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**Reading Strategies for Language
Development: An Exploration of Extensive
and Narrow Reading in English Education**

*Lässtrategier för Språkutveckling: En Undersökning av Extensive
och Narrow Reading i Engelskundervisningen*

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Abstract

This study investigates the effects of extensive reading and narrow reading on L2 learners' language development in English, with a focus on vocabulary, reading comprehension, and motivation. The impact reading has on language development is established, however, the reading ability amongst Swedish students in both Swedish and English has in recent years shown a downward trend, which emphasises the need to explore effective methods for reading and reading instruction.

This study employed a systematic literature review methodology, collecting and analysing relevant articles to investigate the impact of extensive and narrow reading on language development. The findings suggest that both approaches positively influence language development. Extensive reading fosters a broader vocabulary and enhances reading comprehension, while also boosting motivation through enjoyable reading experiences. Narrow reading, on the other hand, facilitates vocabulary development and retention through repeated exposure to thematic texts and similarly contributes to improved reading comprehension and motivation. Notably, the choice of format, whether printed books or e-books, also plays a role, with research indicating that printed books are particularly beneficial for fostering deeper reading comprehension.

The study showcases that extensive and narrow reading can be beneficial approaches to developing Swedish students' English language skills. There is however a need for further research, especially within the Swedish classroom to investigate how these two approaches could be combined to optimise language learning in Sweden. A combination of these approaches could potentially create favourable conditions for versatile language development.

Keywords: extensive reading, narrow reading, vocabulary development, reading comprehension, motivation, EFL, Swedish students, printed books, implicit learning.

Individual Contributions

We hereby declare that both signatories below participated equally in every stage of developing this essay.

Our collaborative efforts encompassed the following:

- Planning
- Formulating the research question
- Conducting article searches and structuring the essay outline
- Drafting the introduction, presenting findings as well as drafting the discussion and conclusion

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Introduction

Reading is a vital skill that is essential for communication and participating effectively in society. Nilsson (2007) claims that reading is necessary for individuals to function and contribute to society. To achieve this, teachers must ensure students engage in regular reading practice.

Through reading, students encounter new vocabulary and linguistic structures that deepen their understanding of the language (Brown, 2014). Reading comprehension further strengthens communication by equipping individuals with tools to engage with their reality, making it a vital skill for all areas of life (Ramírez, 2017). However, the current educational debate centers around Swedish students' reading ability, notably in English as a foreign language, and its downward trend. Many outlets report that Swedish children read less and therefore lack general reading comprehension; Utbildningsdepartementet (2023) presented the results from an international study (PIRLS) that showed that reading ability and comprehension amongst Swedish students have declined since the previous study. During our teaching placements in upper secondary schools, we observed this trend as many of our students could not understand simple texts. We also noticed that many teachers mainly worked with films when it came to storytelling. This reliance on film, while potentially engaging, may unintentionally reduce students' exposure to written texts and contribute to the observed decline in reading skills. Lundahl (2019) addresses that when students lack adequate reading skills, their willingness to read also declines, forcing teachers to balance more accessible approaches such as simplified texts and the use of films to facilitate storytelling. This contradicts the Swedish syllabus for English (2022b) which states that students should come in contact with various forms of literature and texts.

While the exact causes for this decline in reading ability are uncertain, it is plausible to assume that the increased digitisation of society and schools, coupled with decreased availability of physical literature has played a role (Lundahl, 2019). Furthermore, research suggests that students may achieve better reading comprehension through traditional print reading compared to digital reading, potentially due to factors such as differences in engagement, focus, and the physicality of interacting with a printed book (Lundahl, 2019). Dodou (2024) further identifies the concerning trend of literature being marginalised in English language teaching materials. Despite the

recognised value of literature in language education, the previous value of literature in education has diminished over time. Because of this, teachers may often struggle to find suitable literature for the classroom which is exacerbated by the limited selection of English literature in Swedish school libraries (Dodou, 2024). The decline in reading ability among Swedish students is a complex issue with multiple contributing factors, including the potential marginalisation of literature and the shift toward digital media.

Background

The Role of Reading and Literature in Language Development

Literature, which once played a central part in English education, has become less prominent as Lundahl (2019) reports that one-fifth of Swedish fifteen-year-olds demonstrate only basic reading comprehension, finding it difficult to understand and interpret the nuances of context necessary for deeper understanding. Moody et al. (2018) discuss the result of this decrease in the use of literature is that students do not only miss the opportunity to improve their reading ability but also the implicit vocabulary learning through extended language exposure that literature provides. Thereby their chances of developing a rich vocabulary, which is a key component in language learning, is decreased. This decline in literature exposure may be particularly damaging to implicit language learning. Implicit learning, as defined by Nejati (2023), refers to learning that occurs unintentionally, resulting in the ability to perform the acquired skills automatically. The Swedish model for language teaching builds upon this, aiming for students to develop a comprehensive communicative ability through largely implicit means, allowing them to use language spontaneously and effortlessly (Lundahl, 2019). According to the syllabus for English (2022b), education in English should focus on developing all-around communicative skills which include both reception (understanding) and production (expressing).

Additionally, Lundahl (2019) emphasises the positive correlation between vocabulary and reading by noting that vocabulary expands through reading and that this improves students' ability to not only read but also their comprehension. He highlights that this is not an automatic process and that students need directed and structured reading opportunities for them to use this dynamic. Lundahl outlines vocabulary as something with multiple layers that can be split into receptive and

productive vocabulary. Receptive vocabulary includes words that we recognise and understand when encountered, while productive vocabulary includes words that we actively can use when speaking and writing. Since receptive vocabulary always is bigger than the productive, repetition and use of words in new contexts are required for them to be included in the productive vocabulary.

