

# A Six-Step Approach to Designing and Implementing a Successful Extensive Reading Plan for Young Learners

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## A Six-Step Approach to Designing and Implementing a Successful Extensive Reading Plan for Young Learners.

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**Abstract :** This paper takes a six-step approach to the implementation of a successful extensive reading plan. A detailed approach explaining how to determine the reading level of the student, and the type of readers that should be used in the reading plan is explained in detail. The paper shifts its focus on the strategies that are used in implementing an extensive reading plan to methods that encourage students in the program. This is done by first explaining the advantage of reading out loud to students, and then examining the purpose of motivating the students. Finally, this paper details the support and encouragement needed for an extensive reading plan to succeed. By following the steps outlined in this paper institutions can build a successful reading plan for their students.

**Keywords :** Graded readers, Phonics, Vocabulary, Motivation

With the proliferation of the internet, text messaging, and a globalized world, the ability to read in English has become an important pillar for success. With the advancement of technology there has been a shift in reading patterns. It has been suggested that a literate adult in the post-World War II modern era reads more in one week than someone 150 years ago did in a whole year (Swalm & Kling, 1973). Learning to read English in a country like Japan where English is not the dominant language has become an important facet of the English foreign language (EFL) teaching world. This is because the main goal of an EFL student is to understand and communicate in English, not assimilate into an English-speaking culture. However, many EFL L2 level English learners are first exposed to English through listening activities such as songs or watching TV. Gugliemino (1986) argued that songs have become an integral part of our language experience, and can be of great value if used in coordination with a language lesson. However, many young learners (elementary aged children) find it difficult to transition their understanding of spoken words to a written format,

facing difficulties when presented with a page of English words. A Study by Siddiqui, West, and Stonovich (1998) showed that students benefit from lots of extensive reading (ER). Students engaging in ER learn more vocabulary and develop their receptive and productive skills (Elley & Mangubhai, 1983). The challenge to the EFL instructor is to create an environment that not only is pleasurable to the student but is also beneficial to the learning experience. Nation (2008) explains that 'reading is a source of learning and a source of enjoyment...and through success in language use it can encourage learners to learn more and continue with their language study.' Research has shown that with the proper use of an extensive reading program, students will increase their ability not only in reading but in other aspects of English language learning, too (Eckoff, 1983). Among the main components of a reading program is the use of phonic worksheets. Phonic worksheets help students to learn lexicon patterns which in turn will help them in their reading ability. The caveat to this success is that reading programs must be continuous and extensive in terms of time. Using

graded readers in an extensive reading program is a great way to facilitate this process and help students develop their reading ability. Prior to starting an extensive reading program, a plan needs to be implemented by the school administration and/or staff so that all educators follow the same curriculum. This idea comes from years of trial and error in the classroom. My experience has led me to believe that ideally a six-step program has enough content to fill in a semester or school year. At the same time the amount of work to create and maintain the program is workable in a busy teacher's schedule. An ideal extensive reading implementation plan would include the following steps:

1. Identify the level of the learners.
2. Agree on the readers to be used.
3. Create phonics worksheets.
4. Read aloud to students.
5. Identify a purpose to motivate reading.
6. Support students whenever possible.

**Identify the Level of the Learners**

Research done by Nation (2009) found that when EFL students knew 90-95% of the words on a page

a majority of the students were still not able to adequately comprehend the passage. To help teachers find out the reading level of their students there are two approaches that can be taken. If a class has few students, the teacher can allocate time to evaluate each student's reading level, and individual reading programs can be created within a class. This entails extra work on the part of the educator, but is much more beneficial for the learners. If the extensive reading program has many students, evaluations can be done in groups or as a class. For example, students can complete a phonics worksheet to evaluate the median ability of the group. An example of a worksheet that can be used is shown in Figure 1 (Testing Levels). This worksheet is best used for new or the lowest level of EFL students. The words in Testing Levels were selected based on their frequency in use in the English language. The vocabulary words were checked to see if they were frequently or infrequently used words using the corpus found in the research done by Kilgarriff et al. in 2008 (Kilgarriff et al. 2008). According to Nation (2009) the 1000 most frequently used words are impor-

hot	who	new	work	
over	number	one	know	5
come	more	go	day	
hot	water	on	down	
People				
first				
new				
down				

*Testing levels*

tant for learners to identify because they make up almost half of all the written material in the English language. For EFL beginners these words are the cornerstone of comprehending reading materials in English.

An example of a worksheet that I have created is depicted above, the top half shows photos of vocabulary words. Students look at the picture and then circle the corresponding word. On the second half of the page, students look at the word and draw a line to the corresponding picture. The rationale in using this type of worksheet is illustrated in research done by Nation (2009) who stated that: “The principles that should guide this teaching are that most attention can be given to rules and items that occur frequently, are simple, and are regular. By having the students know the spoken forms of the illustrations will help new EFL learners in the starting stages of their reading programs” (Nation 2009). By collecting the worksheets and finding a median, the teacher has a better understanding of students’ reading levels. The scoring of the worksheet would be out of eight. The higher the score that the student or group of students receive the better their word readability level is. This type of worksheet is typical for a beginner EFL student that has little knowledge of the English language (lower elementary school aged child).

