

BLENDING EXTENSIVE AND INTENSIVE READING TO ENHANCE CRITICAL READING SKILLS IN THE EFL CONTEXT

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Article Info	Abstract
Article History Received: April 2025 Revised: June 2025 Accepted: September 2025 Published: October 2025	<i>This study explores the integration of extensive and intensive reading strategies and their impact on critical reading and critical thinking skills in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. The research addresses two primary questions: What challenges do EFL students encounter when engaging in extensive and intensive reading? and In what ways does the integration of these reading strategies influence students' critical reading skills? A qualitative research design was employed, involving 19 EFL students in the fourth semester of a private university in Jakarta. Specifically, the study applied a thematic analysis approach to systematically interpret the data, ensuring that emerging categories captured the complexity of students' experiences. Data were collected through student reflections, interviews, and classroom observations during a 14-session reading course. Key findings reveal that students face challenges in text selection, vocabulary constraints, time management, and critical analysis. However, the integration of both reading strategies enhanced students' comprehension strategies, analytical thinking, and motivation. Students demonstrated greater confidence in discussions, improved inferencing abilities, and the ability to connect ideas across texts. The results highlight important pedagogical implications, suggesting that teachers should adopt a balanced integration of extensive and intensive reading to foster critical literacy, while policymakers and curriculum designers can draw on these insights to strengthen reading components in EFL programs. These findings suggest that integrating extensive and intensive reading approaches can significantly enhance EFL students' critical reading skills, providing valuable insights for future teaching practices. The study contributes to the theoretical understanding of reading instruction in EFL settings and offers practical recommendations for integrating these strategies in classroom settings.</i>
Keywords Critical reading; Critical thinking; EFL classroom; Extensive reading; Intensive reading;	
How to cite: Ilyas, H.P., & Istaryatiningtias, I. (2025). Blending Extensive and Intensive Reading to Enhance Critical Reading Skills in The EFL Context. <i>JOLLT Journal of Languages and Language Teaching</i> , 13(4), 1859-1872. Doi: https://doi.org/10.33394/joltt.v13i4.15441	

INTRODUCTION

Reading represents a fundamental component of language instruction in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education (Ali et al., 2022; Chen & Abdullah, 2024; Yu & Wen, 2023). It serves as a means of facilitating both language acquisition and the enhancement of cognitive abilities (Ilyas et al., 2025), thereby enabling individuals to excel within academic and professional contexts (Lavrijsen, Preckel, & Verschueren, 2023). In light of the above ideas, this paper identifies two main approaches to reading: extensive reading (ER), which promotes enjoyment and fluency through exposure to various texts (Nation & Waring, 2020), and intensive reading (IR), which emphasizes deeper comprehension and analysis of shorter but more cognitively demanding texts (Brainard, 2023). The benefits of both approaches include the development of critical reading (CR) skills that enable students to

evaluate arguments, identify biases, and synthesize information from multiple sources (Ali et al., 2022). It is indisputable that CR is a pivotal component of EFL education (Castaño-Roldán & Correa, 2021; Tseng, 2024), as it endows students with the capacity to engage with diverse texts critically, thereby enhancing their comprehension of both language and content in today's rapidly evolving world (Sun, 2023).

The necessity for developing practical approaches to enhance CR skills among EFL learners is derived from the observation that traditional reading methods do not typically facilitate the desired level of critical thinking (CT). Reading plays a pivotal role in language acquisition and cognitive development (Škarić & Salhab, 2025; Sun & Xi, 2024). However, many traditional approaches prioritize memorization and superficial understanding, which fail to engage learners critically with written material (Abalkheel, 2024). This research aims to address these limitations by implementing innovative pedagogical techniques. These techniques are designed to facilitate comprehension and encourage EFL learners to engage in critical analysis of written material. By doing so, learners develop the cognitive skills that are essential for future academic and informed citizenship. The novelty of this study lies in its blended approach that combines extensive and intensive reading strategies within a single instructional framework, moving beyond the fragmented investigations of previous research. In addition, the application of a qualitative design with thematic analysis offers an in-depth perspective on learners' challenges and growth, an aspect rarely explored in the existing literature.

