpose of extensive reading (ER) and intensive reading (IR) is different. Extensive reading is purely for pleasure reading, whereas IR is for understanding literal meaning, grammatical structures, and rhetorical relationships in the text (Brown & Lee, 2015). There are ten guiding principles of extensive reading according to Day and Bamford (2002, pp. 137-139) as follows:

- The reading material is easy.
- A variety of reading material on a wide range of topics is available.
- Learners choose what they want to read.
- Learners read as much as possible.
- Reading is for pleasure, and to gain information and general understanding.
- Reading is the reward itself.
- Learners usually read quickly and not slowly.
- Reading is silent and individual.
- Teachers orient and guide students.

- The teacher models being a reader.

Hence, to examine the teachers' perception of extensive reading, the ten guiding principles of ER are used as the main characteristics.

### **Benefits of Extensive Reading**

Many studies have found immense benefits of ER in developing all-round language abilities, as well as in promoting motivated autonomous readers with better reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary, and speaking skills (Jacobs & Farrell, 2012; Nakanishi, 2015; Ng, Renandya, & Chong, 2019). However, Waring and Vu (2020) state that despite the immense benefits of ER in enhancing language abilities, it is not popular in Vietnam due to its challenges such as the culture of learning, educational policies, and low income that impeded the implementation of extensive reading. In addition, the study also indicated that many Vietnamese teachers were not able to differentiate between intensive and extensive reading. Therefore, the mixed results in the study showed Vietnamese teachers' misconceptions about extensive reading. Another similar study on ER perception by Sun (2020) found that Chinese teachers had varying perceptions of extensive reading, and interestingly refuted some of the widely accepted ten principles of extensive reading. Furthermore, the study conducted by Arai (2019) revealed similar results, wherein the Japanese teacher trainee participants' definitions of extensive reading (ER) differed among themselves and from previous research. Moreover, the teacher participants varied in their perceptions of the effectiveness of ER and expressed concerns regarding its implementation. Therefore, the researchers (IMAMURA, 2020; Sun, 2020; Waring & Vu, 2020) firmly concluded that teachers further needed ER training programs to implement ER, and also present ways to encourage and motivate students in reading. Hence, these studies confirm the need to explore teachers' perceptions of the ER to clarify the misconceptions and to provide necessary support.

### **Reading in Bhutan**

Similarly, in Bhutan, though the government and the education ministry endeavored to promote reading culture, however, the ways of teaching reading seem more inclined towards the traditional way of teaching reading. This is because Shaw (2005) stated that as English is a medium of instruction in Bhutan, reading is considered a study-related activity associated with textbooks and passing exams. According to Shaw, intensive reading is dominant compared to pleasurable reading in Bhutan.

In addition, the current reading programs may not have impacted much in the rural schools because the Ministry of Education (2014) found out that students from rural areas performed poorly in reading and numeracy and lacked reading abilities compared to students of urban areas.

Therefore, there is an urgent need to implement ER in Bhutanese classrooms, as extensive reading not only promotes vocabulary and grammar, writing, speaking, and listening skills but also makes students better and enjoyable readers (Jacobs & Farrell, 2012). To implement ER, it is also essential to explore Bhutanese teachers' perception of extensive reading because one's perception and belief shape the way we teach, as supported by Macalister (2010) that perceptions have a direct influence on teacher cognition.

Therefore, surveying Bhutanese teacher's perceptions of ER in terms of what they know about ER and its importance despite the use of intensive reading approaches in the classrooms is the main aim of the study. The study would have a significant impact on relevant agencies to gear up ER training, workshops, and professional development programs for teachers to implement extensive reading. This would ultimately have a positive impact on students to read more, acquire more, and improve better in all language abilities

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

The study used a quantitative survey research design to explore Bhutanese teachers' perceptions. A survey involved administering an extensive reading perception questionnaire adapted from (Arai, 2019).

