

## A Study of Thai Students' Opinions on Books for Extensive Reading

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### Abstract

This study aims at investigating Thai learners' desired characteristics of books for English extensive reading, or graded readers. The research was conducted in nine Educational Expansion Schools in Thailand. These schools received 100 graded readers and were case studies for the Models of Graded Readers Use in Primary Schools Project, launched by the Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC), the Ministry of Education. The instruments used in the study included a questionnaire which was used with 475 subjects from the schools, and a follow-up semi-structured interview used with over 100 students from

the same group. The findings revealed that although these students had positive attitudes towards reading and the reading activities arranged by the schools, there was a mismatch between students' desired materials and the graded readers in terms of language difficulty and L1 support, length, topics and contexts, and book appearance. This paper discusses the learners' desired characteristics of graded readers, problems they encountered with the present extensive reading materials, and possible solutions.

**Keywords :** extensive reading, graded readers, learners' factors, reading skills

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### บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อสำรวจลักษณะ  
อันพึงประสงค์ของหนังสือส่งเสริมการอ่านภาษา  
อังกฤษของนักเรียนไทย การวิจัยทำขึ้นในโรงเรียน  
ขยายโอกาสทางการศึกษา 9 แห่ง โรงเรียนเหล่านี้  
ได้รับหนังสือชุด *Graded Readers* จำนวน 100 เล่ม  
และเป็นโรงเรียนกรณีศึกษาในโครงการวิจัยเรื่อง  
การศึกษารูปแบบการใช้หนังสืออ่านนอกเวลาใน  
โรงเรียนระดับประถมศึกษา ของสำนักงานคณะกรรมการ  
การการการศึกษาขั้นพื้นฐาน กระทรวงศึกษาธิการ  
เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการวิจัยประกอบด้วยแบบสอบถาม  
ซึ่งใช้กับกลุ่มตัวอย่างได้แก่ นักเรียนของโรงเรียน

เหล่านี้จำนวน 475 คน และการสัมภาษณ์กึ่งโครงสร้าง ซึ่งใช้กับนักเรียนที่ตอบแบบสอบถามจำนวนกว่า 100 คน ผลการวิจัยพบว่า นักเรียนมีทัศนคติที่ดีต่อ การอ่านและกิจกรรมส่งเสริมการอ่านที่โรงเรียนจัดให้ แต่มีความไม่สอดคล้องกันระหว่างลักษณะของสื่อ การอ่านที่นักเรียนต้องการกับหนังสือที่โรงเรียนได้ รับในหลายด้าน อาทิ ระดับความยากง่ายของภาษา ตัวช่วยที่เป็นภาษาที่ 1 ความยาว หัวข้อ บริบท และ รูปลักษณะของหนังสือ บทความวิจัยนี้จะอภิปราย ถึงลักษณะอันพึงประสงค์ของหนังสือส่งเสริมการ อ่านภาษาอังกฤษ ตามความเห็นของผู้เรียน รวมทั้ง ปัญหาที่เกิดขึ้นกับนักเรียนเมื่ออ่านหนังสือรูปแบบ ที่มีอยู่ในปัจจุบัน และแนวทางการแก้ไขปัญหา

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**คำสำคัญ:** การอ่านที่กว้างขวาง, ทักษะการอ่าน, ปัจจัยด้านผู้อ่าน, หนังสือส่งเสริมการอ่าน

### Background and rationale

A national survey conducted by the National Statistical Office in 2008 indicated that Thai youth spent approximately 46 minutes a day reading, and this reading rate was noticeably lower than those of the previous years' results. The downward trend of students' reading rates serves as a "wake-up call" to the whole nation to take some preventive as well as remedial actions to rectify the situation, as reading is a fundamental literacy skill required for learning in the present knowledge-based society. In order to prepare the nation to be competitive on the world stage, our children need to be equipped with literacy skills, one of which is the ability to efficiently read in English. Promotion of English reading thus has to be regarded as an urgent national issue which needs strong cooperation among the sectors involved.

