

The Impact of Extensive Reading on College Business Majors in Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

The effects of extensive reading on EFL context have been examined with a variety of studies. This study examined the impact of extensive reading on reading proficiency while the participants were taught reading strategies. Furthermore, this study explored whether there were any differences between intervention and control groups on the reading strategy use after the treatment. This study adopted a quasi-experimental, pretest-posttest design with two intact classes (a total of 99 students), which were assigned as control and intervention groups. Both groups were taught reading strategies. The intervention group conducted an extensive reading program for one academic year, whereas the control group was not, in this respect. The results indicated no statistically significant gain in the reading proficiency post-test scores of the intervention group compared with the control group. This revealed that there was no positive effect of the extensive reading on reading proficiency. Conversely, the results showed that extensive reading significantly changed the intervention group's perceptions on reading strategy use; that is, the intervention group improved their perceived strategy use more significantly than the control group.

INTRODUCTION

Taiwan has become a member of the community of industrialized countries, with the government attempting to improve its education in ways that better fit the trend of globalization and enhance its national competitiveness. English, which is typically regarded as the international language, has become the focus of foreign language teaching. In addition, English is the most commonly studied foreign language in Taiwan, since English has traditionally been offered as the only required foreign language at varied levels of schooling (Chern, 2002). Thus, the government authorities in Taiwan who are aware of the significance of English are very keen on promoting the overall English proficiency level of its people.

Of the four language skills for English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL), reading often attracts the greatest attention for students. It is widely recognized that reading is one of the most prominent skills for students to master in spite of the current emphasis on oral or aural approaches. The mastery of the reading skill, as Anderson (2003) points out, helps ESL/EFL students attain improvement not only in English learning but also in other content-based classes where English reading proficiency is required.

Research has demonstrated that one of the best ways to assist students in increasing their language proficiency is to encourage them to read extensively. Getting students to do extensive reading is the easiest and most effective way of improving their reading skills (Nuttall, 1998). If students are learning in a pleasant atmosphere where reading is regarded not only as an educational tool, but as a source of enjoyment, it is much easier to teach them to read more efficiently.

Notably, extensive reading exposes learners to print materials within one's comfort zone with the aim being of building fluency (Waring, 2006). Moreover, extensive reading can be so enjoyable as it helps cultivate reading habits in the target language, which may provide massive amounts of comprehensible input that may otherwise be unlikely in an EFL learning environment. In addition, reading is an interactive process which involves the readers and the print in building meaning. Reading, as Mikulecky (1990) proposes, is a complicated behavior which involves the conscious and unconscious use of various strategies to build a model of the meaning. It is also a complex process in which competent readers orchestrate a number of knowledge sources using diverse strategies to make sense of what they read. These sources of knowledge are in accordance with what Smith (1994) referred to as "visual information." This concept consists both of an awareness of linguistic and print conventions including "non-visual information." This brings forward the content of knowledge that students acquire through the practice of reading. In their attempts to comprehend what they read, readers harness a number of strategies, which are the deliberate conscious plans readers execute when processing textual information. These strategies enable them to explain printed information promptly and efficiently. Thus, in addition to the prerequisites of grammar and vocabulary, reading strategies seem to be the crucial factors on which the development of reading competencies depends.

RATIONALE AND LITERATURE REVIEW

During the 1970s and 1980s, Stephen Krashen's input hypothesis made a significant impact on language teaching (Helgesen, 2003). His perspectives have had a remarkable influence on second language acquisition and language pedagogy (Ellis, 1997). According to Krashen (1985), there are two ways of developing second language ability: acquisition and learning. He suggests that acquisition is a subconscious process which children employ in getting their first language, while learning is a conscious process that leads to knowing about language. In other words, while language acquisition is happening, we are not aware that it is happening; once we have acquired something, the new knowledge is stored in our brains subconsciously (Krashen, 2002). In contrast, language learning is what we do at school. When we are learning, we know that we are learning; learned knowledge is represented in the brains consciously. For Krashen, acquisition is far more important than language learning, and only the acquisition system produces language, the learned system being regarded only as a monitor of the acquired system (Jordan, 2004). As such, his vague definition of what constitutes conscious or subconscious processes has been criticized because they are very difficult to test in practice (Mitchell & Myles, 2004). Krashen's view of the relationship between input and L2 acquisition seems to be somewhat simplistic (Hafiz & Tudor, 1990). However, this argument concerning acquisition and learning has been very influential among foreign language teachers.