The participants in the study were thirty-three Bhutanese English Language teachers. The highest number of teachers in the study hold a Bachelor's degree (87.9%) since a degree is the minimum qualification for teachers in Bhutan and the largest population is found in that level of education. In this study, the snowball sampling technique was used to draw samples from the whole population of teachers in Bhutan. Thirty-three teachers voluntarily participated in responding to the online questionnaire.

### **Research Instrument**

The extensive reading perception questionnaire (see appendix A) was adapted from (Arai, 2019). The questionnaire has five sections. However, for

the study, the second and the third sections of the perception questionnaire were adapted since the other section was irrelevant to the present study as it gathers data about ER implementation, which is not the aim of the current study. The first section of the questionnaire collects data on teachers' perception of extensive reading based on Bamford and Day's (2002) ten guiding principles of ER. The second section of the questionnaire included the perceived benefits of extensive reading. The teacher respondents rated their degree of agreement for each item (principle of ER) on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) and similarly, teachers rated their level of agreement for the items of the perceived benefits of ER.

### **Procedures**

The teacher respondents were informed about the aims of the study before sending the questionnaire and allowed them to submit the responses in a voluntary and anonymous manner. All participants consented to participate in the study voluntarily. After that, the online questionnaire (google form) was shared through Messenger, WeChat, and email. Then the data was collected again through an online questionnaire (google form).

### **Data Analysis**

For the analysis of the five-point Likert scale data, the SPSS program was used to generate descriptive statistics for the responses of the teachers. The mean and the standard deviation were calculated from the respondent's responses. The higher mean ratings and the smaller standard deviations of the responses of items would indicate a lesser variation of agreement. On the other hand, lower mean ratings and larger deviations of the responses of the items would indicate more variation of agreement among the participants.

## **RESULTS**

The findings from the survey questionnaire examined Bhutanese teachers' perception of extensive reading. The findings from the questionnaire were presented by the descriptive statistics analyzed using an SPSS program. The quantitative data from the questionnaire were divided into two sections as follows;

Bhutanese teachers' agreement levels with ER Characteristics

Bhutanese teachers' perceived benefits of Extensive Reading

### Bhutanese Teachers' agreement levels with ER characteristics

The five-point Likert scale is used to collect data. The SPSS computer program was used to generate the mean and the standard deviation. The mean ratings above 3.41 with smaller standard deviations indicates lesser variation of agreement, and the mean rating below 3.41 with a larger standard deviation indicates greater variation of agreement.

Table 1.1 displays descriptive statistics for section 1 where teacher participants were asked to rate their level of agreement for the items of the characteristics of extensive reading proposed by Day and Bamford (2002). The results suggest that Bhutanese teachers have some concepts of extensive reading since most of the mean scores of the items were above 3.4. However, there are a few items that the participants disagreed on; the last four lowest mean ratings showed participants' disagreement with ER characteristics, and the findings were similar to recent second/ foreign language ER studies (e.g., Arai, 2019; Sun, 2020).

**Table 1**

*Descriptive statistics section 1 on the characteristics of Extensive Reading (n=33)*

ER Characteristics	M	SD	Min.	Max.
1. The level of reading materials used in an extensive reading should be easier than a learner's current linguistic level.	3.97	.983	1	5
2. There should be a large variety of reading materials in an extensive reading.	4.1	.972	1	5
3. It is students, not teachers, who should choose reading materials used in an extensive reading.	3.9	.979	2	5
4. In an extensive reading, students should read as much as possible.	4.1	.927	1	5
5. The purpose of an extensive reading is to enjoy reading.	4.2	.820	2	5
6. In an extensive reading, you don't need to understand all the sentences accurately but in general.	3.8	.808	2	5
7. An extensive reading is for its own reward, so there should not be post-reading comprehension questions.	3.6	.742	2	5
8. In an extensive reading a learner should read at a relatively rapid speed.	3.0	.968	2	5

9. Because extensive reading is an individual, teachers should keep silent.	3.1	1.034	1	5
10. In an extensive reading, teachers should read together with their students.	3.0	.979	1	5
11. In an extensive reading student frequently use dictionary to look for meaning of the unknown words.	3.3	1.088	2	5