Acknowledging this threat from the nation's reading shortfall, the Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC), Ministry of Education, has started many national reading development plans with young learners, since childhood is a critical stage of lifelong cognitive and psychological development. Reading is believed to be best promoted starting from early childhood, as it involves cognitive and meta-cognitive abilities which are intensively developed at this age, as well as affective factors which can positively or negatively affect children's desire to read. Therefore, for the promotion of effective reading, both cognition and a love of reading have to be nurtured in young learners.

In 2009, OBEC launched a graded reader project in 356 small Educational Expansion Schools, primary schools that specially offer secondary education to provide education opportunities for students.

These schools were recruited for the project due to the outstanding national test results of their students. One hundred graded readers were sent to each school as a reward for their students' performance. An English teacher from each of these schools was also invited for a training workshop on how to use graded readers to promote students' reading. These teachers were also encouraged to initiate a graded reader project at their home schools and report on the use of the books to OBEC after a year. OBEC expected the schools to use the books to bring about further good results concerning students' reading abilities and habits (OBEC, 2009).

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The results from OBEC's school reports (2009) showed that every school used the graded readers received as external reading. Many of them integrated the books into an English course dedicating some scores to reading and/or reading-related activities to encourage active use of the books. Some schools, however, considered them as extra resources for outside-class opportunities, not as a required part of a course. Students could borrow them as they do other library books.

The use of the books in these schools seemed to be highly dependent upon the English teachers' techniques for promoting them. The schools that reported active implementation incorporated various activities, such as reading portfolios, storytelling, vocabulary notebooks, drawing pictures, reading quizzes, etc., into the graded reader project, and showed a higher record of both books borrowed and student use of the books. In some schools, many of the books received were neglected. The students did not seem to like or use them much. In fact, only one school reported using every single book it had received. This was because the teacher applied the 'one-book-one-week' policy with his

students. The students were required to take one book home for a week regardless of their interest or the book's level of difficulty, and they then swapped the book with a classmate after a week. This policy was created merely to make sure that the books were fully used and the students had a hands-on experience with the graded readers. Unfortunately, the school's high rate of book utilization did not correlate well with their students' attitudes towards the books. The students reported that many books were beyond their proficiency, and did not match their interests and background (OBEC, 2009).

This OBEC school report also highlighted two main implementation problems of the graded reader projects: teachers' active roles in promoting the books and students' reasoning in choosing books. The first problem implies the need for more work at a policy and administration level to foster better implementation, which is beyond the scope of this study. The latter problem reflects a mismatch between the authority or adults who selected the books and the learners who used the books. The problem of book selection also raises an important issue about learners' factors which is essential to consider for effective learning. Without considering learners' choices or preferences, no reading promotion model could successfully achieve its ultimate aim. The present study intends to be a follow-up to the OBEC school reports. It aims to investigate students' ideal English books for an extensive reading programme, activities that they enjoy, and support they request for the effectiveness of an extensive reading project of young learners in Thai primary schools. In the next section, the literature review related to extensive reading and roles of readers are outlined.

### **Extensive reading**

People learn to read and to improve their reading by reading (Eskey, 1986) so the best way to learn reading is to read extensively and continuously. This well-established concept has paved the way for 'extensive reading,' which is the term used in foreign language pedagogy to refer to an approach of teaching reading by encouraging learners to read large numbers of books or other materials for information or for pleasure (Renandya, Rajan & Jacobs, 1999). It is distinct from 'intensive reading' where learners focus on detailed comprehension of a particular text and, therefore, read it intensively by, for example, consulting a dictionary, identifying main ideas, analyzing discourse markers in the text, studying expressions and grammatical features in the text, etc. (Nuttall, 1982; Day and Bamford, 1998; Renandya, Rajan and Jacobs, 1999). In spite of their contrasting natures, extensive and intensive reading could be viewed as complementing each other, rather than being incongruent (Lituanas, Jacobs and Renandya, 1999). They could be used to support each other.