Furthermore, Krashen's Input Hypothesis postulates that:

...humans acquire language in only one way – by understanding messages, or by receiving 'comprehensible input'....We move from *i*, or current level, to *i + 1*, the next level along the natural order, by understanding input containing *i + 1*. (Krashen, 1985, p. 2)

There are two corollaries of the Input Hypothesis: (a) Speaking is a result of acquisition; speech comes out on its own as a result of building competence through comprehensible input,

and (b) If input is understood, and there is sufficient use of it, the necessary grammar is automatically provided (Krashen, 1985). Thus, abundant comprehensible input appears to be the essential element when going about language education.

Nevertheless, comprehensible input is not sufficient for language acquisition. The acquirer should unfold to the input. The affective filter, a mental block, can prevent acquirers from entirely using the comprehensible input they gain for language acquisition (Krashen, 1985). If it is high—that is, the acquirer is anxious, has low confidence, or does not consider him/herself to be a member of the group that speak the language—then the affective filter will keep the input out; little or no acquisition will take place (Krashen, 1994b). Therefore, the Affective Filter Hypothesis implies that language acquirers with a low affective filter seek and obtain more input, and are more receptive to the input (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Although there is no empirical evidence to support a causal relationship between personality variables and language acquisition outcomes, as argued by Scarcella (1990), the mechanism is intuitively attractive. In my study, a low anxiety situation is created by letting students select graded readers geared at their language levels with little or no written work or testing.

In light of the Input Hypothesis, the optimal way to improve language acquisition is to provide learners with a substantial amount of comprehensible input (Krashen, 1981, 1982). In this sense, Krashen (2004) has suggested that language and literacy development can occur by means of extensive reading. That is, extensive reading results in better reading comprehension, writing style, vocabulary, spelling, and grammatical development.

Numerous research studies in both L1 and L2 have demonstrated that extensive reading is effective in language acquisition (Adams, 1990; Cho & Krashen, 1994; Elley, 1991; Hafiz & Tudor, 1989, 1990; Han, 2010; Hayashi, 1999; Holt & O'Tuel, 1989; Krashen, 1988, 1994a, 1994b, 2004; Lao & Krashen, 2000; Mason & Krashen, 1997; Robb & Susser, 1989; Saleem, 2010; Smith, 2010; Tsang, 1996; Walker, 1997). In particular, extensive reading succeeds in enhancing ESL/EFL language proficiency.

However, Lai's (1993) findings showed rather different results. The participants were from eight junior secondary schools in Hong Kong. After one year of extensive reading, the intervention group indicated significant gains in vocabulary recognition, listening comprehension, and reading speed, but not in reading comprehension and writing. Thus, Lai described the outcome as "The findings suggested that having a greater quantity of comprehensive input through extensive reading did not help students to improve their reading comprehension ability" (p. 29).

Kao's (2004) study also indicates that there is no evidence which can manifest that extensive reading improves students' reading comprehension. Kao aimed to examine whether extensive reading led to significant improvement in Taiwanese students' reading comprehension, reading speed, the motivation to read English texts, and learning attitude. The participants were two classes of female senior high school students. The treatment was to give the experimental group extra extensive reading. The results found that both the experimental and control group's reading proficiency improved significantly, but there was no significant difference between the two groups' gain in score. Thus, the author concluded that the study did not yield positive findings.

The development of reading strategy instruction in an EFL context has also been explored. For example, Taylor and his colleagues (2006) identified twenty-three sample studies to meta-analyze their results. It was found that participants who received Explicit Reading Strategy Training (ERST) outscored those who did not receive such training. It was concluded

that learners who were provided with ERST could outperform approximately half a standard deviation from those who did not receive ERST. It was also found that any type of ERST is better than nothing in terms of the best reading strategies to teach.