Although the importance of reading in EFL education is widely acknowledged, there is a noticeable absence of research investigating integrated reading approaches within these educational contexts. While extensive and intensive reading have been the focus of research in isolation, a notable gap remains in the form of a lack of qualitative research investigating the integration of these methodologies and their collective impact on student learning outcomes. Addressing this gap, the present study positions itself as an innovative contribution by examining how a blended model of ER and IR can be systematically implemented and assessed in an EFL classroom. This study aims to address this gap by posing the following qualitative inquiries: (1) What challenges do EFL students encounter when engaging in extensive and intensive reading? (2) In what ways does the integration of these reading strategies influence students' CR skills? By explicitly articulating these guiding research questions, the study provides a clear framework that directs both the analysis and discussion of findings.

Literature Review

CR describes a sophisticated cognitive process in which readers actively engage with texts by analyzing, interpreting, evaluating, and synthesizing information to construct deeper understanding and informed judgments (Olifant, 2024). In the context of EFL, CR encompasses a variety of dimensions, including the ability to recognize implicit meaning, assess authorial intent, identify bias, and distinguish between fact and opinion (Cai, Huang, & Tan, 2023). The acquisition of these skills is particularly important for EFL learners, as it enables them to make sense of diverse textual materials and supports their academic growth, intercultural competence, and intellectual autonomy. Despite the acknowledged importance of developing CR skills in EFL learners, there are notable challenges. These difficulties commonly stem from limited linguistic proficiency, which restricts learners' ability to comprehend and critically engage with complex texts (Al-Jarrah & Ismail, 2018; Weng, 2021). Moreover, cultural factors, including educational traditions that prioritize rote memorization over critical inquiry, often impede students' ability and willingness to independently question, evaluate, and interpret textual content. Furthermore, prior educational experiences with inadequate exposure to higher-order thinking tasks frequently inhibit students' readiness to adopt critical perspectives (Alotaibi, 2024; Lin, 2024), resulting in reliance on surface-level comprehension strategies rather than deeper analytical engagement.

Empirical Evidence of ER's Impact on General Reading Proficiency

A substantial body of research has examined the role of ER in improving general reading proficiency among EFL learners. Several studies have demonstrated ER's effectiveness in enhancing reading comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary acquisition. For example, Suk (2017) conducted a quasi-experimental study in a Korean university setting, comparing students who engaged in both ER and IR with those who received only IR instruction. The results revealed that students who participated in ER outperformed their peers in reading comprehension, reading rate, and vocabulary acquisition. Similarly, Boakye (2017) explored the effects of an ER component within a reading intervention program for first-year university students and found significant improvements in students' reading habits, cognitive engagement, and reading speed. Additionally, Kim (2024) examined a blended ER approach among first-year nursing students, comparing teacher-guided and self-directed learning models. Findings indicated that structured teacher-guided ER led to substantial gains in reading comprehension, fluency, and motivation, reinforcing the importance of guided ER programs. Collectively, these studies highlight ER's role in fostering reading proficiency across different academic and linguistic contexts.

Despite the consensus on ER's benefits, variations exist in its implementation and outcomes depending on learners' proficiency levels, instructional support, and engagement strategies. While Suk's (2017) study confirmed the overall efficacy of ER in improving key reading skills, Li, Majumdar, and Ogata (2024) found that ER engagement yielded different effects based on learners' proficiency levels. Their research revealed that high-proficiency students who engaged more actively in ER improved reading speed significantly, whereas low-proficiency students showed greater gains in overall English performance rather than speed. Likewise, Robb and Ewert (2024) emphasized the necessity of teacher guidance in classroom-based ER programs, noting that while ER enhances motivation and fluency, many students require structured support to sustain engagement. Wan and Razali (2023) conducted a systematic review of 32 ER studies and concluded that while ER positively influences reading proficiency, its impact on long-term motivation remains inconsistent. These findings suggest that while ER facilitates measurable reading improvements, factors such as instructional approach, learner autonomy, and engagement levels mediate its effectiveness.

Although previous studies provide compelling evidence of ER's contribution to reading proficiency, gaps remain in understanding how ER interacts with IR to develop CR skills. Most studies, including those by Boakye (2017) and Kim (2024), focus primarily on fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary gains, overlooking how ER may develop higher-order cognitive skills such as analysis, evaluation, and synthesis. Additionally, while Li, Majumdar, and Ogata (2024) examined ER's differential effects based on proficiency levels, few studies have explored how ER and IR function together to enhance students' ability to critically engage with texts.

