Extensive Reading and Solving Reading Difficulties among English Language Learners

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Abstract

This systematic review investigates the role of Extensive Reading (ER) in addressing reading difficulties among English as a Second Language (ESL) learners in Malaysia. Using the PRISMA (2009) guideline, the review follows a systematic approach to identify, select, and analyze studies published between 2018 and 2023. Google Scholar, ERIC, and ResearchGate were utilized to search for key terms related to ER, ESL learners, and reading difficulties. In the first stage, 90 articles were initially identified through a comprehensive database search. This broad search aimed to capture a wide range of studies relevant to the role of Extensive Reading in addressing reading difficulties among ESL learners. The inclusion criteria focused on studies in English, particularly those examining ESL learners and reporting on reading difficulties or improvements in comprehension. Sixteen relevant studies were analyzed, revealing various factors that contribute to reading difficulties, including motivational, cognitive, social, and resource-related challenges. The review found that ER positively impacts reading fluency, comprehension, vocabulary development, attitudes, and motivation. Nonetheless, barriers such as limited resources and inadequate teacher support were noted as challenges in implementing ER programs effectively. The findings highlight the potential of ER as a comprehensive approach to improving reading proficiency among ESL learners in Malaysia, suggesting that its benefits could be maximized with better resource allocation and teacher involvement. This review emphasizes the significance of ER in enhancing overall reading skills among ESL learners in the Malaysian context.

Keywords: Extensive Reading, ESL Learners, Reading Difficulties, Reading Comprehension, English Language Education

Introduction

Reading proficiency is a fundamental skill that significantly influences academic success and personal growth, particularly for learners of English as a Second Language (ESL). Reading is a foundational skill closely linked with other abilities like listening, speaking, and writing. Students are expected to understand reading materials to maximize their success in teaching and learning outcomes (Chua & Sulaiman, 2021). According to schema theory, modern definitions of reading emphasize it as an interactive process in which learners draw upon prior knowledge—both linguistic and subject-specific—to construct meaning from text. Prior knowledge allows readers to recognize syntactic structures and contextual cues, thereby enhancing comprehension (Al Raqqad, Ismail, & Al Raqqad, 2019). The ability to read effectively is essential for understanding and engaging with educational materials, which is critical for learners in non-native English-speaking countries such as Malaysia. However, ESL learners often face numerous challenges in developing reading skills due to linguistic, cognitive, and socio-cultural factors (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). Limited exposure to English poses a significant challenge for L2 students in developing language proficiency. When students do not have enough contact with the target language, they find it difficult to acquire it, particularly once they have surpassed the critical age ideal for language learning (Azizi & Abdul Aziz, 2019).

This systematic review examined the impact of using extensive reading (ER) on overcoming reading difficulties among ESL learners, with a particular focus on Malaysia, where English proficiency is crucial for educational and professional advancement. ESL learners frequently encounter obstacles in reading due to limited exposure to English, insufficient vocabulary, and lack of motivation (Nation, 2009). These challenges are often magnified in countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam, where English is not the primary language spoken at home. Malaysian students, particularly in rural areas, may have fewer opportunities to practice English outside of the classrooms, leading to a gap in language proficiency compared to their urban counterparts (Pandian, 2002). Moreover, traditional reading instruction methods in Malaysia often emphasize rote memorization and grammar exercises instead of fostering a genuine love for reading and developing comprehensive reading skills (Musa, Lie, & Azman, 2012).

ER is an instructional approach that encourages students to read large amounts of interesting and accessible materials (Day & Bamford, 2002). Unlike intensive reading, which focuses on detailed analysis of short texts, ER aims to enhance overall reading fluency and joy by exposing learners to a wide variety of texts at an appropriate difficulty level. This method has been shown to improve reading speed, vocabulary acquisition, and overall language competence (e.g. Grabe & Stoller, 2011). By allowing students to choose their reading materials, ER also promotes a positive attitude towards reading and increases motivation, which are crucial factors in language learning (Krashen, 2004). Moreover, Renandya and Jacobs (2016) emphasize that ER plays a significant role in both linguistic and affective aspects of language acquisition, supporting language growth by providing abundant exposure to language in context while simultaneously building a positive disposition toward reading.

In Malaysia, the implementation of ER can play a pivotal role in addressing the reading difficulties faced by ESL learners. Given the multilingual context in Malaysia, where its constitution recognises English as the second language, ER offers a practical solution to bridge

the gap in English proficiency. Furthermore, ER can help mitigate the educational disparities between urban and rural students by providing a flexible and enjoyable approach to language learning that can be adapted to various contexts and resources (Pandian, 2002). Yamashita (2013) found that ER not only enhances linguistic competence but also positively influences learners' attitudes and motivation, fostering a greater inclination towards reading outside the classroom. Additionally, Cho and Krashen (2016) reported that Malaysian students involved in ER programs displayed significant gains in vocabulary acquisition and reading confidence, with effects that extended to listening and speaking skills.