Motivation and Reading

Motivation is crucial for developing strong reading skills, as it directly impacts reading comprehension. Nuttall and Alderson (2009) highlight this close relationship between reading comprehension and enjoyment, noting that weak readers often do not enjoy reading and struggle to understand the texts. As mentioned by Lundahl (2019) PISA researchers found a correlation between reading and engagement, reinforcing the idea that motivated and engaged readers are more likely to succeed. When reading habits and motivation are lost, students are less likely to engage with books, making it difficult for them to regain reading skills and enjoyment. The importance of reading is underlined through research that indicates that those who read books regularly tend to perform better than those who rarely do so (Renandya et al., 2018).

Lundahl (2019) describes the difficulty in establishing the correlation between language learning and motivation but that it cannot be separated from it as motivation has been proven to connect to learners' confidence. He further mentions that the most important part of motivation within language learning is *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* motivation. The distinction between the two as described by Lundahl is that extrinsic stems from outside requirements, while intrinsic stems from personal interest. Lundahl additionally suggests that intrinsic motivation is needed for students to study most effectively. He further insists that extrinsic motivation, when it comes from an inclusive and motivating environment, is just as important. Therefore, a balance between the two is a powerful source for fostering reading motivation.

An inclusive and motivating environment can be created by allowing students to engage in their education as discussed by Alerby and Bergmark (2023). They argue that allowing students to participate in their education, such as choosing materials, leads to increased motivation. This for example could be choosing their books. This is rooted in the Swedish curriculum (2022a) where

the idea of a democratic classroom where students should be encouraged to participate in their education. This supports that extrinsic motivation, particularly when driven by students' influence and participation, could foster a positive learning environment which subsequently can evolve into intrinsic motivation.

Motivation for Krashen

We have chosen to focus on extensive reading and narrow reading based on Stephen Krashen's theories, as his work provides a strong foundation to understand these reading approaches to language development. Krashen's input hypothesis emphasises the importance of exposure to comprehensible input which aligns with the principles behind both extensive and narrow reading. By selecting these approaches, we aim to explore their potential effects on language development in the EFL context. Additionally, the relative lack of research on how these specific methods influence language learning, particularly within Swedish education, further motivates the need to investigate their practical applications.

Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Extensive and Narrow Reading

Krashen (1982) emphasised the understanding of second language acquisition with his input hypothesis. Central to this theory is the belief that language acquisition is best facilitated through meaningful exposure to comprehensible input; this approach emphasises the importance of natural and subconscious language learning over conscious learning. Two integral extensions of this theory are extensive reading and narrow reading, both of which focus on how consistent exposure to texts and literature supports language acquisition and development. Extensive reading, rooted in the idea that learners benefit from exposure to large volumes of comprehensible texts, builds fluency and vocabulary by encouraging learners to read broadly and for pleasure (Krashen, 1982). Krashen argues that extensive reading provides an affluence of comprehensible input, which he identifies as the key to language acquisition.

Krashen (2004) later developed the concept of narrow reading, which accentuates the importance of comprehensive and focused reading to language development. Narrow reading implies focused

reading, where learners read multiple texts from the same author or within the same genre, offering multiple benefits for language learning and development. One of the benefits of narrow reading is repetition, as learners frequently encounter the same vocabulary and expressions within a focused thematic context. This repetition in varied but comprehensible contexts deepens their understanding and strengthens their comprehension.

Bridging the Gap

To address these challenges and maximise the potential of reading for language development, it's necessary to bridge the gap between current practices and the theoretical foundations discussed. While reading has long been recognised as a key in language development, its diminished role in contemporary education raises concerns about the long-term effects on student's linguistic abilities. The current decline in Swedish students' reading comprehension underscores the urgent need for reintegrating literature and structured reading practices into English education. Although there is substantial support for the benefits of reading for vocabulary and overall reading comprehension, there appears to be a lack of focused research on how different approaches to reading – such as extensive and narrow reading – together might impact language development in the context of EFL in Swedish education. Further investigation of this area could provide valuable insights into the effects of these reading approaches on language development.

Aim and Research Question

This study investigates the possibilities of extensive reading and narrow reading in supporting L2 learners' development of vocabulary, reading comprehension, and motivation. Thus, by comparing the two approaches, the study aims to highlight how each approach contributes to language development and what they respectively strengthen or limit in the enhancement of these linguistic skills. Consequently, the research question is as follows;

- How can extensive reading and narrow reading influence L2 learners' vocabulary, comprehension, and motivation to read English texts?

Method

In this section, we outline the methodological approaches used in this paper and critically examine our approaches to collecting and analysing articles. The paper is a systematic literature of previous review research. Norris and Ortega (2006) emphasise:

Research synthesis pursues systematic [...] understandings of the state of knowledge that has accumulated about a given problem across primary research studies. Its foremost purpose is to integrate available research evidence, such that both patterns and inconsistencies (in both findings and methods) may be identified with precision. (p.1)

Part of this process involves being transparent with the choices made regarding the inclusion and exclusion of studies. Additionally, it is crucial to analyse the results in correlation to existing theories within the area to identify patterns and connections between the results.