After reviewing the above research studies concerning extensive reading and reading strategy issues, it was found that extensive reading improves the learners' language proficiency. It was also found that reading strategy can be taught to enhance reading comprehension. Given the recent increase in cultural and linguistic diversity in school classrooms, reading teachers will be in need of adequate approaches for teaching students how to read more efficiently and effectively. An extensive reading component, which can be contextualized to reading strategy instruction activities, helps the learners navigate across the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) to full and conscious control of strategy use (c.f., Brunner, 1986). However, little attention has been drawn to this issue, and even less research was conducted to detect the effects of extensive reading program while the participants are taught reading strategies. As a consequence, the purpose of this study is to examine the impact of extensive reading program on business college EFL students while they are taught reading strategies.

AIMS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the impact of extensive reading program on reading proficiency while the students are taught reading strategies in the Taiwanese EFL context. In addition, data gathered about the reading strategy use of the intervention group will be analyzed to see if there are any differences after the treatment. The result of this study can offer guidelines that will help in designing quality instructional procedures which can improve students' reading performance. Consequently, this study aims to compare the reading proficiency gains of those who conduct extensive reading program with a control group and to discover whether there are any differences between intervention and control groups on the perceptions of reading strategy use.

The significance of the study can be viewed from its contributions to the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) in a broader sense as well as to present L2/FL reading theories and pedagogies in a specific sense. Regarding the field of SLA, although researchers have verified the importance of extensive reading programs and reading strategy instruction in language learning respectively, the impact and applicability of extensive reading programs on EFL students while the students are taught reading strategies remain relatively unexplored. This study, focusing on the effect of extensive reading programs on reading proficiency gains, will provide additional evidence for SLA research.

METHOD

Participants

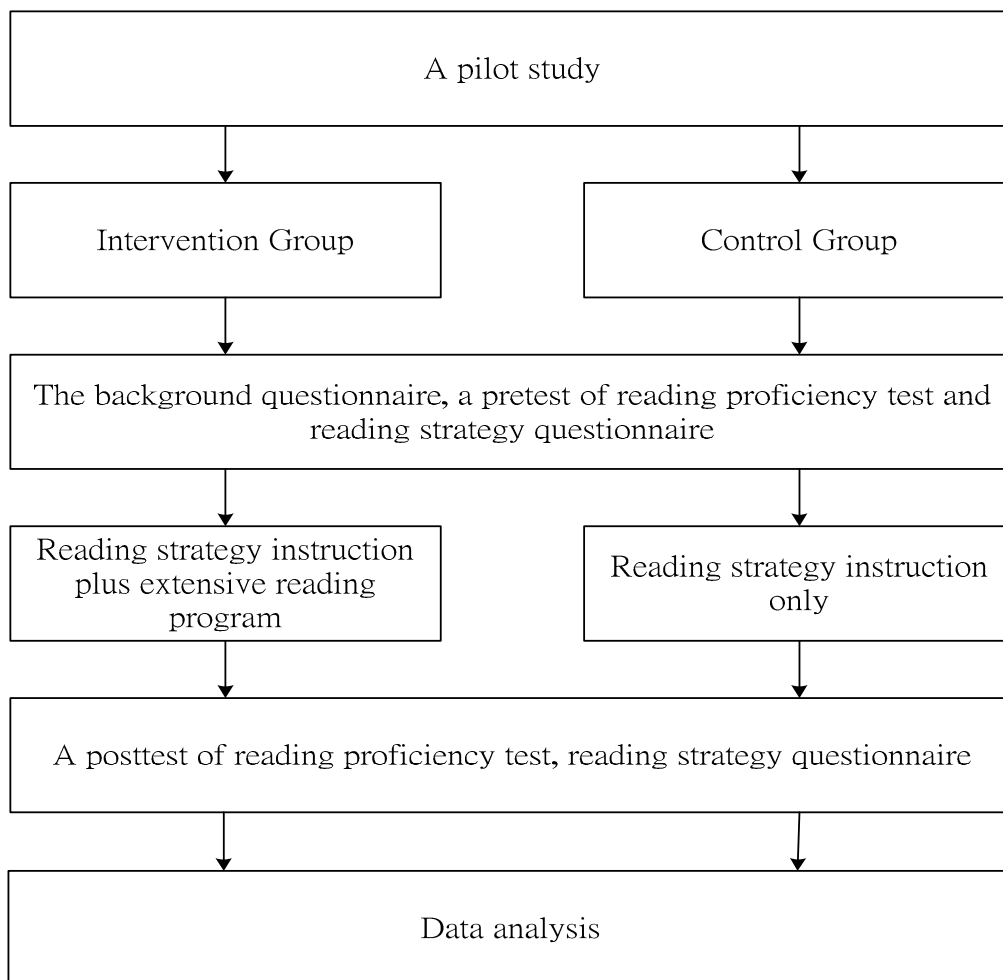
The study involved two groups, both of which were intact classes of the first graders at a junior college (i.e., tenth grade students) in northern Taiwan. One class majored in accounting, was assigned as the intervention group ($n = 48$), while the other, which majored in business administration, was the control group ($n = 51$). The participants had learned English, on average,