Extensive reading allows learners to extensively read a wide range of materials that are well within their linguistic competence for real-world purposes of pleasure and information (Day and Bamford, 1998). This kind of reading focuses more on content and pleasure from reading rather than the language. It is thus real-world reading but for a pedagogical purpose. Also, through this kind of reading, learners can acquire the complex linguistic, world, and topical knowledge needed to improve their reading skills (Day and Bamford, 1998). It, therefore, has a high potential for promoting good reading habits and a love for reading among learners.

Extensive reading has been researched and reported to produce satisfactory results in a number of situations (Tudor and Hafiz, 1989; Rob and Susser, 1989; Elley, 1991; Tudor, 1990; Jacobs, Davies and Renandya, 1997; Nation, 1997; Leung, 2002; Macalister, 2010). These studies point out that extensive reading fosters effective reading skills, good reading habits, positive attitudes, and vocabulary learning as well as general language proficiency. These benefits seemed to stem from readers' vast exposure to various readings. The readers, therefore, get opportunities to obtain general knowledge about the world and learn the language from their self-selected texts. They can observe the language in context, not just as a discrete item from a prescribed English workbook or language exercises. Moreover, the freedom of choice and time allow reading for pleasure, and foster a love for reading. There is no threat from time constraints or coercion from a teacher's pre-determined titles. Through reading extensively, learners learn to read in a second or foreign language, and enjoy reading.

Due to its all-encompassing nature, extensive reading is introduced to an English class either as an integral part of the lesson or an outside-class reading activity. In either form of application, the following features are suggested as general guidelines for effective implementation of the programme (Day and Bamford, 1998).

1. Large amount of reading: Learners read as much as possible.
2. Wide range of materials: Learners have various choices of topics to choose from.
3. Freedom: Learners can choose what to read or not to read, and to start and stop reading anytime.
4. Reading purposes: The purposes of reading are usually for

pleasure, information, or general understanding, and these purposes are determined by the nature of the materials or learners' interest.

5. Self-rewarding nature of reading: Reading is for the sake of reading, not for getting good scores from comprehension or follow-up exercises.

6. Right level: Reading materials are within the linguistic competence of learners in terms of vocabulary and grammar.

7. Private and silent nature of reading: An individual learner reads silently in their own setting at their own pace.

8. Fast speed: Learners usually read quickly rather than slowly, as the materials are usually easily understandable.

9. Teachers' guidance: Teachers should explain the goal and guide the students to read to get the most out of reading.

10. Teacher as a role model: Teachers should be active members of the reading community.

These ten characteristics contribute to the success of an extensive reading programme. For example, it is essential that learners can choose the materials that they are interested in and read them for pleasure, rather than to satisfy the teachers or to pass a reading test, which is not the real purpose of extensive reading. If learners only read to follow the course requirements, the love for reading might be dismissed. Moreover, if the reading materials are beyond the learners' linguistic competence with no comprehensive input required for language acquisition, reading achievement is impossible (Krashen, 1982; Saville-Troike, 2006). In addition, both teachers and learners need to realize their roles in doing extensive reading. It is not adequate to simply buy books, put them in a library, and inform students to

practice reading. Some measurements should be employed to encourage students to start reading, enjoy reading, and continue reading so that they can read in larger amounts and be satisfied with their roles as achievers. These measurements usually include various interesting reading-related activities, such as storytelling, competitions, portfolio, etc. In some programmes, the use of extrinsic motivation like rewards, scores, and grades is used to motivate learners to read. However, these extrinsic reinforcements have to be used with caution, so as not to sacrifice the admirable self-rewarding nature or intrinsic motivation of reading.

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### **Materials used for extensive reading**

As one of the key features leading to the success of extensive reading lies in the amount of reading, the selection of reading materials has to be carefully considered. Generally, materials used for extensive reading should vary in forms and levels to cater for individual differences. They could be materials published specially for extensive reading purposes such as simplified readers and graded readers, or authentic materials available in the communicative community (Day and Bamford, 1998).