Database selection

The choice of databases was based on what was accessible to us as students at Malmö University. In addition to this, the databases also have an educational focus which further aligns with the topic within education and the aim that this paper has. ERC (Education Research Complete) and ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) are two platforms that offer educational-focused articles; while similar they may also differ in some areas. Therefore, we ran the same search strings on both platforms to make sure that we got the broadest results possible. However, most of the results were the same: only two articles were solely found on the ERC.

Search Process

The search process for this study involved conducting individual searches focusing on the concepts of *extensive reading* and *narrow reading*. We adapted our search terms based on specific aspects of language development that we sought to explore, including *vocabulary* and *reading*

comprehension. These terms were chosen in concordance with the various dimensions of our research focus. After gathering results from these targeted searches, we evaluated the relevance of each source concerning our aim – which is examining the roles of *extensive* and *narrow reading* in supporting language development. Sources that most effectively addressed these relationships were selected for inclusion in this paper. *Motivation* was then found as a theme throughout most of the articles, which is why it was later added.

Inclusions and exclusions

For this paper, we included peer-reviewed articles only to meet the requirements for the paper and to ensure the credibility of the sources used. To maintain relevance, we included studies between 2015 and 2024. This range was chosen to reflect on recent developments and current perspectives in the field.

Analysis

To analyse the results, the sources were categorised into two groups: extensive reading and narrow reading. Each study was then read and examined individually, focusing on their aims and findings. Summaries were created to establish the core objectives and outcomes of each study, focusing on identifying correlations and patterns that emerged in the research articles.

These patterns were then organised systematically to form the basis of the discussion section, this resulted in a structured comparison and integration of the results within the framework of the study. The analysis aimed to create an overview of the research instead of summarising individual studies.

By following the outline by Norris and Ortega (2006), a central part of the analysis was to identify patterns and inconsistencies. The study actively searched for recurring themes and results that indicated consistency in the research field. Attention was drawn to discrepancies and contradictions in the results to obtain a more nuanced picture. For example, patterns were identified by several studies finding that extensive reading improves vocabulary, while others showed that narrow reading is effective for learning new words. Inconsistencies were identified, for example, in how the effect of e-books and printed books differs. The analysis connected the results to existing

theories, specifically Krahens' input hypothesis, to identify patterns and relationships within the theoretical framework. This contributed to a deeper understanding of the research results and their significance within the framework of language learning.

Overview of Selected Studies

Data base	Author Year Title	Method	Country Participants	Keywords in article	Main results
ERIC	Assiri, A., & Ahlullah, S. 2021 Extensive Reading: A Multifaceted Panacea for EFL Students at KKU.	Mixed	Saudi-Arabia University	Anxiety, EFL, extensive reading, speaking fluency, USSR	Extensive reading improves reading comprehension and vocabulary.
ERIC	Abdollahi, M., & Farvardin, T.M. 2016 Demystifying the Effect of Narrow Reading on EFL	Quantitative	Iran Senior, high school	EFL, vocabulary retention, vocabulary recall, Narrow Reading.	Narrow reading and exposure to target words in thematically related passages improved students' vocabulary recall

	Learners' Vocabulary Recall and Retention.				and retention.
ERIC	Ateek, M. 2021 Extensive reading in an EFL classroom: Impact and learners' perceptions.	Mixed	Jordan 21-27 year olds	Extensive reading; reading fluency; vocabulary knowledge; learners' perceptions; action research.	Extensive reading positively impacts fluency and vocabulary by showing that the participants' vocabulary expanded, the more they read.
ERIC	Chang, A.C. -S., & Millett, S. 2017 Narrow reading: Effects on EFL learners' reading speed, comprehension, and perceptions.	Mixed	Taiwan College	Narrow reading, reading speed, reading fluency, reading comprehension	Narrow reading resulted in EFL learners reading faster and comprehending texts than reading unrelated texts.
ERIC	Outamgharte, B., Yeou, M., & Zyad, H.	Quantitative	Morocco High School	EFL, Arab students, receptive vocabulary,	Narrow reading, specifically by reading texts by the same author

	2024 The Impact of Narrow Reading on the Receptive Vocabulary Knowledge of Moroccan High School Students.			vocabulary development , narrow reading	and the same theme resulted in an improvement of EFL learners' receptive vocabulary.
ERIC	Iwata, A. 2022 The Effectiveness of Extensive Reading (ER) on the Development of EFL Learners' Sight Vocabulary Size and Reading Fluency.	Quantitative	Japan College	Extensive reading, reading fluency, EFL learners, Sight Vocabulary Size.	Extensive reading in an EFL classroom is a feasible option to facilitate vocabulary and fluency for communication.
ERIC	Iqbal, S.A & Komal, S.A. 2017	Mixed	Pakistan Secondary school	Extensive reading, vocabulary knowledge scale,	Extensive reading enhances vocabulary among students as well as reading

	Analyzing the Effectiveness of Vocabulary Knowledge Scale on Learning and Enhancing Vocabulary through Extensive Reading.			comprehension skills, graded readers.	motivation.
ERIC	Kang, E. Y. 2015 Promoting L2 Vocabulary Learning through Narrow Reading.	Mixed	South-Korea Senior high school	Narrow reading, vocabulary, vocabulary learning through reading, EFL, vocabulary learning	Narrow reading improved EFL learners' receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge in comparison to reading unrelated texts.
ERIC	Khamesipour, M. 2015 The Effects of Explicit and Implicit Instruction of Vocabulary	Quantitative	Iran University	Explicit vocabulary, instruction, implicit vocabulary instruction, narrow reading, vocabulary	Implicit vocabulary instructions through narrow reading were more efficient than explicit vocabulary instructions in

	through Reading on EFL Learners' Vocabulary Development.			development	developing EFL learners' vocabulary.
ERIC	Park. J., & Lee, J. 2015 Effects of E- books and Printed Books on EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension and Grammatical Knowledge.	Quantitative	South-Korea Elementary school	Extensive reading, tablets, e- books, printed books, literal reading comprehensi on, inferential reading comprehensi on, grammatical knowledge	Extensive reading with printed books is better for improving reading comprehension than digital texts.