for over seven years (based on the personal background information in the questionnaire), and had four periods of English class per week. Each period lasted fifty minutes. The researcher taught their English reading class.

Research Design

This study adopted a quasi-experimental, pretest-posttest design. The intervention group was taught reading strategy instruction and conducted an extensive reading program, while the control group was taught reading strategies only. In other words, the extensive reading program was the treatment. Both groups completed pretests and posttests to measure their reading proficiency gains (Pretests scores are subtracted from the posttests scores to compute gain scores) and perceptions of reading strategy use (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Procedure for the Research Design



Instruments

To answer the research questions, two instruments were included in this study: (a) a reading section of the General English Proficiency Test (GEPT)—Intermediate Level, and (b) a reading strategy questionnaire. The General English Proficiency Test (GEPT) was developed in 1999, commissioned by the Language Training and Testing Centre (LTTC) in Taiwan. The purpose of GEPT is to provide individuals with a measurement of their English proficiency and assist employers and educational institutions in selection and placement (Roever & Pan, 2008). Moreover, it had been developed to encourage the learning of English and to improve people's English proficiency in Taiwan. Two equivalent reading sections of the GEPT at the Intermediate level were employed since issues regarding reading are the main concern in the current study. The reading proficiency test contained forty multiple-choice items and the allotted time was forty-five minutes.

In this study, the same questionnaire was used to examine the participants' perceptions of reading strategy before and after the treatment to investigate if there was any change caused by the extensive reading program. The questionnaire used in this study was adapted from Tsai (2000). The theoretical construct of the instrument was the use of reading comprehension strategies by ESL/EFL readers. The questionnaire adopted a 5-point Likert scale format (see Appendix A). Response choices to prescribed statements ranged from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." Before this study, the researcher has piloted the questionnaire to ensure its reliability. In the pilot, the overall reliability coefficients were .81, indicating that the data collected were considered rather reliable.

Extensive Reading Program

The extensive reading program was conducted in intervention group only. It lasted one academic year. During this period, the participants selected and read graded readers outside of class. The participants were given guidance to select graded readers appropriate to their proficiency level and interest. There were sufficient simplified readers available in the college library, such as Oxford Bookworms and Penguin Readers, which created a situation where it was very convenient for the participants to borrow the relevant reading material. The teacher's guidance was also available if the students had difficulties finding an appropriate book.