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Graded readers are usually preferable for extensive reading since they come in series and are specially designed to serve different levels of readers. These commercial resources are produced by publishers such as Oxford, Penguin, and Cambridge. These materials are usually graded by levels of language difficulty and/or length, and are classified by themes. There are also a wide range of topics in a series. Readers can start from a lower level and enjoy reading many topics available

in the series. Then, after finishing the set or gaining enough confidence, they can move up to a higher level and clearly observe their own achievement. These commercial materials, however, require budgets and careful selection, since not all of the topics available may interest or be at the right level for learners. Moreover, most graded readers are published by a foreign press, so many stories depict foreign settings unfamiliar to Thai students, or are simplified from Western literature. These stories require adequate cultural knowledge from readers and, therefore, might be too demanding for them. In addition, these simplified texts are considered to suffer from lack of authenticity by a number of reading experts.

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An alternative approach for extensive reading is to use authentic materials. Teachers can collect printed materials from a variety of available resources, and form a reading corner for learners to access them conveniently. These sources are usually non-fiction, and they could be selected from short stories, novels, comics, cartoons, advertisements, news, features, documentaries, film reviews, etc. However, the use of non-graded texts might lead to teachers' concerns about levels of text readability and difficult words. These materials are also difficult to grade or classify to suit learners' proficiency. However, Poulshock (2010) argued that this might not always be a problem. He argued for the promotion of texts collected especially from liberal arts and sciences. In his study, Poulshock (2010) graded non-fiction stories in the liberal arts and sciences, and examined how students learned from these graded stories. The findings showed promising results. Learners enjoyed, were motivated by, and gained vocabulary knowledge through reading these materials.

Many reading experts support the use of authentic materials for promoting reading. They further suggest that readers should be the ones who determine whether the materials are suitable or at the right level for them both in terms of interest and language difficulty. In fact, text authenticity resides in the quality of reading bestowed upon it, rather than the nature of the text itself (Widdowson, 1979; Nuttal, 1982; Lee, 1995). Readers, therefore, decide whether the text is authentic or not. If the readers can read the text, enjoy it, and would like to continue reading, it is then considered authentic and should be regarded as the right level or appropriate extensive reading material for them.

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### **Learners' factors and readers' active roles in reading**

Obviously, choices of materials for extensive reading are closely dependent on learners or readers who play active roles throughout the reading process where readers and writers communicate ideas via written media. Readers make the decision whether or not to read a text at the initial stage of material selection or consideration. They will read the text only if it interests them or serves their needs; otherwise, reading will never occur. This initial stage is, thus, an important step that decides whether the other subsequent interactive actions in the reading process-such as decoding the text, reacting to the message, understanding, appreciating, creating personal meanings, and solving reading problems-will occur.

Both the initial stage of deciding whether or not to read, as well as the rest of the entire reading process, are highly dependent upon learners' factors which involve individual differences in terms of interest, styles, preferences, motivation, ages, sexes, background, levels of

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literacy, etc. For instance, learners of different age groups and sexes usually prefer to read different topics. Learners with different levels of English proficiency are likely to read or are able to read texts at different levels of understanding and appreciation. Learners who are highly interested in the reading topics will enjoy reading more, and read longer and usually better. Learners with a strong motivation to read and to improve reading will have more endurance in tackling a challenging text, and greater potential to read effectively, etc. These learners' factors, therefore, directly affect the entire reading process, which requires learners' active roles in reading.

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While reading, especially in a foreign language, usually learners do not want only to enjoy reading; many of them also intend to learn the language by observing patterns of language use and vocabulary from the texts. To assist learning, therefore, they are encouraged to record new words or expressions. They may also summarize what they have read, or transfer the information into different forms such as drawing pictures, doing a role play or orally retelling the story to others. Moreover, it is suggested that reading reflection is a crucial part of the learning process as it helps readers understand their feelings, attitudes, and problems, and evaluate their levels of success from reading, which in turn helps them select the right material to read and employ more appropriate strategies for the next reading.

