

Exploring the Role of English Reading in Enhancing Vocabulary

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Keywords: <i>Extensive Reading, Vocabulary Acquisition, EFL Learners, Informal Learning, Reading Motivation.</i></p> <p>DOI: https://doi.org/10.22437/langue.v3i2.46092</p> <p>Received: June 25, 2025</p> <p>Reviewed: July 7, 2025</p> <p>Accepted: July 16, 2025</p>	<p><i>Vocabulary development has an important role in English language learning, especially in supporting reading comprehension and oral communication. This research tries to explore the impact of reading English on vocabulary mastery among students and learners in informal housing environments. Using a quantitative descriptive approach, data were collected from 53 participants through a Likert-scale questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The questionnaire examined four key variables: interest in reading, reading comfort, vocabulary improvement, and motivation. The findings indicate that most students show high interest and comfort in reading English texts. A significant majority agreed that reading helps them learn and retain new vocabulary. Additionally, reading activities were found to enhance students' motivation to engage further with English learning. These results support existing literature that extensive reading positively influences vocabulary acquisition. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of promoting English reading habits outside formal education environments. It is recommended that educators, parents, and communities provide accessible reading materials to foster vocabulary growth and language learning motivation among learners. By encouraging reading as a regular practice, even in informal settings, learners can develop a stronger foundation in vocabulary that benefits their overall English proficiency.</i></p>

1. Introduction

Vocabulary acquisition plays a central role in English language learning, supporting both comprehension and communication. Without adequate vocabulary knowledge, learners struggle to understand texts and express ideas effectively (Zeng et al., 2025). Moreover, vocabulary competence plays a critical role in enabling learners to engage in fluent communication and academic comprehension (Teng, 2015).

Among the strategies that foster vocabulary development, reading particularly extensive reading, has gained wide recognition for its dual function in improving both receptive and productive vocabulary skills. Nation and Coxhead (2014) argue that reading offers repeated exposure to lexical items in meaningful contexts, thereby promoting long-term retention.

Moreover, Liu and Zhang (2018) demonstrated through meta-analysis that extensive reading significantly enhances vocabulary acquisition across different levels of language proficiency.

Although the effectiveness of reading in vocabulary development is widely acknowledged, fewer studies have focused on learners in informal, community-based settings. Most existing research centers on classroom environments, structured learning programs, or academic institutions, leaving a gap in understanding how learners acquire vocabulary through reading in non-formal contexts. Lindawati (2021) emphasized the importance of exploring learners' attitudes and experiences outside formal education systems.

This study aims to investigate how informal English reading practices contribute to vocabulary acquisition among EFL learners in residential neighborhoods. It specifically examines learners' interest, reading comfort, vocabulary improvement, and motivation. The findings are expected to provide insights into how everyday reading habits influence language learning.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Important Role of Reading in Vocabulary Development

Reading enables learners to observe vocabulary in context, which facilitates a deeper understanding of word meaning, usage, and nuance. Nation and Coxhead (2014) emphasized that repeated exposure to lexical items through reading contributes significantly to the development of both receptive and productive vocabulary. Zeng et al. (2025) added that context-rich input, such as that found in extensive reading materials, is more effective for long-term vocabulary retention than isolated memorization techniques. Teng (2015) supported this by demonstrating that the combination of extensive reading and explicit vocabulary instruction produces more significant learning outcomes than using either method in isolation. Similarly, Nguyen and Nguyen (2021) found that students involved in sustained extensive reading programs not only improved their vocabulary knowledge but also gained greater confidence in using English in both spoken and written forms.

2.2 Previous Studies on Reading and Vocabulary

Several recent studies support the notion that reading contributes significantly to vocabulary acquisition. Liu and Zhang (2018), in their meta-analysis, demonstrated a statistically significant correlation between extensive reading and vocabulary development across multiple educational levels. Lindawati (2021) explored EFL students' perceptions of reading and found that most learners believed reading English texts regularly improved their vocabulary and reading skills. Additionally, Khoiriyah and Ilmi (2023) found that the integration of digital tools into extensive reading programs (e.g., e-books, videos, and interactive materials) increased learners' motivation and vocabulary retention. Jonathans et al. (2021) emphasized that combining extensive reading with intentional vocabulary strategies such as pre-teaching keywords yields better outcomes in EFL contexts.

Despite these insights, few studies have focused on learners in informal, community-based contexts. While previous research has largely examined vocabulary development through extensive reading within classrooms or institutional programs, this study shifts the focus to learners in residential neighborhoods who engage in English reading independently. This non-academic context allows for the exploration of vocabulary growth through informal reading habits, which is rarely examined in prior literature. The present study, therefore, contributes a unique perspective by investigating how everyday reading outside of formal settings supports vocabulary acquisition and learner motivation among EFL students.

Briefly, it is widely believed that reading plays a major role in enriching your vocabulary through both obvious and less obvious means. However, most research on this topic has been

conducted in formal academic settings. This gap indicates that we need more research on how vocabulary is acquired through reading in informal settings, which is the specific focus of this study.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This research used a quantitative descriptive design to identify students' perceptions of reading English and its role in vocabulary improvement. According to Lindawati (2021), this design is appropriate for exploring trends and general opinions among language learners. The study gathers data through structured questionnaires to capture these perceptions effectively.

3.2 Participants

The participants in this study were 53 EFL learners aged between 10 and 18 years old, residing in a suburban neighborhood in Indonesia. They represented a range of educational levels, including upper elementary school, junior high school, and senior high school. Most participants had basic to intermediate exposure to English, obtained primarily through school instruction, online media, and informal self-learning activities. The selection of this demographic was intentional to reflect informal learning environments where English is practiced outside of formal classroom settings.