IR in EFL Context and Its Beneficial Effects

IR has been extensively examined in the EFL context, particularly concerning its impact on reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and CT skills. Williams and Vaughn (2020) investigated the efficacy of an IR intervention for English learners (ELs) with learning disabilities (LD), concluding that despite structured interventions, significant improvements in reading comprehension remained difficult. Their study underscores the persistent difficulties in enhancing reading outcomes for this demographic, highlighting the need for prolonged and multifaceted interventions. In contrast, Martínez and Andrade (2023) reported a marked improvement in reading comprehension among EFL learners who engaged in structured IR activities, suggesting that strategic implementation of IR techniques can yield positive learning outcomes. Charry et al. (2024) extended the scope of IR research by exploring its influence on CT, demonstrating that well-structured CR tasks enhance students' analytical abilities.

Meanwhile, Shobeiry (2020) focused on IR's role in preparing Academic IELTS test takers, finding that authentic IR tasks significantly improved reading comprehension, thereby reinforcing the pedagogical importance of exposure to real-world texts in EFL instruction.

A comparison of these studies reveals notable divergences in methodology, target populations, and outcomes. Williams and Vaughn (2020) found that IR interventions had limited effects on comprehension among ELs with LD, suggesting that reading interventions alone may not sufficiently address the multifaceted challenges these learners face. Conversely, Martínez and Andrade's (2023) findings point to a direct correlation between IR activities and improved comprehension, implying that the effectiveness of IR may depend on contextual factors such as instructional design and learner characteristics. While Charry et al. (2024) emphasized IR's role in fostering CT, their study differs from Shobeiry's (2020) in its pedagogical objectives. Charry et al. (2024) focused on intellectual engagement and argumentation, whereas Shobeiry (2020) highlighted IR's potential in test-oriented reading proficiency. These discrepancies suggest that while IR is generally beneficial, its effectiveness is dependent on the specific learning goals, the nature of the reading materials, and the characteristics of the target learners.

These findings offer valuable insights into the present research, which investigates the integration of ER and IR to enhance CR skills in EFL students. While previous studies have predominantly examined IR as a stand-alone approach, this study builds upon this foundation by incorporating ER to address its limitations, particularly in fostering deeper engagement and critical analysis. The inclusion of student-selected materials in ER aligns with Shobeiry's (2020) emphasis on authentic texts, suggesting that increased learner autonomy may enhance motivation and comprehension. Additionally, by bridging the gap between comprehension-based IR strategies and the CT emphasis highlighted by Charry et al. (2024), this research contributes to a more holistic understanding of reading development in EFL contexts. This integrative approach may offer a more sustainable and impactful model for developing CR skills.

Studies on Integration and Comparison between ER and IR Approaches

The integration of ER and IR has become a focal point for researchers exploring effective approaches to enhance reading comprehension and CT in EFL contexts. Several studies have explored this hybrid approach, highlighting its benefits in improving reading skills. Haswani, Erlita, & Rika (2023) examined the use of digital-platform-based worksheets to blend ER and IR, revealing that the integration significantly enhanced students' reading comprehension, motivation, and engagement. In a similar vein, Park (2020) compared the effects of ER and IR on EFL learners' reading attitudes, finding that ER led to more positive reading attitudes compared to traditional IR approaches, with proficiency levels not affecting the outcomes. Suk's (2017) study demonstrated the effectiveness of integrating ER with IR in improving reading comprehension, reading rate, and vocabulary acquisition. Likewise, Maipoka and Soontornwipast (2021) investigated the effects of integrated intensive and extensive reading instruction (IIERI) on Thai primary school students, finding significant improvements in their reading abilities, including vocabulary knowledge and comprehension. Alsheikh et al. (2020) explored the reciprocal relationship between IR and ER among graduate students in the United Arab Emirates, noting that both approaches supported and enhanced each other, though certain instructional methods hindered the natural flow of ER. Finally, Park, Isaacs, and Woodfield (2018) compared the effects of ER and IR on vocabulary development among Korean secondary students, revealing that ER significantly improved vocabulary knowledge, especially for higher proficiency learners. These studies collectively emphasize the potential of integrating ER and IR to optimize reading development.