Note: 5 strongly agree, 4 agree, 3 I don't know, 2 disagree, 1 I strongly disagree

The mean ratings above 3.41 with smaller standard deviations indicate lesser variation of agreement as seven out of eleven items reflect participants' agreement with the characteristics of extensive reading. The highest mean rating for item 5 concerning the purpose of extensive reading for pleasure is agreed by 29 participants out of 33 participants indicating that Bhutanese teachers were aware of letting the learners choose their material (item 3). The importance of pleasure reading can be seen in the statement of ER researchers (Susser & Robb, 1990), that ER is to draw pleasure from the text. However, the contrasting view by Waring and McLean (2015) in the classification of the ER definition concluded that ER does not necessarily need to be pleasurable. Nevertheless, the present study supported the view that ER is to read for pleasure.

Further, the value of the importance of providing easy reading materials for the students, and providing reading materials lower than the student's current linguistic level (item 1) is agreed upon by 24 teacher respondents since pleasure reading is determined by easily graded materials and the interests of the students (Bamford & Day, 2002). This ER characteristic is proposed by Bamford and Day (1998) that ER materials must be within the student's linguistic level regarded as "i minus 1". Contrastingly, Krashen (2007) pointed out the importance of providing a large amount of input "i plus 1" that is providing comprehensible input that is little beyond the current linguistic level of students. Similarly, the participants in the study further showed the importance of providing a variety of reading materials to the readers (item 2) as it was considered more effective than reading materials of the same genre or materials written by the same authors (Chang & Renandya, 2017). Therefore, enhancing students' motivation to read as much as possible (item 4).

However, the mean ratings for items 8, 9, 10, and 11, are below 3.40 with a larger standard deviation indicating more variations among the participants in the level of agreement. According to Bamford and Day (2002), the reading speed is faster rather than slower as the ER materials are usually easy (i minus 1) according to the comprehensible input by Krashen (2007). However, the lowest mean rating in the result



indicated Bhutanese teachers' disagreement with item (8) indicating the unimportance of reading speed in ER. Similarly, (item 11) concerning ER is to use frequent use of a dictionary to look for the meaning of unknown words is not a characteristic of ER. The results depicted disagreement among the participants concluding that they do agree with the process of reading faster without any disturbance to stop and look for unknown words in the dictionary. However, the findings of this study are incongruent with previous studies (e.g., Arai, 2019; Sun, 2020). The varied and mixed results indicated participants' misconception of extensive reading suggesting a need to pioneer ER training programs and workshops for Bhutanese teachers.

### **Bhutanese Teachers perceived the benefits of extensive reading**

Table 1.2 presents the descriptive statistics for section 2 which asked participants to rate their level of agreement for the perceived benefits of extensive reading. Generally, the higher mean score (above 3.40) with smaller standard deviations indicated lesser variations in the level of agreement showing that Bhutanese teachers accepted the benefits of extensive reading.

#### **Table**

*Descriptive statistics on section 2 of the benefits of ER (N=33)*

Items	M	SD	Min.	Max.
1. Extensive reading benefits a learner by developing his/her reading proficiency.	4.6	.788	1	5
2. Extensive reading benefits a learner by developing his/her writing proficiency.	4.2	.820	1	5
3. Extensive reading benefits a learner by developing his/her listening proficiency.	3.8	.9056	1	5
4. Extensive reading benefits a learner by developing his/her speaking proficiency.	4.2	.910	1	5
5. Extensive reading benefits a learner by developing his/her vocabulary knowledge.	4.4	.936	1	5
6. Extensive reading benefits a learner by developing his/her grammar knowledge.	4.1	.882	1	5
7. Extensive reading benefits a learner's motivation.	4.3	.742	2	5

Note. 5 strongly agree, 4 agree, 3 I don't know, 2 disagree, 1 I strongly disagree

The results showed that almost all participants accepted the overall benefits of extensive reading. Specifically, for the development of listening proficiency, only