ER can also help mitigate educational disparities between urban and rural students by providing a flexible and enjoyable approach to language learning adaptable to various contexts and resources (Pandian, 2002). For example, Azman and Razali (2016) found that ER reduces anxiety and builds reading confidence among rural Malaysian students, supporting their development in literacy at a pace suited to their individual needs. Together, these studies highlight ER's role as a valuable tool for language acquisition, promoting both skill development and positive learning attitudes among diverse student populations across Malaysia.

Despite the clear benefits of ER, several challenges hinder its widespread adoption in Malaysian schools. One major challenge is the lack of resources, such as a diverse range of reading materials that are appropriate for different proficiency levels (Macalister, 2010). Additionally, teachers may need more training and support to effectively integrate ER into their existing curricula (Musa, Lie, & Azman, 2012). There are also institutional constraints, such as the emphasis on standardized testing, which prioritize traditional reading methods over ER (Suk, 2017). Reading comprehension challenges are often linked to both linguistic and cognitive factors, which require the use of specific strategies to overcome (Ismail, Al Raqqad, & Al Raqqad, 2019). The modern definition of reading, which emphasizes the interaction between a learner's prior knowledge and the text, is often attributed to schema theory, particularly through the work of Anderson and Pearson (1984). This perspective suggests that readers actively construct meaning by integrating new information from the text with their existing knowledge. Schema theory underlines the importance of effective reading strategies for processing complex texts, as these strategies help learners make connections, infer meanings, and better comprehend material.

For ESL learners, particularly those with limited exposure to English outside the classroom, reading strategies offer a structured pathway to improved comprehension. Teaching a second language to learners who lack exposure to its natural environment is challenging. Many students rarely use the target language in their everyday lives and typically encounter it only in school settings, specifically within language classrooms (Misbah, Mohamad, Md Yunus, & Ya'acob, 2017). This structured approach aligns well with the goals of Extensive Reading (ER), which similarly fosters greater fluency and comprehension by encouraging students to engage with texts in ways that enhance both language competence and confidence over time.

Given these challenges, it becomes crucial to understand the underlying factors that contribute to reading difficulties among Malaysian ESL learners and to explore how ER could play a role in addressing these issues. Thus, this review seeks to answer two key research

questions: (1) What are the common factors contributing to reading difficulties among ESL learners in Malaysia? and (2) To what extent could the practice of extensive reading mitigate these reading difficulties? By answering these questions, this review seeks to offer practical insights for educators and policymakers on how to effectively incorporate ER into ESL instruction. Additionally, it will highlight areas where further research is needed to optimize the implementation of ER in diverse educational settings

Methodology
In the methodology section, the credibility and widespread acceptance of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines in enhancing transparency and accuracy in systematic reviews are often attributed to the work of Moher et al. (2009). PRISMA is recognized globally for providing a standardized approach to conducting and reporting systematic reviews, ensuring rigor and transparency in research synthesis. It ensures that researchers follow a clear, step-by-step process, reducing the risk of bias and improving the quality of reporting. The PRISMA guideline helped monitor the review process, which included identifying studies, screening, and making decisions about inclusion. This methodological rigor ensures that the review process is transparent and minimizes bias (Chin & Hashim, 2018).

The process involved few steps designed to ensure methodological rigor and comprehensiveness, including the formulation of a research question, comprehensive literature search, study selection based on predefined criteria, data extraction, quality assessment of included studies, and synthesis of findings (Greenhalgh & Peacock, 2005).

There are other available guidelines to do reviews e.g. the Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions and MOOSE (Meta-Analysis of Observational Studies in Epidemiology). However, PRISMA guideline stands out because it is widely adopted across various fields and is particularly suited for meta-analyses and systematic reviews involving educational and medical research. Its structured checklist and flow diagram offer a streamlined approach, ensuring consistency and thoroughness in every stage of the review process (Moher et al., 2009; Page et al., 2021a; Page et al., 2021b). PRISMA guideline was chosen for this study due to its adaptability, rigor, and relevance to educational research. Unlike alternatives such as the Cochrane Handbook, which is specialized for clinical trials, and MOOSE, which focuses on meta-analyses of observational data, PRISMA guideline is highly flexible and suited for diverse study designs, including quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. Its 27-item checklist and structured flow diagram ensure a transparent and replicable review process, making it ideal for synthesizing findings from a variety of methodologies, as required in educational research.

Prisma guideline focuses on transparency in study selection, data extraction, and synthesis which ensures clarity, particularly for interdisciplinary topics such as ER and ESL learners. Additionally, its global recognition adds credibility to the findings, facilitating their acceptance among researchers, educators, and policymakers. PRISMA guideline emphasises on capturing the nuances of diverse educational interventions, such as ER programs, aligns well with the goals of this systematic review. The structured framework enables the integration of insights across different study contexts, offering a comprehensive understanding of ER's impact on reading difficulties. This suitability, combined with the

guideline's emphasis on rigor and replicability, underscores its selection as the guiding framework for the study. The significance of the PRISMA guideline in enhancing transparency and rigor in systematic reviews has been established in multiple studies (Petticrew & Roberts, 2008).