In conclusion, reading is a private and solitary activity. Moreover, it is an active and interactive learning process which demands a high level of engagement from readers. Therefore, without considering readers' factors such as their interests, wants, needs, levels, problems faced, etc., an extensive reading programme will not be successful.

This study regards readers' or learners' factors as an important element of extensive reading. It aims to investigate learners' attitudes and ideas about characteristics of extensive reading materials they prefer and the ones they do not like, as well as problems and support they need while using the materials. The next section describes the research design of the study.

### Research methods

To achieve these aims, a questionnaire was designed to focus on three main themes: desired materials for extensive reading, problems encountered, and support needed. The questions asked solicited short answers with open-ended parts (See Appendix). The questionnaire was posted to the teachers responsible for the extensive reading project of nine schools which were the case studies in the research project, Models of Graded Readers Use in Primary Schools, launched by Office of the Basic Education Commission in 2009 (OBEC, 2009).

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Four hundred and ninety five questionnaires were sent to the teachers. Each teacher was asked to distribute the questionnaire to at least 50 students who had used graded readers for extensive reading. As it turned out, 475 questionnaires (95.96%) were returned to the researchers. Most respondents were from primary 5 to secondary 3, as shown in Table 1. These respondents include 279 females and 192 males. There were four students who did not identify themselves.

**Table 1: Numbers of respondents**

Levels	No.	Percentage
Primary 3-4	4	0.84
Primary 5-6	101	21.26
Secondary 1-2	253	53.26
Secondary 3	117	24.63
Total	475	100

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As a follow-up to the questionnaire, students from these schools were asked to be interviewed in groups according to each school's convenience. The teacher of each school selected 20-30 students who had answered the questionnaire and were available for the interview at the time of the researchers' school visit. They were asked for permission for a group interview, and it was explained to them that the interview aimed to get clarification for their answers in the questionnaire and their ideas concerning extensive reading, as well as suggestions for the graded reader project.

The total interviewed subjects were 137 students. They were from only six out of nine schools participated in the study as the other three schools were not available for the interview. These students were from primary 6 to secondary 2 students. It was observed that all of them had very good attitudes towards graded readers and reading activities arranged by the schools, but the language proficiency of most of the students was rather low. Moreover, the researchers found no significant differences in terms of language proficiency and general background between the primary students and the secondary students.

In the next section, the significant findings from the questionnaires will be presented with the support of students' reasons and opinions obtained from the interview.

### **Results: Learners' desired materials for extensive reading**

When asked about types of books or materials that could attract their interest to read extensively, all of the students reported that they preferred materials at the 'right' levels. Their explanations for the 'right' materials, however, varied tremendously. The information obtained was classified as follows:

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#### **Language: "Not too many difficult words, with L1 support, please!"**

The subjects suggested two aspects concerning the language of their preferred English reading materials: levels of language difficulty and L1 support. In terms of levels of language difficulty, most of the respondents (78%) agreed that a graded reader should not be too easy or too difficult.

The clear reasons for this were given in the interview. Most students said that they could learn more from a slightly difficult text, especially in terms of vocabulary. Noticeably, the students seemed to relate the level of difficulty of a text with its number of unknown words. The more words they do not know, the more difficult they think the book is. Many studies have revealed a high correlation between vocabulary size and reading (Laufer, 1992; Taguchi, et al, 2004). Research has also found that readability is dependent upon the vocabulary load of the text (Taguchi, et al, 2004; Horst, 2005; Laufer, 2013).

The first group of students in the interview further suggested that to ease the vocabulary problems, a glossary or a vocabulary note

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should be provided. Interestingly, some of them proposed the use of a bilingual text where English is available on the verso and Thai on the recto, or vice versa, so that they could get adequate L1 support. This group of subjects had only a few bilingual texts in their reading corner at school, and wished very much to have more. They explained that the books helped them read and learn English, as they allowed them to compare the Thai and the English sentence-by-sentence so they could understand the text more. When the concept of bilingual texts was checked with other subjects in the interviews, almost all of them supported the idea. They thought that bilingual texts would help them to improve their reading.