Results

The following segment explores the impact of extensive reading and narrow reading on various aspects of language development, including vocabulary, reading comprehension, and learner motivation. The studies reviewed offer insights into the benefits by highlighting their unique contributions to language learning. The section is organised into two, first, the findings related to extensive reading and then the results related to narrow reading. This section aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the comparative strengths of extensive and narrow reading in fostering language development.

Out of the selected studies, 3/5 of the extensive reading sources employed a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic. In addition, 3/5 of the narrow reading sources primarily used quantitative methods to measure specific outcomes. Several of the studies were action research projects conducted on smaller groups, offering practical insights despite their limited size. While some studies lack a control group, their inclusion is still valuable as they provide relevant findings and contribute to a broader understanding of the research area.

Extensive Reading

The research conducted on extensive reading unanimously shows the benefits it has on multiple aspects of language learning, including vocabulary and reading comprehension as well as fostering motivation. Multiple of the studies used a mixed method approach where they combined quantitative and qualitative methods for a broader understanding of the impact.

Vocabulary

Consistent exposure to vocabulary through extensive reading, as showcased in multiple studies, plays a crucial role in vocabulary development, leading to passive recognition and active application. Iqbal and Komal (2017) while investigating the impact of extensive reading on 100

Pakistani participants aged 12-15 found that it not only improved vocabulary and retention but also enabled learners to apply these newly acquired words into their writing. This indicates that vocabulary development through extensive reading extends beyond passive recognition, with the repetition of vocabulary during reading playing a vital role in both retention and fostering long-term lexical knowledge. Similarly, Assiri and Siddiqui (2021) in a study over 12 weeks, demonstrated significant progress in vocabulary development among 25 Saudi Arabian university students. By removing the pressure of comprehension questions, their method encouraged the participants to engage with extensive reading which resulted in measurable progress in their vocabulary development. In addition, Ateek (2021) concluded that repeated exposure to vocabulary through extensive reading leads to greater vocabulary development. Throughout the study, the participants – 10 Jordanian EFL learners aged 21-27 – who initially reported little engagement with reading in English, read an average of 21 books. Despite the small-scale nature of this study, it underscores the importance of consistent practice and exposure in building vocabulary.

In contrast, Iwata (2022) who compared the effects of extensive reading and intensive reading found that extensive reading was more effective than intensive reading for developing sight vocabulary. Sight vocabulary, partially known high-frequency words, is the set of words one can recognise immediately without using decoding strategies. The study was conducted on 72 Japanese college students and used the MVST (Modified Vocabulary Size Test), which is widely regarded as both reliable and credible in Japanese contexts. Likewise, to previous studies, the findings suggest that repeated exposure through extensive reading is instrumental in expanding vocabulary. Nonetheless, the findings of the study solidify the contributions of extensive reading on vocabulary growth, particularly in expanding sight vocabulary.

Reading Comprehension

Research demonstrated that extensive reading enhances reading comprehension. This is achieved through repeated exposure to new vocabulary, which builds a strong foundation for improved reading fluency, ultimately leading to better comprehension.

Ateek (2021) affirmed that reading speed contributes to reading comprehension by demonstrating a positive correlation between the number of books read and reading fluency. Participants reported

that they read faster and felt more confident in their reading as a result of the consistent exposure. Additionally, Iwata (2022) confirmed the effectiveness of extensive reading in enhancing reading fluency by finding that those who read extensively achieved higher reading rates compared to those who engaged in intensive reading. Iwata emphasises the relationship between reading volume and speed, with greater fluency gains observed among those who read more, ultimately resulting in improved reading comprehension.

In addition, Assiri and Siddiqui (2021) found that extensive reading significantly improved the participants' reading comprehension. The results assist in showcasing the multifaceted benefits of extensive reading in the overall development of language learning skills. Assiri and Siddiqui also emphasise that the stress-free and self-directed nature of extensive reading encourages learners to engage with reading at their own pace, which improves their comprehension skills. Additionally, Park and Lee (2021) investigated the impact of extensive reading on reading comprehension by comparing e-books and printed books in a study involving 97 South Korean students aged 10-12. Pre-study assessments revealed that most participants had limited exposure to English reading materials, either in print or online, outside the classroom, and more than half reported that they had never read printed books or digital materials in English. Their findings revealed that e-books were particularly effective for improving literal comprehension, while printed books, combined with regular English instruction, facilitated substantial gains in both surface-level and deep comprehension. This indicates that the effects of extensive reading on reading comprehension can vary depending on the medium used, further demonstrating its versatility in supporting reading comprehension across different formats.