Search Strategy
To ensure a comprehensive and diverse collection of studies on the impact of ER on ESL learners' reading difficulties, a systematic and rigorous search strategy was employed across multiple academic databases, including Google Scholar, ERIC, and ResearchGate. The selection of the search terms was informed by a thorough review of prior systematic reviews and meta-analyses in related educational fields. This review involved several key steps: first, relevant systematic reviews and meta-analyses related to ER and ESL learners were identified using academic databases.

A thorough review was conducted to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the impact of ER on ESL learners' reading difficulties. The process began by identifying relevant systematic reviews and meta-analyses from academic databases such as Google Scholar, ERIC, and ResearchGate. These reviews were meticulously analyzed to extract commonly used keywords and phrases which were used to develop precise search terms. The findings and conclusions of these reviews were carefully evaluated to identify main themes and gaps in the existing literature, which informed the refinement of the search strategy

Next, the search terms used in these reviews were analyzed to identify common keywords and phrases that effectively captured the topic's scope, including terms related to "Extensive Reading," "reading difficulties," "ESL learners," and "reading comprehension." The findings and conclusions of these reviews were evaluated to understand the main themes and gaps in the literature, which guided the formulation of new search terms. Finally, reference lists from relevant reviews were consulted to uncover additional studies that may not have appeared in the initial searches.

Boolean operators were employed to enhance the effectiveness of the literature search. Specifically, OR was used to combine related search terms and synonyms, thereby broadening the search results. For example, in Google Scholar, terms such as "Extensive reading programme" OR "ESL student reading challenges" were combined to capture a wider array of studies. Additionally, AND was utilized to narrow the focus by linking different concepts, such as "Extensive reading programme" AND "reading comprehension interventions." Each search was executed across the respective databases using combinations of these Boolean operators, such as in ERIC: ("extensive reading and ESL education" OR "reading difficulties in second language learners") AND ("ESL reading comprehension improvement" OR "literacy interventions for ESL students"). This structured application of Boolean operators allowed for a more comprehensive and relevant collection of literature on the impact of Extensive Reading on ESL learners' reading difficulties. The approach adhered to the PRISMA guideline (2009), which underscores the necessity of employing well-defined, inclusive search terms to capture a broad and relevant body of literature. Table 1 summarizes the search strategies.

Table 1
Terms used in the Search Strategy

Database	Search Terms
Google Scholar	"Extensive reading programme" "ESL student reading challenges" "reading comprehension interventions" "second language reading strategies" "improving reading skills in ESL learners"
ERIC	"extensive reading and ESL education" "reading difficulties in second language learners" "ESL reading comprehension improvement" "literacy interventions for ESL students" "language acquisition and reading fluency"
Research Gate	"ER impact on ESL students" "challenges in reading for ESL learners" "ESL reading proficiency development" "reading intervention strategies for second language learners" "vocabulary acquisition through extensive reading"

By employing these varied search terms, the review aimed to capture a broad and relevant collection of studies addressing the role of ER in enhancing reading skills among ESL learners, ensuring a thorough and comprehensive exploration of the topic. In total, 90 articles were identified through the database search, and after removing duplicates, 85 articles remained for further evaluation. This collection reflects a diverse array of research findings related to the impact of ER on ESL learners' reading difficulties.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria
The inclusion and exclusion criteria were employed to ensure that only studies directly relevant to the research question were considered for analysis. These criteria are essential for narrowing the focus to high-quality studies that meet the objectives of the review and for excluding studies that do not align with the scope of the research.

Table 2
Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Aspects	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Language of Publication	Written in English	Written in non-English
Year of Publication	2018-2023	Prior 2018
Focus	ESL learners only	Articles unrelated to ESL learners
Content	Reports on reading difficulties OR improvements in reading comprehension	Non-peer-reviewed articles (e.g., opinion pieces, editorials)

These criteria ensured that the review remained focused on high-quality, relevant research (Grabe & Stoller, 2011; Nation, 2009). The inclusion and exclusion criteria were carefully designed to ensure the review addressed the research questions rigorously. The date range (2018–2023) was chosen to include the most recent research on ER and its impact on ESL learners, ensuring relevance to current practices. Studies published before 2018 were excluded to avoid outdated data. Only articles written in English were included for consistency and accuracy, while non-English studies were excluded due to translation challenges. The review focused on ESL learners, excluding studies on EFL learners or native speakers to maintain relevance to the specific context of ESL education. Empirical studies reporting on reading difficulties or improvements in comprehension were prioritized, while opinion pieces or non-peer-reviewed articles were excluded. Articles were verified as peer-reviewed through academic databases like Google Scholar, ERIC, and ResearchGate. These criteria ensured a rigorous selection of high-quality, relevant research to answer the study's objectives effectively.