The students were required to read thirty minutes each day, Monday through Friday, at school or outside of class. Students were asked to keep their own weekly reading diaries (see Appendix B). In the reading diary, students listed the title of the book they were reading, the number of minutes they read per day, and how much they liked the book. It was believed that by writing reading diaries, students could examine their own reading habits, keep track of their progress, and share what they had read with the teacher. The reading diaries were required as an assignment, and collected every two weeks. This allowed the researcher to have an understanding of what the participants were reading and what the participants' interests were. This process of checking the reading diaries also ensured that the extensive reading program was being implemented within the guidelines.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of the Reading Proficiency Test

As indicated in Table 1, firstly, the results of Independent Sample t-test showed that the mean score in the pretest for the control group and intervention groups were 53.18 and 55.75, respectively. The difference between the two groups in reading proficiency test ($t = 0.77$, $p = .44$) was not significant. Therefore, both groups were homogeneous in terms of reading proficiency before the treatment.

Secondly, the intervention group's means for the pre-test and post-test were 55.75 and 57.00, respectively (see Table 1), which was a gain of 1.25. The Independent Sample t-test results ($t = 0.74$, $p = .46$) revealed that there was no significant difference between the two groups in the gain score (intervention: 1.25, control: - 1.06), meaning that the reading scores of the intervention group did not improve significantly more than the control group. The reason might be attributed to the strategy instruction. This is a possible explanation as the control group's performance actually dropped at the post-test. Thus somewhat indicating the harmful effects of strategy instruction for the participants.

Table 1. Means Comparison between Intervention and Control Groups on Reading Proficiency Test

	Intervention ($n = 48$)	Control ($n = 51$)	t	p
Pre-test	55.75 (17.87)	53.18 (15.25)	0.77	.44
Post-test	57.00 (16.89)	52.12 (16.83)	1.44	.15
Gain	1.25 (16.43)	-1.06 (14.57)	0.74	.46

Note. Standard deviation in the parenthesis.

Findings from the Reading Strategy Questionnaire

In this study, the perceptions of the participants' reading strategy use refer to their self-reported reading strategy frequency. In order to probe whether extensive reading program influenced the perceptions of the participants' reading strategy use, the Independent Sample t-test was used to compare the respondents' scores. As shown in Table 2, in the pre-test, there was no statistically significant difference for the reading strategy use between the two groups ($t = -1.62$, $p = .11$). According to the means (the intervention group: 3.52, the control group: 3.70), the participants in both groups reported more than moderate strategy use. After the treatment, in the post-test, the difference between groups favored the intervention group, and the t-test reached significance ($t = 2.06$, $p = .04$). That is, the intervention group improved their perceptions of reading strategy use significantly than the control group. Why did the intervention group outperform the control group on reading strategy questionnaire after the treatment? The extensive reading program may have been the key. Reading a variety of graded readers during the treatment, it logically follows that the intervention group had sufficient opportunities to exercise the learned strategies, thus likely to enhance their perceptions of reading strategy use.

Table 2. Group Differences on Perceived Reading Strategy Use

Phase	Group	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Pre-test	Intervention	3.52	.49	-1.62	.11
	Control	3.70	.59		
Post-test	Intervention	3.75	.63	2.06	.04*
	Control	3.53	.44		

Note. Intervention group N = 48; Control group N = 49. * $p < .05$.

Next, the means of reported strategy use can also be examined by comparison between the pre- and post-test. As indicated in Table 3, the Paired Sample T-tests between the pre-test and the post-test within each group found a statistical difference within the intervention group ($t = 3.38$, $p = .001$), which means that the intervention group reported significantly more on the strategy use after extensive reading program. In contrast, reported strategy use in the control group revealed a significant decline ($t = -2.38$, $p = .021$), which means that the control group reported significantly less frequent strategy use in the post-test than the pre-test.

This finding is reminiscent of Neves and Anderson's (1981) effects of practice. Knowing reading strategies is declarative knowledge, knowing how the strategies work is called procedural knowledge. In this study, extensive reading program seemed to put learned reading strategies into practice.

Table 3. Means Comparison Between Intervention and Control Groups on Self-reported Reading Strategy Use

Group	Pre-test	Post-test	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Intervention ($n = 49$)	3.53 (0.49)	3.77 (0.24)	3.38	.001***
Control ($n = 51$)	3.70 (0.24)	3.52 (16.83)	-2.38	.021*

Note. Standard deviation in the parenthesis. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.