Motivation

Another key aspect of extensive reading is that it also increases learners' interest in reading, which in turn leads to long-term engagement and motivation. Iqbal and Komal (2017) observed that extensive reading stimulated the participants' interest in reading, making reading more enjoyable and fostering intrinsic motivation. This enthusiasm not only enhanced participants' engagement but also contributed to long-term retention, which emphasises the role extensive reading has in sustaining language learning. Similarly, Assiri and Siddiqui (2021) observed that the stress-free

nature of extensive reading allowed learners to enjoy reading and become more deeply involved. This relaxed and enjoyable approach led to greater engagement and significant progress, again, reinforcing the capability of extensive reading to motivate learners and promoting a more sustained involvement in language acquisition.

Extensive Reading Summary

The findings collectively underscore the benefits of extensive reading for language learners, particularly in fostering vocabulary development and promoting reading comprehension. Additionally, its stress-free and enjoyable nature motivates learners to engage more deeply with language learning. By encouraging consistent exposure to diverse reading materials, extensive reading creates an environment conducive to natural language development and sustained interest, making it a vital tool for both EFL and ESL learners.

Narrow reading

The research conducted on narrow reading, points to its capability of enhancing vocabulary, reading comprehension as well as motivation through repeated exposure in thematical contexts. In contrast to the studies on extensive reading, the studies on narrow reading used quantitative methods to measure specific results.

Vocabulary

Most of the studies focused on narrow reading suggest that it enhances vocabulary development, particularly when the reading material is thematically consistent. Khamesipour (2015) examined explicit and implicit vocabulary instruction among 30 EFL university students in Iran aged 20-27. By using a pre-test and post-test, students were assessed on their vocabulary development while a proficiency test measured their general proficiency in English. The results revealed that implicit methods allowed them to encounter vocabulary within reading materials without previous explanations. Thus, was more effective than explicit instruction where the students were introduced

to vocabulary definitions before reading. Through narrow reading, repeated exposure enabled students to understand and use the target words from the reading material which supported the vocabulary development. Similarly, Kang (2015) investigated narrow (thematic) reading and wide (unrelated) reading approaches among 61 L2 learners in Korea aged 17-18. Two tests assessed the group's vocabulary development, one measuring in isolation and the other in context. The study revealed that narrow reading significantly enhanced vocabulary development through students' exposure to recurring target words within familiar contexts in comparison to wide reading.

The thematic effect on vocabulary development is further presented through the Outamgharte et al. (2024) study which assessed the effects of narrow reading on receptive vocabulary knowledge in 75 tenth-grade EFL Moroccan students. Three groups were tested: one read texts with the same author and theme, the other read texts by the same author but with different themes and a control group read unrelated texts by different authors. The results of the study showcased that the group reading texts with the same author and theme led to better outcomes in receptive vocabulary development than unrelated texts. Narrow reading yielded the best outcomes through the reduced cognitive load and repeated encounters with vocabulary which overall could facilitate the burden of learning new vocabulary. In addition, Abdollahi and Farvardin (2016) examined the impact of narrow reading on vocabulary recall and retention among 60 senior high school students in Iran. The study was conducted through two groups: one experimental group read thematically related passages, while the control group read unrelated topics. A pre-test and two delayed post-tests showcased that narrow reading enhanced incidental vocabulary learning through frequent repeated thematic exposure thereby improving recall and retention of partially known or unknown vocabulary.

Reading Comprehension

Narrow reading has been shown to significantly enhance reading comprehension by reducing cognitive and lexical load through thematic consistency. The sources for narrow reading tended to combine reading comprehension and fluency without making a firm split because of their correlation (Chang and Millett, 2017). Chang and Millett (2017) explored the effects of narrow reading on L2 learners' reading speed, reading comprehension, and reception of two groups

through narrow reading strategies. Each group, which included 53 Taiwanese senior high school students, aged 18 years old, engaged with texts that included different narrow reading strategies. One group read texts of the same genre from the Sherlock Holmes series. The other group read texts with the same title but published at different language levels from the Railway Children. The researchers demonstrated that reading thematically consistent 1000-word passages helped improve reading comprehension by reducing the lexical load while increasing background knowledge. The enhanced comprehension was associated with the recurrence of vocabulary and context. A similar pattern was showcased in the study by Outamgharte et al. (2024) which highlighted how narrow reading reduced cognitive demands while enhancing comprehension by exposing learners to repeated vocabulary within consistent themes.

Motivation

Despite not primarily focusing on motivation, narrow reading studies have revealed several motivational benefits. Abdollahi and Farvardin (2016) concluded that narrow reading acts as a tool for reading to become engaging to the learners through thematic familiarity which supported the bigger focus on vocabulary recall and retention. Similarly, Kang (2015) revealed in the study conducted that the participants preferred narrow reading due to frequent thematic encounters. This resulted in further engagement and interest for the students in reading the material. Chang and Millett (2017) also observed that thematic consistency in narrow reading enhanced learners' perceptions of reading, increasing their motivation and willingness to engage with the texts. Additionally, Outamgharte et al. (2024) noted that students' eagerness to participate in activities related to the English course and their desire to learn more English, highlighted the importance of creating a supportive learning environment that nurtures intrinsic motivation.

Narrow Reading Summary

The studies demonstrate the narrow reading significance in enhancing vocabulary development, reading comprehension, and motivation. Repeated thematic exposure strengthens vocabulary recall, retention, and usage by reducing cognitive load and reinforcing semantic networks. Reading comprehension is enhanced through the decrease of lexical load that allows the learners to process

familiar contexts. Furthermore, the motivation occurred when learners engaged with thematic themes and familiar contexts which increased their interest in reading. The findings of the studies highlight narrow reading as a method for developing language skills.