Study Selection
The study selection process for this systematic review adhered meticulously to the PRISMA guideline to ensure a thorough and unbiased examination of the literature on the impact of using ER on reading difficulties among ESL learners. The initial phase, termed identification, involved a comprehensive database search which yielded a pool of 90 articles. This broad search strategy aimed to capture a wide range of studies relevant to the research question. In the subsequent screening phase, duplicate entries were meticulously removed, resulting in a refined pool of 85 articles. These articles were then evaluated based on their titles and abstracts, focusing on their relevance to integrated reading practices within school settings. This step was crucial in narrowing down the pool to studies that specifically addressed the intersection of ER and reading difficulties among ESL learners.

Following the screening phase, the eligibility of the remaining articles was assessed by retrieving and reviewing the full texts of 16 potentially relevant studies. Each article was

rigorously evaluated against the pre-defined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria mandated that studies must focus on ESL learners, investigate the impact of ER on reading difficulties, employ empirical research methods, and be published in peer-reviewed journals. Conversely, studies were excluded if they centered on native speakers or EFL learners, did not specifically address reading difficulties, were theoretical or anecdotal without empirical data, or were not published in English. This rigorous evaluation ensured that only the most relevant and high-quality studies were considered for the review.

Ultimately, 16 articles met the stringent inclusion criteria and were included in the final review. These selected studies provide a robust and comprehensive foundation for analyzing the role of ER in mitigating reading difficulties among ESL learners. The systematic and detailed approach to study selection not only enhances the reliability and validity of the review findings but also ensures that the included studies collectively offer a holistic understanding of the research topic. By following the PRISMA guideline meticulously, the study selection process has maintained a high level of methodological rigor, paving the way for a thorough and insightful synthesis of the existing literature on ER as a strategy to overcome reading challenges in ESL learners.A flow diagram depicting the selection process is provided in Figure 1.
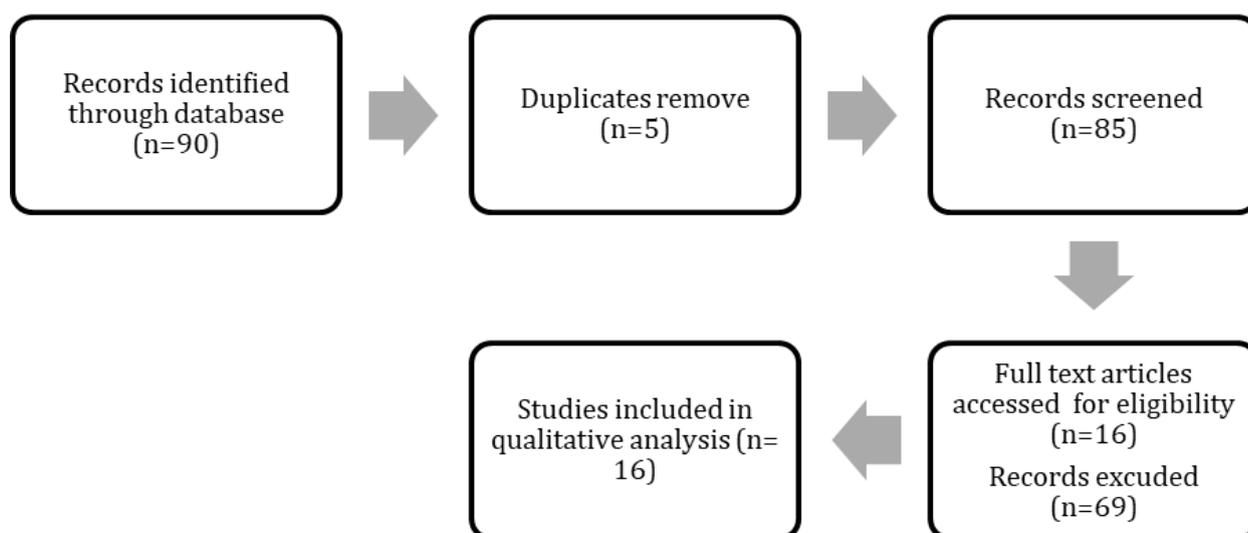

Figure 1 : PRISMA Flow Diagram
The study followed a systematic approach adhering to the PRISMA guideline. A database search was conducted using predefined keywords, identifying 90 records. After removing 5 duplicates, 85 articles were screened for relevance. Based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, 69 articles were excluded, and 16 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. No additional exclusions occurred, leaving 16 articles for thematic synthesis. A thematic analysis was conducted using Braun and Clarke's framework, involving coding, categorization, and theme development. The results were synthesized to align with the research questions

Data Extraction

The selection criteria for the included articles were designed to ensure a comprehensive review of the impact of using ER on ESL learners worldwide. Each article was assessed for relevance to the research topic, focusing on how extensive reading contributes to overcoming reading difficulties in ESL learners. The articles were sourced from reputable databases which are Google Scholar, ERIC, and ResearchGate. Articles published between 2018 and 2023 were considered, capturing the latest research developments. Studies were selected from various geographical locations to ensure diverse perspectives and contexts, with a focus on primary or secondary schools to maintain relevance to the target population of ESL learners in formal educational settings.