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The students' suggestions are congruent with Jacob, et al. (1994), Bishop (2004) and Yoshii (2006). According to Jacob, et al. (1994), glosses provide accurate meanings, and learners favoured marginal glosses to glosses at the end of the text. Marginal glosses also ease vocabulary notification as they are on the same page as the words they explain, allowing the words to be highlighted. Bishop (2004) pointed out that learners would benefit more from highlighting forms of words (e.g. by printing them in color, and or underlining them). Highlighting helps learners notice the words clearly and to recognize them as chunks. In terms of language use in the glosses, Yoshii (2006) suggested that either L1 or L2 could be used as long as it helps learners understand the meanings.

#### **Length: “Can it be...not longer than 20 pages?”**

The subjects explained that the length of an item of reading material was one of the factors that affected their decision whether to

read or to ignore a book. In the questionnaire, 463 respondents wrote their ideal number of pages of graded readers. The majority of these respondents preferred books with less than 30 pages. Most of them even suggested the possibility of readers no longer than 20 pages (See Table 2).

**Table 2: Preferred length of a reading text**

Preferred length (pages)	No. of students	Percentage
<11	70	15.12
11-20	199	42.98
21-30	106	22.89
>30	88	19.01
Total	463	100

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The students explained during the interviews that long materials usually discouraged them, while a book of their desired length was manageable both in terms of readability and portability. This might be because the interviewees were primary 6 to secondary 2 students whose English was not good. Many graded readers available at the schools seemed to be beyond their ability. They were, thus, discouraged and felt that the books were too lengthy. Noticeably, the students' answers about the length of the book and their ages seemed to be related. Younger subjects tended to suggest fewer pages; while older learners generally suggested slightly longer materials.

**Topics and contexts: “Variety is the best policy, and what about a Thai context?”**

In the questionnaire, 410 subjects (about 86%) stated their

preferred types of materials and topics. Many of them had various interests and mentioned more than one type, which could be classified into non-fiction and fiction.

As can be seen from Table 3, the students preferred works of fiction. Moreover, 37 students suggested that the presentation of any content should be in form of a tale or a comic, which contains conversations among characters.

**Table 3: Preferred types of content**

Preferred length (pages)	Times mentioned	Percentages (out of 465 times)
1. Non-fiction (book/magazine)	<b>160</b>	<b>34.41</b>
1.1 Science (especially about nature)	136	29.25
1.2 Travel	10	2.15
1.3 Others	14	3.01
2. Fiction (tale/short story/novel/comic)	<b>291</b>	<b>62.58</b>
2.1 Adventure	181	38.92
2.2 Drama (especially about love)	81	17.42
2.3 Comedy	21	4.52
2.4 Thriller	8	1.72
3. Any kinds	<b>14</b>	<b>3.01</b>
Total	465	100%

These ideas were elaborated upon during the interviews. Interestingly, many students suggested a story with a Thai context, having Thai characters in a Thai setting. They mentioned that it would

be nice to read about, for example, 'Malee' instead of 'Mary'. In one school, their English teacher produced a few items of reading material with local contexts. They read about community legends, and these materials caught their interest well. However, the number of materials that the teacher produced was limited, and the stories were related to their local community only. The students showed further interest in reading about stories from other parts of Thailand. The students' preference for local contexts might be related to their background knowledge, since this schema assists them when reading the English version (Saville-Troike, 2006).

Data from the interview also revealed that one of the problems the learners faced when reading was coping with unfamiliar Western names, places, and cultures. Research suggests that a schema is a crucial variable for reading comprehension. Learners need to activate the right schema to help them tackle the text. Activating an irrelevant one results in different meanings (Williams and Burden, 1997; Saville-Troike, 2006).

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### **Appearance: “More pictures and more color!”**

As expected, in the interviews, most of the subjects added that they preferred to read books that look graphically attractive with colorful illustrations. They did not want to read graded readers with heavy text content. Many books focused too heavily on textual information and thus could not capture their interest.