Discussion

Considering the declining reading abilities observed among Swedish students, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), this discussion examines the potential of implementing extensive and narrow reading to reverse this decline. Extensive reading and narrow reading are two approaches in second/foreign language education, that each offer different benefits for developing vocabulary and reading comprehension, as well as motivation to engage with literature and texts. These two approaches could hold particular significance to the Swedish English classroom, in which the syllabus (2022b) emphasises fostering students' receptive and productive skills.

Extensive and narrow reading has proven to be effective methods for expanding vocabulary. Both extensive reading with its diverse nature and narrow reading, with its thematic focus, can expose learners to the same words and expressions in various contexts, thereby facilitating learning and retention. Studies have shown that when students repeatedly are exposed to the same words, even in varied contexts, their understanding and use of the words are enhanced (Iqbal and Komal, 2017; Kang, 2015). Similarly, Khamesipour (2015) asserts that implicit vocabulary learning through narrow reading is more effective than explicit vocabulary learning before reading. This indicates that students benefit from learning words in context rather than through isolated definitions which are supported by Iqbal and Komal (2017) who demonstrated that extensive reading has a positive effect on students' productive vocabulary, by allowing them to internalise and use new words through repeated exposure.

Iwata (2022) highlighted the capability of extensive reading to enhance students' sight vocabulary, especially high-frequency words. This is particularly important for Swedish students who often learn English as a second or third language, since a rich sight vocabulary, which is a part of receptive vocabulary, can significantly facilitate reading comprehension. To fully understand the impact of extensive reading and narrow reading on vocabulary development, it's crucial to distinguish between receptive and productive vocabulary as outlined by Lundahl (2019). Receptive vocabulary refers to the words a learner recognises and understands when encountered in reading or listening, while productive vocabulary refers to the words a learner can actively use in speaking

and writing. Lundahl emphasises that receptive vocabulary is always larger than productive, which highlights the need for repeated exposure and the use of words in varied contexts to transfer them from receptive to productive.

Narrow reading's strength lies in its ability to significantly boost receptive vocabulary. By repeatedly exposing learners to specific words and phrases within a thematic context, it strengthens students' ability to recognise and understand those words (Khamesipour, 2015). The thematic consistency reduces cognitive load, allowing learners to focus on the nuances of meaning and usage of the target vocabulary, further solidifying these words within their receptive vocabulary (Outamgharte et al., 2024). As such, narrow reading supports the development of receptive vocabulary. While extensive reading also contributes to receptive vocabulary growth (Iwata, 2022), it plays a more crucial role in bridging the gap between receptive and productive vocabulary. By exposing learners to a wide range of texts and genres, extensive reading provided opportunities to see words used in diverse contexts and sentence structures. Through this wide exposure, extensive reading builds on the foundation of receptive vocabulary established by narrow reading, promoting a more versatile and eventually productive vocabulary. Therefore, by strategically combining both approaches, teachers can create conditions for multifaceted vocabulary development, facilitating the crucial transition from merely recognising words to effectively using them in communication, encompassing both receptive and productive proficiency.

In addition to vocabulary development, extensive and narrow reading contribute significantly to reading comprehension by enabling students to engage with texts at a comfortable pace. Lundahl (2019) underscores that linguistic research demonstrates a clear connection between the amount of reading and the development of reading ability, emphasising the importance of frequent exposure to text. The connection between reading comprehension and fluency is well-documented, as highlighted by Chang and Millett (2017). The following analysis of comprehension will inherently address this connection, recognising that increased fluency generally leads to improved understanding. This enhancement in fluency can be attributed to the repeated exposure to text inherent in both extensive and narrow reading, as studies have shown that the more students read, the faster their reading pace becomes (Ateek, 2021; Iwata, 2022). Furthermore, when this practice involves reading thematically cohesive texts, the cognitive load is reduced, easing the processing

and interpretation of the content (Outamgharte et al., 2024). The syllabus (2022b) also highlights the importance of reading for developing varied language use, pointing out that language varies depending on context, and that students should develop strategies for reading and communication by encountering different types of materials. Chang and Millett further observed that students who read thematically consistent materials enhance their reading comprehension because of the lessened lexical load through reading a book series. Likewise, other studies suggest that through reading book series, an opportunity arises to take advantage of the student's prior knowledge, the recurring words, and characters (Cho and Krashen, 1994; Cho et al., 2005).

To maximise these benefits and foster deeper comprehension, teachers can strategically combine extensive and narrow reading approaches. For instance, students might engage in extensive reading for pleasure and overall fluency, while also incorporating narrow reading to delve deeper into specific themes, genres, or authors, thus building upon their prior knowledge and further developing their reading comprehension. Beyond the content itself, the format in which the text is presented can influence reading comprehension, as demonstrated by Park and Lee (2021). They indicated that e-books helped in enhancing literal reading comprehension, while printed books, in combination with regular English instruction, led to deeper reading comprehension. This proves that the choice of the medium plays a vital part in reading. By combining extensive and narrow reading, their strengths could help in developing deeper reading comprehension among students.

Motivation, particularly intrinsic motivation, is crucial for both reading engagement and the effectiveness of different reading approaches. Iqbal and Komal (2017) emphasise the importance of re-establishing reading habits, citing the rise of digital entertainment such as computer games and television as a significant contributing factor. They suggest that a decline in intrinsic motivation to read may be a key underlying issue. Lundahl (2019) corroborates this concern, noting that the loss of reading habits and motivation makes it increasingly difficult for students to regain both reading skills and enjoyment. This highlights the critical role of sustained motivation in fostering long-term success and meaningful engagement with reading.