As shown in Table 4, the top five items revealed the intervention group's most favored strategies after the treatment. It was found that the participants particularly liked to use *expecting certain things from grasping the organization of the whole text*, *using a variety of context clues*, *using prior knowledge*, *relating information which comes next in the text to previous information in the text*, and *reading each word and feel impulses to look up unknown words in the dictionary*. In addition, a point worthy of note is that "*expecting certain things from grasping the organization of the whole text*" ranked first among the top five most frequently used strategies, whereas it ranked the tenth before the treatment. The reason might be that the participants were taught this strategy during class, which resulted in them practicing this strategy via extensive reading program outside of class.

Concerning the least frequently used strategies (see Table 5), the participants reported to dislike *questioning the veracity and profundity of the objects and author's viewpoints*, *understanding the meaning of each word*, *understanding all details of the content*, *paying attention to punctuation and transition words*, and *recognizing the differences between main points and supporting details*. Interestingly, it was found that the reported bottom-five strategies were exactly the same as those less frequently used strategies before the treatment, but the sequence was somewhat different.

Table 4. The Top-five Strategy Use Reported by the Intervention Group (N = 48)

Rank Post-test	Strategy Item	Post-test <i>M (SD)</i>	Pre-test <i>M (SD)</i>	Rank Pre-test
1	Expect certain things from grasping the organization of the whole text	4.73(6.30)	3.60(1.20)	10
2	Use a variety of context clues to understand the parts	4.31(.66)	4.21(.77)	2
3	Use my prior knowledge and experiences to understand the content of the text	4.27(.71)	4.25(.79)	1
4	Relate information which comes next in the text to previous information in the text	4.13(.70)	3.92(.79)	6
5	Read each word and feel impulses to look up unknown words in the dictionary	4.13(.82)	3.79(1.05)	7

Note. The items were arranged in the descending order by their means of the post-test.

Table 5. The Bottom-five Strategy Use Reported by the Intervention Group (N = 48)

Rank Post-test	Strategy Item	Post-test <i>M (SD)</i>	Pre-test <i>M (SD)</i>	Rank Pre-test
1	Question the veracity and profundity of the objects and viewpoints presented by the author in the text	2.92(1.03)	2.58(1.05)	2
2	Understand the meaning of each word	3.13(1.00)	3.06(.93)	4
3	Understand all details of the content	3.13(.73)	3.06(.73)	5
4	Pay attention to punctuation and transition words	3.15(1.05)	2.88(1.08)	3
5	Recognize the differences between main points and supporting details	3.19(.94)	2.58(.79)	1

Note. The items were arranged in the ascending order by their means of the post-test.

In order to investigate whether there were significant differences on individual strategy use before and after the treatment, Paired Sample t-tests were computed. With regard to the results (see Table 6), the t-tests between the pre-test and post-test on individual strategy use within the intervention group found significant differences in items 5, 13, 14, 16, and 20. In other words, the intervention group reported to use these strategies (*read each word and feel impulses to look up unknown words in the dictionary, break down each sentence into smaller parts in understanding its meaning, recognize the differences between main points and supporting details, reread the problematic parts of the content several more times and ask myself related questions, question the veracity and profundity of the objects and viewpoints presented by the author in the text*) after the treatment significantly more than before. These findings, coupled with the previous comparison of the means scores between the intervention and control groups, lend further support to the superior effectiveness of reading strategy instruction with extensive reading activities over reading strategy instruction only on the perceived strategy use.