#### Agree on the Readers to be Used

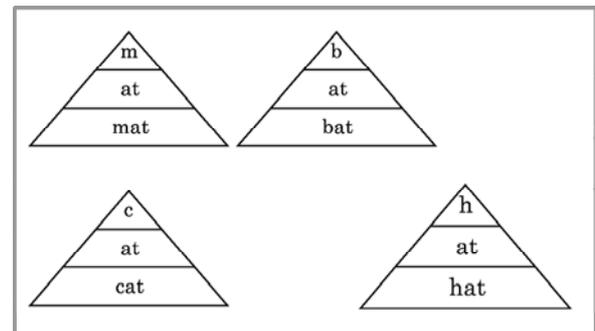
Once the educator has chosen a starting level, the next step is to agree on which graded readers to use. Graded readers have tools incorporated into them that can make them ideal for teaching children. First, graded readers have varying numbers of headwords, which are the keywords that determine the nature of a phrase in a graded reader. By understanding the meaning of the headwords in a graded reader the student will have a better understanding of the story. The fewer the headwords in a book, the easier the book should be to read. By knowing the number of headwords in a given graded reader, a teacher can select graded readers which are at an appropriate language level for the

class. The other important aspect of graded readers is the repetition and predictability of the structures that are found in each level of the readers (Allen, 1994). For example, seeing the same word on multiple occasions helps students to retain vocabulary. Being able to utilize all the extensive reading books in a series allows teachers and students the freedom to read a multitude of texts.

However, if this is not possible, the most important factor when choosing graded readers is that the level of the graded reader matches the students’ reading ability.

#### Creating Phonics Worksheets

A study by Nation and Hu (2000) found that students should already know 98% of the words in new reading materials. Vocabulary sheets are an ideal approach to help young learners develop a base of written words for extensive reading. Vocabulary sheets not only help students identify words but help them learn word patterns which in turn help them read and understand words even the first time they are seen. An example of a phonics worksheet which is used for this purpose is shown in Figure 2.



*Vocabulary retention.*

To use a vocabulary tree, students start first by pronouncing the letter at the top of the pyramid. When that is mastered, they move to the second tier and add the phonics pattern. At the final tier, the student pronounces the word. By using phonics tools such as a vocabulary tree, students can learn phonics patterns and use them in their reading.

### Reading Aloud to Students

Reading in class is defined as the teacher reading a passage to students while they listen and follow along. Research in this area is extensive. Cohen (1968) found that there is a direct relationship between the process of listening and following along with the story and an increase in learner's vocabulary and comprehension. The goal of this process is for the teacher to model reading, not to question students on the meaning or vocabulary of the story. The students should feel relaxed with no pressure put on them. Topics that students find interesting and relate to can help them feel at ease in the reading class. Graded readers can be an ideal source of relatable stories.

### Identify a Purpose to Motivate Reading

Having been an English Language educator for over a decade through my experience I believe that although young learners need motivation to complete a task, it usually does not suffice to tell them that they will become better English readers if they practice reading English books. Peters (2000) states that "academic achievement is more a product of appropriate placement of priorities and responsible behavior than it is of intelligence" (p. 124). If a child is properly motivated they can reach and even exceed parent and teacher expectations. One such motivational approach is to create a reading challenge. In an area of the school which is visible to all students every day, have a large chart displayed with all the participants' names on it. The chart is based on word counts that are written on the cover of graded readers. Children are encouraged to read as much as possible. When they have completed a book, they report to the teacher. The total number of words of the book is added to the student's word count column. At the end of a pre-determined time, prizes can be awarded to the top readers. A reading challenge creates a positive environment and helps build responsible reading behavior in children.

### Support Students Whenever Possible

Positive reinforcement of a child's ability is a

key factor of their success. The teacher is a role model for many students, especially young learners. Brophy (2004) asserts that a teacher's sincerity and enthusiasm affects students' rate of success. For this reason, it is important that teachers show students that they are invested in their mastery of English. Teachers can help students to continue reading by focusing on the students' strengths and by encouraging them whenever possible, while never disparaging them. In a study by Ebata (2008), results showed that students want teachers who are friendly, caring, and trustworthy. Teachers being prepared, having a smile on their faces, and maintaining a positive outlook goes a long way towards helping students succeed.

### Conclusion

Extensive reading can be an important component young learner L2 English education.

This paper has mainly focused on the specific steps needed to create a successful extensive reading program. First, the teacher needs to identify the level of the students. Second, all teachers must agree on which readers to use. Phonics worksheets must then be given to students to help with vocabulary and pronunciation. Teachers also need to read aloud in class to students. The students need a purpose or goal to motivate them to read. Finally, students need positive reinforcement whenever possible. The goal of this paper is to show fellow educators that it is beneficial to all parties, students and EFL instructors to set up and create a program that is organized and easy to monitor. By following these steps, a successful extensive reading program can be created.

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## 若者のための幅広く効果的なリーディング力をつける方法 —六段階のアプローチの仕方—

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### 要 旨

本論文は、効果的な6段階多読計画の実施方法を検討する。最初に、学習者の読解力を評価する詳細な方法、そして読書計画で使用すべき段階別読本の種類を詳しく説明する。次に、多読計画を実施する際の戦略、そして学習者を励ます方法に焦点をおく。ここでは、教員が学習者の前で朗読するメリットを説明し、そして学習者を動機づける目的を検討する。最後に、多読計画の成果をあげるために必要な支援や励ましについて詳しく述べる。本論文の段階を踏めば、あらゆる機関が学習者向けの効果的な読書計画を構築することができる。

キーワード：能力別リーディング教材、フォニックス、単語、動機