Extensive reading, characterised by its emphasis on enjoyable and stress-free reading experiences, fosters intrinsic motivation by encouraging students to engage with texts that resonate with their

interests. Studies observed that students became more engaged in reading through extensive reading's self-directed choices by allowing them to select their books (Iqbal and Komal, 2017; Assiri and Siddiqui, 2021). This approach resonates with Skolverket's (2022) goal of creating motivated classrooms where students are encouraged to participate actively in their education. In addition, Alerby and Bergmark (2023) noted the positive correlation that has been shown through studies on participation and motivation among students, further showcasing the need for students to feel included in their education to feel motivated. Lundahl (2019) further supports this connection between motivation and an inclusive classroom environment, emphasising that such environments are crucial for fostering engagement and learning.

Similarly, narrow reading, with its thematic consistency, has been shown to motivate students by improving vocabulary recall and retention. Abdollahi and Farvardin (2016) observed that the structured and focused content of narrow reading facilitated engagement, while Kang (2015) demonstrated that students preferred narrow reading due to its familiar contexts, which heightened their interest in reading. Cho and Krashen (1994) likewise insisted that the familiarity of characters and words through reading book series enhanced motivation among the readers. These findings underscore the potential benefits of integrating extensive and narrow reading approaches to re-establish reading habits and promote long-term engagement. This combined approach could foster greater reader engagement, thereby increasing motivation to read.

The interplay between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation remains a key area of discussion. Extensive and narrow reading in education is often initiated by external factors, such as academic requirements or the influence of teachers. These extrinsic motivations provide the initial push, encouraging students to engage with texts they might not otherwise explore. Over time, however, as they immerse themselves in engaging content, they may begin to experience a sense of satisfaction which can influence intrinsic motivation. This gradual shift from reading for external influence to reading for personal fulfillment reflects the development of intrinsic motivation. These insights highlight the potential of extensive and narrow reading in creating an engaging reading experience. By combining the strengths of the two approaches, teachers can thereby make reading more enjoyable for students and foster motivation.

Both extensive and narrow reading support Krashen's input hypothesis, which claims that language learning is mostly effective when learners are exposed to comprehensible input. According to Krashen (1982), language learning is at best acquired when learners encounter a language that is slightly above their current level, that is language that contains enough new vocabulary to challenge them while remaining understandable. This theory is highly relevant to the Swedish EFL classroom, where students often learn English as a second or even third language. Given the diversity of multicultural classrooms in Sweden, where students come from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds, the principle of *En likvärdig utbildning* (an equal education) presented in the curriculum (2022a) becomes central. It is important to acknowledge that students cannot all be at the same level of language proficiency. By implementing strategies that align with Krashen's theory, teachers can ensure that each learner receives comprehensible input adjusted to their specific needs. For instance, narrow reading allows teachers to focus on material that gradually builds vocabulary and understanding, while extensive reading provides opportunities to reinforce these skills in broader contexts. Together these approaches could support a balanced and inclusive educational environment where all students, regardless of their entry level, can progress effectively in their English language development.

The Swedish syllabus for English (2022b) emphasises the importance of developing a rich and varied vocabulary to expand students' receptive and productive skills. Specifically, the syllabus emphasises the need for students to develop their ability to understand spoken and written English (receptive skills) and to express themselves in speech and writing (productive skills) in various contexts. It also stresses the importance of students adapting their language to different situations, purposes, and recipients. This is where extensive and narrow reading, strategically combined, can be particularly effective methods to build vocabulary in a meaningful way. The curriculum (2022a) states that students should be given the opportunity to develop an all-round communicative ability. Extensive reading, with its focus on reading widely for pleasure, exposes learners to a broad range of vocabulary in diverse contexts, thus enhancing their receptive vocabulary - the ability to recognise and understand words when encountered in text or speech (Iqbal and Komal, 2017; Lundahl, 2019). Narrow reading, on the other hand, with its focus on thematically related texts, allows for repeated exposure to specific vocabulary and concepts, solidifying understanding and promoting retention (Khamesipour 2015; Abdollahi and Farvardin, 2016). As such, narrow reading

is especially beneficial for developing receptive vocabulary in specific domains. By offering opportunities to work actively with the material that has been read, for example through vocabulary activities, chances are increased that students will learn, remember, and use new words, thus gradually transferring them to their productive vocabulary (Kang, 2015; Outamgharte et al., 2024). For example, teachers might use a series of books (narrow reading) to build familiarity with specific vocabulary and concepts, while also providing a wide collection of other reading materials (extensive reading) to broaden exposure and cater to individual interests.

Teachers play a vital role in motivating and encouraging their students to read (Iqbal and Komal, 2017), as well as creating a positive and inclusive reading environment where students feel free to explore different literature (Lundahl, 2019), a principle that aligns with the Swedish curriculum (2022a) emphasis on fostering a supportive and engaging learning atmosphere. The curriculum further underscores the importance of students' influence and participation in their learning, which connects to allowing students to choose their material. Teachers can guide students in choosing texts that are at the right level, or slightly above, and that capture their interest. For instance, providing a classroom library with a diverse range of genres and topics (supporting extensive reading) and incorporating student-led book clubs focused on specific themes or authors (supporting narrow reading) can be effective strategies. In this context, teachers play a key role in reintroducing literature in the English classroom, an approach that aligns with Lundahl's (2019) concerns about the decline of literature in English education. By thoughtfully selecting and incorporating literary materials, including printed books, which have been shown to foster deeper comprehension (Park and Lee, 2021), teachers can help reverse the decline in reading ability. In addition, given the emphasis in the syllabus (2022b) on students encountering literature and texts in various forms, teachers should also consider a balanced approach to digital and print resources. While acknowledging the benefits of increasing digitisation, such as accessibility and variety, it is important to maintain a balance that incorporates the strengths of printed books, which are particularly effective in developing long-term reading skills and deeper comprehension (Park and Lee, 2021). Therefore, a thoughtful integration of both reading formats, tailored to specific learning objectives and individual students' needs is something to consider.