### **Problems with the present books**

Considering the features of the subjects' ideal external reading, many of the graded readers the schools obtained did not seem to fit

them well. They appeared to be too long, too difficult in terms of vocabulary, and unappealing to students, even though they came in a variety of topics. This might explain why over 50 percent of the subjects answered in the questionnaire that they were only moderately satisfied with the books they had. Many of them, in fact, faced various problems as summarized in Table 4.

**Table 4: Problems students encountered in their graded readers programme**

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Problems	No. of subjects who mentioned the problem	Percentages (out of 475 subjects)
Difficult vocabulary	174	36.63
Length of story	152	32.00
Time available for reading	111	23.37
Not interested in the topics	29	6.11
No dictionary	26	5.47
Disliked after-reading activities	17	3.58
Dislike English	14	2.95
Dislike reading	13	2.74
Did not understand the story	3	0.63

Noticeably, most of the subjects pointed out that they had problems about vocabulary and the length of the stories. They explained during the interviews that the books that they got were too difficult, and they were discouraged by the length of the books. Many of them could not finish reading the books as they needed time to work on difficult

vocabulary. The students from one school said that the teacher usually allowed them to borrow each book for a week, but they needed much more time. This might explain why about 23 percent of the subjects mentioned time available as one of their problems. They added that they had other homework and many activities to do outside class and, therefore, did not have enough time to finish reading. Some of them (about 5 percent) also referred to the lack of dictionaries, which worsened their vocabulary problems. They further explained that without a dictionary, they would not be able to read; luckily, some friends had noted down the meanings in the books. Relying on meanings noted down by their friends raised the question of whether it was a reliable resource. The researchers noticed that the Thai meanings noted were the first meaning that appeared in the dictionary entry, rather than the meaning appropriate for the context, and this might affect their understanding.

However, according to the questionnaire, only three subjects said that they faced comprehension problems. This perception was clearly shown during the interview. Most students perceived that they adequately understood the story. They thought that vocabulary was the key to comprehension. If they know every word in the text, they could understand the story well. However, when they were asked to look at a graded reader that they had read and explain some parts to the researchers, it was clearly noticed that they could not really make good sense of the text, although their impressive attempt was clearly evidenced by the word-level Thai translations that appeared for almost every single word in the text. The subjects said that they looked up the words from a bilingual dictionary and noted down the meaning of

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the words in the texts. Unfortunately, they did not realize that they had not written the correct meaning. Research suggests that low-proficiency readers cling to the meaning that they create without adjusting it or noticing available clues in the text (Tepsuriwong, 2001). Therefore, the students need to be trained with appropriate reading strategies to help them understand the text.

Interestingly, not many students stated in the questionnaire that their reading problems were rooted in negative attitudes towards reading or English. Most of them even suggested various reading promotion activities, which will be discussed in the following section.

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### **Support students require**

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The problems that the subjects encountered seemed to be rooted in two main factors: appropriate materials and students' background. These problems were reflected in the support the subjects said that they need in the programme. Firstly, the subjects requested 'easier and more attractive materials', which can be provided in terms of language and contexts as discussed earlier.

The other forms of support were to compensate for their poor learning background. The subjects explained in the interview that they needed language support from teachers. Although the students realized that reading extensively would be one way to improve their English and their reading, they preferred intensive explanation from teachers. The subjects understood the purpose of extensive reading well and realized that extensive reading helped them learn more vocabulary, and that when they gained more vocabulary, their reading would be even better. This implied that the subjects achieved an understanding

of this benefit of extensive reading in terms of vocabulary expansion. Nation (2001) and Laufer (2013) agree that vocabulary knowledge can help reading, and reading directly contributes to vocabulary growth.

Instead of reading on their own, the subjects verbally reported that they preferred to read along with the teachers so that they could get the teacher's explanations on the spot to clarify what the text really meant. A few of them also suggested reading aloud in class to improve their pronunciation and to see a model of how to translate the text.