In comparing these studies, it is evident that while the integration of ER and IR shows positive results, there are notable differences in the methodologies and focus areas. Haswani,

Erlita, and Rika (2023) used digital platforms to facilitate integration, while Park (2020) and Suk (2017) focused on different aspects of reading, with the former emphasizing reading attitudes and the latter targeting reading comprehension, reading rate, and vocabulary development. Maipoka and Soontornwipast (2021) found that IIERI was effective even for younger students, demonstrating that the integration can benefit learners at various levels. Alsheikh et al. (2020) highlighted the reciprocal nature of ER and IR, with each approach supporting the other, while Park, Isaacs, and Woodfield (2018) focused on vocabulary development, showing ER's superior impact on vocabulary for advanced learners. Additionally, the studies varied in their participant groups, with some focused on university students (Alsheikh et al., 2020; Haswani, Erlita, & Rika, 2023) and others on secondary or primary students (Maipoka & Soontornwipast, 2021; Park, 2020), illustrating the versatility of integrated reading strategies across educational levels.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the challenges EFL students encounter when engaging in ER and IR and to examine how the integration of these reading strategies influences their CR skills. A qualitative approach was appropriate as it enables an in-depth exploration of students' experiences, perceptions, and interactions with texts (Creswell & Poth, 2025), allowing for a detailed understanding of the cognitive and affective dimensions of reading comprehension. Unlike quantitative methods that prioritize statistical generalization, qualitative research provides rich, descriptive insights into the specific difficulties faced by students and the strategies they employ to enhance their CR abilities. By analyzing students' oral and written reflections, class discussions, and textual analyses, this study captured the complexity of reading comprehension in an EFL context and the impact of blended reading strategies on CR development. The flexibility of qualitative research further facilitated an interpretive approach, enabling a deeper examination of individual learning paths, engagement levels, and metacognitive awareness.

Participants

The research was conducted at a private university in Jakarta, Indonesia, within an undergraduate EFL program. The study involved 19 fourth-semester students enrolled in a reading course, with proficiency levels ranging from pre-intermediate to pre-advanced, as determined by their prior coursework and placement assessments. The participants, comprising 13 females and 6 males aged between 21 and 23, were selected based on their enrollment in the course and willingness to participate, with ethical considerations ensuring informed consent and confidentiality. The classroom environment fostered interactive and discussion-based learning, providing an ideal setting for implementing the blended, ER, and IR activities. The variation in proficiency levels shaped classroom dynamics, as students with higher proficiency often modeled advanced comprehension and inferencing strategies, while those at lower levels highlighted the challenges of vocabulary and text complexity. This diversity allowed the study to capture a fuller spectrum of difficulties and benefits associated with the integrated approach, thereby enriching the analysis of outcomes. While the integration of these reading strategies was not part of the standard curriculum, the lecturer and students agreed to engage in the additional activities designed for the research, ensuring active participation and authentic engagement. The institutional context, characterized by a student-centered pedagogical approach, further facilitated critical discussions and reflective learning, enhancing the study's exploration of students' reading challenges and the development of their CR skills.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection was conducted using two qualitative methods: written reports and a focus group discussion. First, students submitted written reports following their oral presentations on

the extensive reading texts. These reports provided a valuable source of data, as they documented students' reflections on the texts they had chosen, their comprehension processes, and the challenges they encountered in engaging with ER. The written reports allowed for a systematic analysis of students' reading behaviors, their ability to summarize and critically engage with texts, and the extent to which ER contributed to their CR development. To guide students' responses, they were provided with open-ended prompts such as "What aspects of the text were most challenging and why?" and "How did this reading influence your way of thinking about the topic?" These prompts encouraged learners to go beyond surface-level summaries and articulate their analytical reasoning and personal interpretations. By collecting these reports, the study was able to capture individual variations in students' reading experiences and their evolving analytical skills over time.

The second data collection method involved a focus group discussion conducted at the end of the research period. This method was selected to facilitate a deeper exploration of students' collective experiences with the blended reading approach. The focus group provided an interactive platform where participants could articulate their perspectives, discuss challenges, and compare their engagement with ER and IR. To ensure consistency, the discussion was guided by a semi-structured template including questions such as "In what ways did extensive reading help you understand texts differently from intensive reading?" and "What strategies did you find most useful when dealing with difficult vocabulary or ideas?" This format allowed participants to reflect on both approaches while still leaving space for spontaneous insights. This method allowed for a more dynamic exchange of ideas, enabling the researchers to identify common patterns in students' responses, as well as individual differences in reading strategies and CT development. The focus group also helped to validate findings from the written reports by allowing students to elaborate on their reflections and clarify their insights. Furthermore, the discussion format encouraged students to critically assess their learning experiences, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of integrating ER and IR in enhancing CR skills in the EFL context.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis to examine the qualitative data collected from written reports and the focus group discussion. Thematic analysis was selected as it allows for the identification, organization, and interpretation of patterns within the data, providing a comprehensive understanding of students' reading challenges and their engagement with ER and IR. The analysis process involved multiple stages: familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, identification of key themes, and refinement of thematic categories. Examples of initial coding categories included "text selection strategies," "vocabulary barriers," "time management difficulties," and "approaches to summarization," which were later refined into broader themes such as "practical challenges in reading," "cognitive engagement with texts," and "growth in critical reading skills."