Data Analysis Method

Upon finalizing the selection of 16 articles, a thematic analysis approach was employed to delve deeply into the literature and uncover key themes related to the research questions. This method involved a systematic and rigorous examination of each article, allowing for the identification and categorization of pertinent themes and patterns within the data. The thematic analysis was structured around two primary research questions to ensure a focused and comprehensive exploration of the topic.

The first research question aimed to identify common factors contributing to reading difficulties among ESL learners. To address this, each selected article was analyzed to categorize various reading challenges discussed within the literature. This comprehensive analysis considered a wide range of aspects related to reading skills, such as phonemic awareness, vocabulary knowledge, reading fluency, and comprehension abilities. By systematically categorizing these challenges, we were able to compile a detailed and nuanced understanding of the specific difficulties ESL learners encounter across different contexts. This categorization not only highlighted the multifaceted nature of reading difficulties but also underscored the importance of addressing these issues through targeted educational interventions.

The second research question focused on evaluating the impact of using ER on alleviating these identified reading difficulties. This involved synthesizing the results from the 16 studies to assess the effectiveness of ER interventions. Findings from each study were carefully examined to determine how ER practices influenced the reading abilities of ESL learners. The analysis sought to identify commonalities in the outcomes reported, such as improvements in reading fluency, enhanced comprehension skills, and increased motivation to read. By aggregating these findings, we were able to gauge the overall effectiveness of ER as a pedagogical strategy in mitigating reading challenges among ESL learners. This synthesis provided valuable insights into the mechanisms through which ER facilitates reading improvement and highlighted best practices for implementing ER in diverse educational settings.

Upon selecting 16 articles, a thematic analysis was employed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, allowing for a structured and insightful analysis of the literature concerning the research questions.

Data Familiarization

The first step involved immersing deeply in the collected data to develop an understanding of its scope and nuances. This was achieved through repeated readings of the selected articles, allowing the researchers to familiarize themselves with the content and identify key patterns and concepts. During this phase, essential ideas related to factors contributing to reading difficulties and the impact of ER were highlighted. Preliminary observations were recorded to capture recurring themes and ideas relevant to the research questions. This initial immersion established the foundation for subsequent analysis.

Generating Initial Codes

In this phase, the researchers systematically analyzed the data by segmenting it into meaningful units. Key excerpts from the articles were coded to categorize information that addressed the research questions. For instance, segments discussing "interest in reading materials" or "teacher support" were coded under categories such as "Motivational Factors" or "Social Dynamics." Similarly, codes like "vocabulary limitations" or "difficulty with comprehension" captured cognitive challenges. This systematic coding process helped organize the data into manageable categories, ensuring that all relevant information was accounted for and ready for deeper analysis.

Searching for Themes

The initial codes were then grouped into broader categories to identify overarching themes. This step involved clustering related codes to form thematic patterns that reflected the data's underlying structure. For example, codes like "phonemic awareness" and "vocabulary limitations" were grouped into a theme called "Cognitive Challenges." Similarly, codes addressing the benefits of ER, such as "improved reading fluency" and "increased vocabulary," were grouped under the theme "Enhanced Reading Proficiency." These thematic groupings were developed iteratively, guided by the research questions and the study objectives.

Reviewing Themes

The identified themes were reviewed to ensure they accurately represented the data and were distinct from one another. This iterative process involved examining the coherence and consistency of each theme, refining or merging overlapping themes, and discarding any themes that lacked sufficient evidence. For instance, initial categories like "Reading Confidence" and "Reading Motivation" were combined into a broader theme, "Attitudinal Changes," to better reflect their interconnected nature. This review phase ensured that the thematic framework was both comprehensive and robust.

Defining and Naming Themes

Once finalized, each theme was clearly defined and given a descriptive label that encapsulated its essence such as "Importance of Foundational Reading Skills" which reflected themes related to cognitive challenges such as phonemic awareness and vocabulary limitations. Another search is "Fostering Motivation and Positive Attitudes through ER" which highlights the role of motivation and engagement in reading success. Another label is "Enhanced Reading Proficiency through ER" which captures themes related to improvements in fluency and comprehension. Each theme was supported by specific examples and data excerpts, ensuring a clear and accurate representation of the findings.

Producing the Report

The final phase involved synthesizing the themes into a coherent narrative that addressed the research questions. A comprehensive report was developed, detailing the thematic findings and linking them to relevant examples from the data. This synthesis highlighted key insights, such as the multifaceted challenges faced by ESL learners and the potential of ER to mitigate these difficulties. The report provided a structured analysis that was grounded in the data and supported by theoretical and empirical evidence, ensuring its relevance and utility for educators and policymakers.