The instructional support required by the subjects highlights the complementary nature of intensive and extensive reading (Lituanas, Jacobs, and Renandya, 1999). One could be used to support the other. Students need to explicitly learn how to read intensively and apply the knowledge to read more extensively. Teachers, therefore, play an important role in an extensive reading programme. They need to provide guidance and be a role model for the students to let them see how to read, to enjoy reading, and to foster good reading habits (Day and Bamford, 1998). Some students also revealed that when they read at home, they could not get any support from their parents, so teachers seemed to be the only resource that they could access.

Additionally in the interview, the students suggested that it would be better if they could read in groups with friends. Unfortunately, the graded readers the school received did not cater for group reading. The books came in different titles. Moreover, these books were meant to be used as outside-class reading, where each student can read on their own. Many schools, however, promoted group work after reading. They encouraged students to do reading-related activities e.g. storytelling, role-play, competition games, etc. The interview data

showed that many students favoured these group activities. The activities that they enjoyed the most were drawing pictures from the stories and role-plays, as these allowed them to relax and to interact with friends. They also explained that these activities could provide them with reading support as they made them enjoy reading more.

The findings from the interview can explain the students' rationale behind the suggestions of the reading promotion activities given in the questionnaire (see Table 5).

**Table 5: Extensive reading promotion activities suggested by students**

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Activities	No. of respondents	Percentage (out of 475 subjects)
1. Setting up a reading club	310	65.26
2. Introducing a book to the class each week	254	53.47
3. Arranging completion games	233	49.05
4. Rewarding students who read most extensively	225	47.37
5. Providing consultation sessions on reading	200	42.11
6. Reading together in an English class	168	35.37

Noticeably, these suggestions covered both cognitive and affective domains of learning. The subjects required appropriate materials and needed help in terms of language and strategies to cope with their

reading, as well as some activities that motivate them to learn and to enjoy learning. These suggestions highlighted an important requirement for extensive reading. It is not sufficient to simply provide a lot of reading materials. Support and encouragement are needed to motivate students and to make the most out of reading. Therefore, apart from a variety of materials which are at the right levels, adequate support in terms of language, suggestions on strategy use, and motivational factors should be taken into consideration.

### **Suggestions and conclusion**

To promote extensive reading, the basic requirement to start with, therefore, is to provide desired materials to suit the learners' levels and interest. If appropriate reading materials are available, it is likely that students can reap the benefits that extensive reading promises to offer (Leung, 2002). Without the 'right' materials, students may feel discouraged and refuse to continue reading.

One way to provide appropriate materials for Thai learners is to use familiar contexts. It is not sufficient to rely on commercial graded readers, most of which illustrate western cultures for which young learners may not have accumulated adequate background to aid understanding. More materials with Thai contexts should be produced and promoted. This suggestion is especially suitable for this present globalized era, where local knowledge that marks learners' background and identity is required, together with world knowledge. Moreover, these suggestions come from the voices of the young learners. In-house materials not only allow the use of Thai contexts, they also cater for learners' preferences and needs. For instance, they could

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be designed to come in different lengths, and levels of difficulty. Topics could vary, and pages could be designed to be less text-heavy. Glossing should also be available to avoid problems of choosing irrelevant meanings. Students, teachers, material writers, and publishers need to work together for attractive and effective designs of these desired materials. Texts' and learners' authenticity could also be negotiated when these agents work cooperatively.

Cognitive and motivational support required by the students also suggests that at least at the initial level<sup>1</sup> especially at the primary school level it is reasonable to regard extensive reading as part of a curriculum or to tailor it for an English course. Theoretically, extensive reading should be free reading for pleasure, to make reading self-rewarding (Day and Bamford, 1998). However, integrating it into an English course allows teachers to provide adequate support to scaffold readers. Some part of extensive reading may take place in class to guarantee better success (Macalister, 2008). This is also in line with Yu (1993), who suggested that without incorporating it into the curriculum, extensive reading might turn out to be sporadic, haphazard, and unrewarding, and in turn might eventually make students give up reading. Listening to learners' voices and taking their suggestions into consideration are key to improving an extensive reading programme.

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