Table 6. Comparison of Individual Strategy Use before and after the Treatment (N = 47)

Strategy Item	Pre-test	Post-test	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
5. Read each word and feel impulses to look up unknown words in the dictionary	3.81 (1.06)	4.15 (.81)	2.07	.044*
13. Break down each sentence into smaller parts in understanding its meaning	3.40 (1.14)	3.81 (.82)	2.53	.015*
14. Recognize the differences between main points and supporting details	2.57 (.80)	3.19 (.95)	3.80	.000***
16. Reread the problematic parts of the content several more times and ask myself related questions, then try to make some guesses	3.68 (.86)	4.00 (.69)	2.54	.015*
20. Question the veracity and profundity of the objects and viewpoints presented by the author in the text	2.57 (1.06)	2.94 (1.03)	2.63	.012*

Note. Standard deviation in the parenthesis, * $p < .05$ ** $P < .01$ *** $p < .001$.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this quasi-experimental study was to compare the effectiveness of reading strategy instruction plus extensive reading and reading strategy instruction only among EFL junior college business majors. The results indicated that the intervention group significantly outperformed the control group on the reported strategy use, although there were no significant differences between the two groups' reading proficiency gains. Thus, extensive reading program has a significantly positive effect on the intervention group's reading strategy use. That is, the participants benefited from the extensive reading program for promoting their strategy use. This finding has practical implication for EFL reading instruction. It shows that reading strategy instruction plus extensive reading might be a better option for EFL reading teachers who are bent on improving students' reading strategy use.

Although the findings of this study provide significant insights into the investigation of the relationship between readers' strategy use and strategy instruction plus extensive reading, this research suffers from some limitations. First, this study had to be conducted with intact classes of participants, since it was not feasible to assign participants at random to intervention and control groups. The utilization of a control group in this study is more solid than a simple pre- post-test design (without a control group) due to the risk of temporal changes in the intervention group being wrongly attributed to the treatment. Although the intervention and control groups seemed well matched in terms of their English proficiency abilities at the pre-test, it must be pointed out that this study is a quasi-experimental design, which means there could be a risk of some form of selection bias. Correspondingly, randomized controlled trials (RCT) can eliminate selection bias, whereby proper randomization will control for both any known or unknown variables which could affect outcomes (Torgerson & Torgerson, 2008). As a consequence, further research should utilize random sampling procedures, thereby increasing the external validity of findings.

Furthermore, the present study suggests that extensive reading was closely related to the participants' perceived strategy use. Although such a finding revealed a causal link between these two variables, other factors such as personality characteristics (e.g. self-esteem, anxiety

and risk-taking), learning style, or reading motivation might affect their strategy use as well. Therefore, future research could focus on exploring the contributing effects of these individual factors on students' strategy use.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Reading Strategy Questionnaire

The following statements are about silent reading in English. Please indicate the level of your agreement or disagreement with each statement by circling the appropriate number:

strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5

When reading silently in English, the things I do to read effectively are to

1. Focus on understanding the grammatical structures
2. Use a variety of context clues (i. e. title, text structure, signal words, key words, grammatical patterns, conclusion, etc.) to understand the parts I do not understand
3. Read the first line of each paragraph to get the gist of the text
4. Mentally sound out parts of the words
5. Read each word and feel impulses to look up unknown words in the dictionary
6. Use my prior knowledge and experiences to understand the content of the text
7. Expect certain things from grasping the organization of the whole text
8. First glance through the text quickly to make sure that I know most of the words
9. Understand all details of the content
10. Underline the unknown words, phrases, sentences and translate them into Chinese as much as I can
11. Study the topic sentence and visualize a mental picture about the content of the text
12. Pay attention to the individual letters in guessing the meaning of unknown words
13. Break down each sentence into smaller parts in understanding its meaning
14. Recognize the differences between main points and supporting details
15. Understand the meaning of each word
16. Reread the problematic parts of the content several more times and ask myself related questions, then try to make some guesses
17. Relate information which comes next in the text to previous information in the text
18. Read slowly and carefully so that I will not miss any parts of the text
19. Skim the whole text first to grasp what the general idea is
20. Question the veracity and profundity of the objects and viewpoints presented by the author in the text
21. Pay attention to punctuation and transition words
22. Skip the parts I do not understand and keep reading to get the overall meaning

Appendix B. Reading Diary

Date	Name of Book	Time Spent	Number of Pages	Interest*

* Criteria of Interest: 5 = very interesting, 4 = interesting, 3 = a little interesting, 2 = not very interesting, 1 = not at all interesting