24 participants agreed ( $M = 3.8$ ). Similarly, for speaking proficiency ( $M = 4.2$ ), 30 participants accepted the benefits of ER. Comparatively, participants' agreement levels were higher for reading proficiency ( $M = 4.6$ ), vocabulary ( $M = 4.4$ ), and enhancing motivations to read ( $M = 4.3$ ), while slightly lower for writing ( $M = 4.2$ ) and grammar ( $M = 4.1$ ). Nevertheless, the perception of the teachers for the above-mentioned items is inconsistent with previous ER study of (Chang & Renandya, 2017; DoHuy, Hull, & Tepsuriwong, 2006; Jeon & Day, 2016). However, (item 3) concerning ER benefits on listening proficiency ( $M = 3.8$ ) has the lowest mean rating, indicating a variation in the level of agreement.

### Discussion and Conclusion

The main aim of the study was to empirically explore Bhutanese teachers' perception of Extensive reading. The results concerning the level of agreement with the ER characteristics suggest that many participants agreed with seven of the eleven ER principles. ER characteristics that emphasized pleasure reading were agreed upon by 24 participants. Additionally, 30 teacher respondents agreed to the use of easy reading materials. Furthermore, providing a large variety of reading materials was agreed upon by 26 participants. These findings are supported by Krashen's (1985) input hypothesis for language acquisition. The comprehensible input  $I - 1$  and  $I + 1$  for language acquisition is the main underlying theory of extensive reading (Ng et al., 2019). Krashen characterizes comprehensible input as ' $i+1$ ', with ' $i$ ' representing the learner's current proficiency level, and ' $+1$ ' indicating the proficiency level slightly above that of the learner (Krashen, 1982). On the other hand, according to Day and Bamford (1998), the effectiveness of language learning is maximized when students are provided with input that is just slightly easier than their current level of proficiency, known as " $i-1$ " input. This theory suggests that learners derive the most benefit when they are presented with material that is challenging yet still manageable, facilitating gradual improvement in their language skills. So, this study further reinforces the use of a variety of comprehensible reading materials that are enjoyable and to the level of students for a longer duration.

However, the level of agreement varied regarding four out of the eleven extensive reading (ER) characteristics. The disagreement concerning learners reading at a relatively rapid speed was refuted, and several others were rated as 'I don't know'. However, Bamford and Day (2002) argue that extensive reading (ER) entails reading faster, as students typically engage with easy and comprehensible books that are enjoyable. Therefore, the contrasting result for this item indicates Bhutanese teachers' misconception of extensive reading, underscoring the need for extensive

reading programs to be initiated in the country to clarify the misinterpretation of ER. The findings were consistent with the results of previous research studies (e.g. Arai, 2019; Sun, 2020; Waring & Vu, 2020). Nevertheless, for the second section, the perceived benefits of extensive reading in enhancing reading, writing, speaking, grammar, and vocabulary were highly accepted by the teacher respondents. However, the level of agreement varied for the item ER improves listening proficiency contradicting the study of Cho and Krashen (1994) that found ER's effectiveness in enhancing listening proficiencies.

While the findings of the study offer valuable insights into extensive reading, it is important to acknowledge that drawbacks are inevitable. Firstly, the smaller sample size limits the generalizability of the results to other contexts. Secondly, the teachers' prior experiences with reading benefits may have influenced their perceptions, which overlapped with Day and Bamford's (2002) ten extensive reading characteristics. Despite these limitations, the study can be an eye opener for educationists, teachers, and parents to look at the ways of building reading culture and also to help them move more towards 'read to learn' rather than 'learn to read'.

In conclusion, while Bhutanese teachers largely embraced the benefits of Extensive Reading, the varying levels of agreement on ER characteristics suggest some misinterpretation among teachers. Further exploration is necessary to investigate the perceptions of Extensive Reading among teachers with diverse educational backgrounds and levels of experience, including the number of years in service. Additionally, future research could examine both the long-term and short-term benefits of Extensive Reading, as well as the practical challenges associated with its implementation, particularly within the Bhutanese context.

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