The process of deriving themes is a structured and iterative approach that incorporates several key aspects to ensure rigor and alignment with the research questions. It begins with familiarization with the data, where repeated readings are conducted to develop a deep understanding of the content and identify key ideas and recurring patterns. This is followed by coding, where specific segments of data are systematically labeled with concise codes, such as "interest in reading materials" or "vocabulary limitations," to capture essential points. The next aspect is categorization, where related codes are grouped into broader categories, such as Motivational Factors or Cognitive Challenges, to organize ideas into meaningful clusters. Table 3 details the shift from codes to the final themes, that will be discussed later.

From these categories, the aspect of theme identification comes into play, focusing on synthesizing categories into overarching themes that reflect the broader meaning and implications of the data. For instance, the category Motivational Factors evolves into the theme Impact of Motivation and Relevance on Reading Engagement. This is followed by reviewing and refining themes, where themes are iteratively analyzed to ensure clarity, coherence, and distinctiveness, confirming their alignment with the data and research questions.

Once themes are finalized, the aspect of defining and naming themes involves clearly articulating their essence and assigning descriptive labels, such as Importance of Foundational Reading Skills or Enhanced Reading Proficiency Through ER. Finally, the process culminates in synthesizing themes, where the finalized themes are integrated into a comprehensive narrative that is firmly grounded in the data and provides insightful answers to the research questions. These aspects ensure that the process is methodical, transparent, and results in meaningful, data-driven findings.

Overall, the thematic analysis method allowed for a thorough and insightful examination of the literature, revealing key themes and patterns related to the research questions. By categorizing common factors contributing to reading difficulties and synthesizing the impact of ER on these challenges, the analysis provided a holistic and nuanced understanding of the effectiveness of ER as a strategy for improving reading skills among ESL learners. This methodological approach ensured a comprehensive and detailed exploration of the topic, offering valuable insights for educators, researchers, and policymakers interested in enhancing reading outcomes for ESL students through ER practices.

Table 3
Thematic Identification

Research Question	Codes	Categories	Aspects	Themes
RQ1: Factors Contributing to Reading Difficulties Among ESL Learners in Malaysia	1. Interest in reading materials 2. Personal relevance of texts 3. Intrinsic motivation	Motivational factors	Motivational factors impacting reading difficulties	Impact of motivation and relevance on reading engagement (Yamashita, 2021; Bala, 2022)
	1. Lack of phonemic awareness 2. Vocabulary limitations 3. Difficulty with comprehension	Cognitive challenges	Cognitive challenges affecting ESL reading ability	Importance of foundational reading skills (Hidayat & Nurinayah, 2022; Wahyudi & Firmansyah, 2023)
	1. Peer support and collaboration 2. Teacher support networks 3. Social classroom environment	Social dynamics	Importance of peer and teacher collaboration	Supportive social environment for reading engagement (Nkomo, 2021; Conaway & Parsons, 2023)

	1. Access to diverse reading materials 2. Availability of digital devices 3. Teacher training for ER programs	Resource-related challenges	Barriers due to limited access and inadequate training	Necessity of resources and training for effective reading support (Park & Lee, 2021; Wulyani et al., 2022)
RQ2: Ways Extensive Reading Mitigates Reading Difficulties	1. Improvement in fluency and comprehension 2. Regular practice with ER materials	Reading fluency and comprehension	Benefits of regular engagement with ER	Enhanced reading proficiency through ER (Suk, 2021; Wahyudi & Firmansyah, 2023)
	1. Exposure to a wide range of texts 2. Learning new vocabulary in context	Vocabulary acquisition	Vocabulary growth facilitated by diverse ER materials	Increased vocabulary development via ER (Liu & Zhang, 2022; Cho & Krashen, 2021)
	1. Positive attitudes toward reading 2. Increased motivation to read	Attitudinal changes	Promoting motivation and positivity through ER	Fostering motivation and positive attitudes through ER (Bala, 2022; Shih, 2021)

	1. Enhanced comprehension skills 2. Development of critical thinking skills 3. Peer interaction and support	Cognitive and social benefits	Cognitive and social gains through ER	Dual benefits of ER: cognitive growth and social engagement (Nkomo, 2021; Oaxaca et al., 2022)
	1. Challenges with resource allocation 2. Need for comprehensive teacher training 3. Limited access to diverse reading materials	Implementation challenges		Importance of resources and teacher preparedness for successful ER integration (Conaway & Parsons, 2023; Wulyani et al., 2022)

Findings and Discussion

The Common Factors Contributing to Reading Difficulties Among ESL Learners in Malaysia
To address the research Question on the common factors contributing to reading difficulties among ESL learners in Malaysia, the analysis of the literature revealed four key factors: motivational, cognitive, social, and resource-related challenges. Motivational factors, such as intrinsic interest in reading materials and their relevance to students, play a critical role in reading engagement. Bala (2022) found that when students find reading materials personally relevant and engaging, their intrinsic motivation to read increases, which in turn enhances their reading habits. Without motivation, students may struggle to engage with texts, resulting in a lack of consistent practice necessary for skill development.