3.3 Instruments

Data were collected using a Google Forms questionnaire with five-point Likert scale items. The instrument was adapted from studies by Jonathans et al. (2021) and Lindawati (2021), focusing on four variables: interest in reading, reading comfort, vocabulary acquisition, and motivation.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores. This method helped summarize the learners' responses effectively. As noted by Khoiriyah and Ilmi (2023), such an approach provides a clear overview of response patterns.

4. Findings

4.1. Students' Interest in English Reading

The results indicate a high level of interest among participants in reading English texts. As shown in Table 1, 86.8% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoy reading English materials, with a mean score of 4.25. Additionally, 71.7% of the participants reported reading English texts during their free time (mean = 3.94). This suggests that reading has become part of the participants' informal learning habits, even outside school contexts.

Table 1. Interest in Reading

Statement	Mean	Strongly Agree + Agree (%)
I enjoy reading English materials (stories, articles, etc.)	4.25	86.8%
I read English texts in my free time	3.94	71.7%

4.2. Students' Reading Comfort

As presented in Table 2, 77.4% of respondents indicated feeling comfortable when reading English texts, with a mean score of 4.13. However, only 69.8% found such texts easy to understand (mean = 3.79), suggesting varying levels of reading comprehension skills.

Table 2. Reading Comfort

Statement	Mean	Strongly Agree + Agree (%)
I feel comfortable reading English texts	4.13	77.4%
I find it easy to understand English reading materials	3.79	69.8%

4.3 Vocabulary Acquisition through Reading

Table 3 illustrates that reading significantly contributes to vocabulary development. A notable 88.7% of participants agreed that they learn new vocabulary through reading (mean = 4.30), while 86.8% stated that reading helps them remember English words better (mean = 4.25).

Table 3. Vocabulary Improvement

Statement	Mean	Strongly Agree + Agree (%)
I learn new vocabulary through reading	4.30	88.7%
Reading helps me remember new English words	4.25	86.8%

4.4 Motivation to Learn through Reading

Most respondents showed high motivation levels related to reading. As shown in Table 4, 81.1% agreed that reading motivates them to learn more English, and 79.2% felt encouraged to read more after encountering new vocabulary.

Table 4. Motivation

Statement	Mean	Strongly Agree + Agree (%)
Reading in English motivates me to learn more	4.17	81.1%
I feel motivated to read more English texts after learning new words	4.13	79.2%

5. Discussion

These findings align with prior studies highlighting the benefits of extensive reading for vocabulary development (Teng, 2015; Nation & Coxhead, 2014). The high levels of reading interest and motivation reported by participants support Lindawati's (2021) conclusion that students perceive reading not only as a means of learning but also as an enjoyable and motivating activity. In this study, 86.8% of learners reported enjoying English reading materials, and 81.1% felt motivated to learn more English after reading figures that suggest a strong emotional engagement with reading. This emotional connection is important, as it fosters sustained interaction with English texts outside the classroom, which may lead to incidental vocabulary learning. These results also extend existing literature by showing that such positive perceptions and vocabulary gains occur even in informal, non-institutional settings, thus reinforcing the potential of community-based reading practices for language development.

Students' comfort in reading further suggests that frequent exposure contributes to greater reading fluency, even though comprehension challenges remain. This supports Nation and Coxhead's (2014) theory that repeated exposure in context leads to improved vocabulary

retention and usage. Furthermore, the correlation between reading comfort and learning exposure indicates that when students are regularly exposed to English texts in supportive and familiar settings, they are more likely to feel confident and motivated to engage with the material. This ongoing engagement fosters a sense of ease, which reinforces reading habits and allows vocabulary to be acquired more naturally. The lower ease-of-comprehension score (mean = 3.79) signals the need for reading materials that are level-appropriate and engaging (Zeng et al., 2025).

Moreover, the significant agreement on vocabulary acquisition through reading supports Teng's (2015) conclusion that extensive reading enhances both incidental and intentional vocabulary learning. This suggests that learners are not only acquiring vocabulary deliberately but also gaining new words unconsciously through repeated exposure. Additionally, the motivational aspect of reading found in this study reflects Khoiriyah & Ilmi's (2023) findings and implies that when learners are motivated, they are more likely to read frequently, thereby increasing their opportunities for vocabulary growth. These results emphasize the interconnected role of motivation, engagement, and language exposure in vocabulary acquisition, particularly in informal settings.

This study not only confirms previous findings on the benefits of extensive reading but also expands the scope of vocabulary research by demonstrating that effective vocabulary development can occur beyond traditional classroom settings. Its findings highlight the relevance of informal and community-based language practices in second language acquisition, especially for learners with limited access to formal resources. Therefore, this study contributes to bridge the gap between academic research and real-world language learning experiences.

6. Conclusion

This study concludes that English reading activities significantly contribute to vocabulary acquisition, even in informal learning environments. The results demonstrated that the majority of participants who reside in informal residential neighborhoods enjoy reading English texts, feel comfortable doing so, and are motivated to continue learning. Their responses highlight the value of informal English reading in supporting vocabulary acquisition and sustaining learner motivation. Therefore, educators, parents, and community leaders should promote reading habits by providing access to appropriate English materials both printed and digital. Fostering a culture of reading in everyday life will not only enhance vocabulary learning but also increase motivation and overall language proficiency.

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