Beyond the pedagogical considerations of integrating digital and printed resources, the economic aspects of implementing such an approach, especially concerning printed books, should also be considered. Implementing extensive reading in schools may involve significant costs, particularly if one is to balance between physical books and digital resources, which students encounter more and more. The studies show that even if the initial cost of maintaining a physical as well as a digital library at hand for the students, for them to be able to choose freely, the long-term benefits of extensive reading justify the expense (Iwata, 2022). As observed by Park and Lee (2021) online libraries may be more cost-efficient and encourage more reading, they also mention the importance of maintaining a collection of printed books which adds to the overall cost. Whereas the cost of libraries is emphasised, Kang (2015) highlighted the benefit of technology that can offer opportunities for collecting and locating reading materials for narrow reading. By such, bridging the gap between the cost and reading material available through the usage of the Internet. Therefore, while the economic realities of implementing a balanced approach to reading resources are complex, the potential benefits for students reading development, as outlined in this discussion, suggest that careful consideration and strategic investment in both print and digital material in extensive and narrow reading are warranted.

Conclusion

This study aimed to highlight how extensive and narrow reading contributes to language development and what they respectively strengthen in the enhancement of vocabulary, reading comprehension, and motivation. The focus has been on how these reading methods, combined with printed books, can enhance English education in Swedish EFL classrooms. The findings indicate that an integrated approach involving both extensive and narrow reading could be the key to more effective and engaging language development.

This study demonstrates how extensive reading, through its emphasis on reading for enjoyment and a wide variety of texts, contributes to expanding students' vocabulary and strengthening overall reading comprehension. This method fosters self-directed learning, allowing students to hand-pick texts that capture their interest. In turn, this stimulates intrinsic motivation and creates a positive attitude towards language learning.

Narrow reading, on the other hand, offers a more focused reading within specific themes or genres. By repeatedly encountering similar vocabulary, students merge their knowledge while reducing the cognitive load. This not only facilitates the learning of new words but also enables a deeper reading comprehension as well as fostering motivation to read.

This study underscores the possibility of viewing extensive and narrow reading as complementary methods. While extensive reading expands students' linguistic horizons, narrow reading deepens their understanding and reinforces fundamental linguistic building blocks. Since both methods have their benefits, teachers need to find practical ways to effectively combine them in classrooms. For example, teachers could offer students a selection of books to read (extensive) and have them choose a certain theme or topic to focus on further (narrow).

Together, they can create a dynamic and multifaceted learning environment that benefits both receptive and productive language skills. A key conclusion is that both extensive and narrow reading, supported by printed books and texts, have the potential to improve students' vocabulary

and reading comprehension. This study also showcases a positive correlation between the two methods and students' motivation to read by fostering intrinsic motivation.

It is also important to acknowledge the limitations of the study conducted since it is a systematic literature review that was limited to ten articles, which cannot cover the whole field. The study was also written during a shorter amount of time. Furthermore, there was a lack of articles focused on the two methods together as well as a Swedish EFL perspective. Had more time and space for articles existed, perhaps a broader and deeper perspective could have been presented. However, this study does reveal a clear research gap. There is a lack of studies specifically investigating how extensive and narrow reading together, with a focus on printed books and texts, can be implemented in Swedish EFL classrooms. To address this gap, a follow-up classroom study based on qualitative and quantitative data testing the combined effects of extensive and narrow reading on Swedish EFL student's language development. This could involve comparing a control group with a group that uses a combined approach, measuring vocabulary, reading comprehension, and motivation over an extended period of time. Further research is needed to map the long-term effects of these methods on students' language development and to identify the most effective strategies for integrating them into teacher practices. If implemented effectively, the long-term benefits for Swedish EFL learners could include not only improved English proficiency across the linguistic skills needed to function in society, and a lifelong love of reading. Continued exploration of extensive and narrow reading within the context of Swedish English instruction is therefore crucial. Thus by increasing our understanding of how these methods can be used to further assist students' language learning, we can create more engaging and effective teaching practices.

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Appendix

Search Table

Database	Search words	Limitations	Hits	Chosen articles
ERIC	("narrow reading") AND ("EFL" OR "ESL") AND ("Vocabulary")	Peer-reviewed, 2015-2024	7	3
ERC	("narrow reading") AND ("EFL" OR "ESL") AND ("Vocabulary")	Peer-reviewed, 2015-2024	5	2
ERIC	("EFL") AND ("extensive reading") AND ("vocabulary development" OR "vocabulary knowledge" OR "grammatical knowledge") AND ("reading fluency" OR "reading comprehension")	Peer-reviewed, 2015-2024	19	4

ERIC	("extensive reading") AND ("ESL" OR "EFL") AND ("vocabulary knowledge")	Peer-reviewed, 2015-2024	14	1
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