Another contributor is cognitive barriers. Nkomo (2021) highlights how a lack of foundational skills, such as phonemic awareness and vocabulary knowledge, hampers reading comprehension. Similarly, Hidayat and Nurinayah (2018) emphasize that decoding difficulties and insufficient phonemic awareness among secondary school students significantly impact their ability to process and understand texts. These findings underscore the importance of targeted interventions to build foundational reading skills. The social learning environment also shapes reading success. Nkomo (2021) identifies how collaborative interactions and peer support foster engagement, while Conaway and Parsons (2023) emphasize the role of teacher networks in shaping effective reading strategies. These findings suggest that creating

supportive and collaborative social environments can significantly enhance students' reading experiences.

Lastly, resource-related issues create barriers to effective reading development. Park and Lee (2021) highlight disparities in access to appropriate materials and digital tools, while Wulyani et al. (2022) emphasize the need for teacher training and adequate reading resources for successful ER implementation. Addressing these gaps is crucial for improving reading outcomes. In summary, the analysis clearly aligns with Research Question 1 by identifying and discussing motivational, cognitive, social, and resource-related factors that contribute to reading difficulties among ESL learners. Addressing these areas holistically is essential for overcoming challenges and fostering better reading outcomes in Malaysian ESL contexts.

Extensive Reading as Effective Mitigating medium towards Reading Difficulties Among ESL Learners
The literature review revealed the extent of ER mitigates reading difficulties among ESL learners in Malaysia, which establishes ER as a powerful strategy for improving various aspects of reading skills and overcoming challenges faced by ESL learners. The review explores how ER positively impacts reading fluency, comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, motivation, and overall cognitive and social benefits. Despite these advantages, implementation barriers, such as resource constraints and insufficient teacher training, underscore the need for concerted efforts to maximize the potential of ER.

One of the most consistent findings from the literature is the ability of ER to significantly improve reading fluency and comprehension. Reading fluency refers to the ability to read text effortlessly and smoothly, while comprehension relates to understanding the meaning conveyed in the text. Both are essential for academic success and broader language acquisition. Endris (2018) and Hidayat and Nurinayah (2018) reported substantial progress among students engaging with ER, noting improved ability to read texts smoothly and process information effectively. These findings highlight the cumulative impact of frequent exposure to large volumes of meaningful, level-appropriate texts. Similarly, Wahyudi and Firmansyah (2023) confirmed that ER interventions enhanced reading comprehension among secondary school students, reinforcing that regular practice with ER materials builds skills over time. The repetitive engagement with texts at an accessible level allows students to gradually internalize linguistic structures, improving their fluency and comprehension in tandem. ER's emphasis on volume and variety means that learners interact with different genres, contexts, and language structures, making comprehension more intuitive. As Suk (2021) demonstrated, the extended exposure to language fosters familiarity, leading to smoother and more effective reading. Collectively, these findings underscore the effectiveness of ER in building foundational fluency and comprehension skills, essential for learners to transition from decoding to understanding and enjoying texts.

Vocabulary acquisition plays a critical role in reading proficiency and overall language development. ER is particularly effective in this area because it immerses learners in rich, contextualized language use. Studies show that this immersion promotes incidental vocabulary learning, enabling learners to encounter and internalize new words naturally. Song (2020) reported that primary school students participating in ER programs exhibited substantial vocabulary growth, leading to improved reading and writing abilities. Liu and

Zhang (2018) reinforced these findings through a meta-analysis, which revealed that ER significantly enhances vocabulary learning across various educational settings. The contextual learning facilitated by ER allows students to understand words based on usage rather than memorization, a process that deepens retention. Moreover, the exposure to diverse vocabulary through ER helps bridge the lexical gap often seen in ESL learners, particularly those with limited exposure to English outside the classroom. Learners encountering words repeatedly across different contexts are more likely to remember them, apply them accurately, and infer meanings of unfamiliar words in future texts. This iterative learning process illustrates the transformative impact of ER on vocabulary acquisition.

Motivation and attitude are crucial for sustained engagement in reading. ER has been shown to foster intrinsic motivation and cultivate positive attitudes toward reading, which are essential for long-term improvement. Studies emphasize that learners who are motivated to read are more likely to persevere, practice consistently, and develop proficiency. Bala (2022) demonstrated that students engaged in ER programs developed favorable attitudes toward reading, finding the process enjoyable and rewarding. The opportunity to select materials that align with their interests plays a pivotal role in this shift. Similarly, Pirih (2019) highlighted that motivation increased when students were given autonomy over their reading choices, as they felt empowered to explore topics of personal relevance. Shih (2018) further emphasized that motivated students are more likely to read regularly, creating a cycle of improvement. This increased engagement not only strengthens language skills but also builds confidence, reducing reading anxiety. By making reading accessible and enjoyable, ER addresses motivational barriers that often deter ESL learners from developing their skills.

ER provides dual benefits in cognitive and social development, enhancing learners' overall reading experience and contributing to broader educational goals. Nkomo (2021) identified the cognitive advantages of ER, particularly in improving comprehension and critical thinking skills. The process of engaging with a wide variety of texts challenges learners to analyze, infer, and synthesize information, fostering higher-order thinking. ER also reinforces schema theory, which posits that learners construct meaning by integrating new information with prior knowledge. The consistent engagement with texts builds cognitive resilience, allowing learners to tackle more complex materials over time. ER also fosters a collaborative and supportive learning environment. Oaxaca et al. (2022) demonstrated that young learners participating in ER programs benefited from peer interactions, where they shared insights and discussed texts. This collaborative approach not only reinforced comprehension but also built a sense of community. Moreover, social reading activities, such as group discussions and peer recommendations, create a positive atmosphere that encourages continued engagement. Together, these cognitive and social benefits highlight ER's holistic impact, addressing not only individual skill gaps but also fostering environments conducive to learning.

While the benefits of ER are clear, implementation challenges often hinder its adoption in schools. These barriers must be addressed to ensure the sustainable and effective integration of ER into ESL education. Wulyani et al. (2022) identified resource-related challenges, including insufficient access to diverse and level-appropriate reading materials. Many schools, particularly in rural areas, lack the financial and logistical capacity to maintain extensive libraries. Digital tools, which could bridge this gap, are also limited in accessibility due to infrastructure constraints. Inadequate teacher training is another significant barrier.

Conaway and Parsons (2023) stressed that teachers need professional development to effectively implement ER programs, including guidance on material selection, instructional strategies, and monitoring progress. Without sufficient training, teachers may struggle to integrate ER into their curriculum, diminishing its impact. The emphasis on exam-oriented education in Malaysia further complicates the implementation of ER. Traditional methods prioritize rote learning and grammar drills, which are perceived as more aligned with assessment goals. This misalignment often leads to a lack of institutional support for ER programs.

To maximize the benefits of ER, concerted efforts are required to address the challenges hindering its implementation. Resource allocation is a critical first step, as schools and policymakers need to invest in diverse reading materials, including digital libraries, to ensure equitable access for all learners, particularly those in underserved or rural areas. Equally important is teacher training, which involves designing comprehensive professional development programs to equip educators with the necessary skills to implement ER effectively. These programs should focus on key aspects such as selecting appropriate materials, employing effective instructional strategies, and tracking student progress. Finally, curriculum integration is essential to position ER as a core component of English language instruction rather than an optional activity. Aligning ER with broader educational objectives ensures its recognition as a valuable pedagogical tool and fosters greater institutional support. Together, these strategies can create an enabling environment for the sustainable and impactful use of ER in enhancing ESL learners' reading outcomes.

The findings of this review align closely with Research Question 2, demonstrating that ER mitigates reading difficulties by improving fluency, comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, motivation, and cognitive and social development. However, addressing implementation barriers is critical to fully realizing its potential. ER offers a holistic, evidence-based approach to improving reading proficiency among ESL learners in Malaysia. By addressing resource constraints, enhancing teacher training, and embedding ER within the curriculum, educators and policymakers can ensure that ER becomes a sustainable and impactful strategy for overcoming reading challenges. These efforts hold significant promise for transforming ESL education and empowering learners to achieve their full linguistic and academic potential.

Conclusion

This systematic review provides an in-depth analysis of ER as a strategy for addressing reading difficulties among ESL learners in Malaysia, shedding light on the intricate challenges faced by these students and the potential benefits of ER interventions. The findings underscore that ESL learners' reading difficulties are influenced by a range of factors, including motivational, cognitive, social, and resource-related elements. ER interventions have been found to significantly enhance reading fluency, comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, attitudes toward reading, and overall motivation. By establishing a supportive learning environment and offering a diverse array of reading materials, ER emerges as a highly effective approach for mitigating these difficulties.

However, the review also acknowledges several limitations, such as variability in the methodological quality of the included studies and potential differences in ER program

implementation and evaluation. Additionally, the focus on research conducted primarily in Malaysia may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other contexts or countries.

To address these limitations and further advance the field, future research should incorporate longitudinal studies to examine the long-term effects of ER on reading proficiency. Investigations into the impact of various ER program implementations across diverse educational settings will provide a more comprehensive understanding of its effectiveness. Moreover, addressing challenges related to resource availability and teacher training will be essential for optimizing ER interventions and improving their applicability across different ESL contexts.

This research makes a significant theoretical contribution by expanding the understanding of extensive reading (ER) within the schema theory framework, particularly in the context of ESL learners in Malaysia. By synthesizing findings that link ER with improved reading fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary acquisition, this study reinforces the theoretical premise that ER supports cognitive and motivational dimensions of reading. Contextually, the research highlights the unique challenges faced by Malaysian ESL learners, such as resource constraints and language anxiety, and proposes ER as an adaptive strategy to address these localized issues. The findings also provide practical insights for educators and policymakers to design ER programs tailored to Malaysian educational settings, thus bridging the gap between theory and practice. This dual contribution underscores the importance of ER in both advancing academic discourse and enhancing real-world applications in ESL education.

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