First, all written reports were reviewed and coded to extract relevant patterns related to students' reading experiences, comprehension difficulties, and critical engagement with texts. Recurring themes, such as challenges in summarization, difficulties in grasping authorial intent, and the role of prior knowledge in interpreting texts, were systematically categorized. For instance, one cluster of codes relating to "identifying authorial stance" and "detecting bias" was grouped under the theme of "developing evaluative reading," while codes such as "sharing insights with peers" and "learning from discussion" were organized under the theme of "collaborative meaning-making." The focus group discussion transcript was also transcribed and analyzed to triangulate findings and ensure consistency and credibility in the data interpretation.

Thematic analysis further facilitated an in-depth exploration of how ER and IR influenced students' CR skills. Specifically, codes related to textual analysis, argument evaluation, and

inferencing skills were examined to determine the extent of students' critical engagement with different texts. The iterative nature of thematic analysis allowed for continuous refinement of emerging patterns, ensuring that findings accurately reflected students' learning experiences. Additionally, cross-validation between data sources strengthened the reliability of the study, as the findings from written reports were corroborated by students' oral reflections in the focus group discussion. Through this analytical approach, the study could provide rich qualitative insights into the impact of blending ER and IR on students' CR skills. The use of thematic analysis ensured that key findings were systematically derived, contributing to a deeper understanding of pedagogical strategies that enhance CR development in EFL contexts.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to rigorous ethical standards to ensure the protection of participants' rights, privacy, and confidentiality. Before the research implementation, informed consent was obtained from both the lecturer and students, who voluntarily agreed to participate under the condition that their personal identities and institutional affiliations would remain anonymous. Participants were fully briefed on the study's objectives, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any stage without repercussions. Confidentiality was strictly maintained by anonymizing all collected data, ensuring that no identifiable information was disclosed in research reports or publications. Ethical compliance was also observed in the selection of reading materials, ensuring that all texts used for ER and IR adhered to academic integrity standards and did not expose participants to content that could be culturally or emotionally sensitive.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Challenges EFL students encountered when engaging in ER and IR

This study's findings reveal several challenges EFL students face when engaging in extensive and intensive reading. These challenges encompass difficulties in text selection, limited prior exposure to reading strategies, vocabulary constraints, struggles with critical analysis, time management issues, and reading fatigue and motivation. Additionally, many students encountered difficulties answering higher-order questions, which required more profound comprehension and CT. The following sections discuss these challenges in detail, shedding light on the factors that hinder students' engagement with these reading strategies and their ability to develop CR skills. To strengthen the validity of these findings, representative quotes from participants are included to illustrate how these challenges were experienced in practice.

One of the primary challenges identified was difficulties in text selection for ER. While students were free to choose their texts, many struggled with selecting appropriate materials. Some chose texts that were too complex, leading to frustration and disengagement, while others selected overly simple materials that did not provide sufficient cognitive stimulation. As one student remarked, *"I picked a novel that was too difficult, and I could not finish it, so I felt demotivated."* Another participant reflected, *"Sometimes I chose an easy story because it was comfortable, but later I realized I did not learn much from it."* This challenge highlights the importance of providing students with guidance on how to choose texts that are not only interesting but also appropriately challenging. A balance between readability and cognitive complexity is crucial to ensure that students remain engaged and motivated while developing their reading skills.

Another significant challenge was limited prior exposure to the practices involved in ER, such as summarizing and reflecting on their reading experiences. Many students were unfamiliar with the strategies needed to engage deeply with texts. As a result, their engagement remained superficial, focusing only on surface-level elements like plot or main ideas rather than on critical analysis. For example, one participant admitted, *"I only wrote about the story, not my opinion, because I never learned how to reflect on reading before."* Without previous

training in CR strategies, students struggled to connect ideas, reflect on underlying themes, or engage with texts on a deeper level. This issue underscores the necessity of scaffolding in ER, where students are gradually introduced to more complex reading and reflective strategies that allow them to engage more critically with texts.

The challenge of vocabulary constraints emerged prominently in IR, particularly in academic and argumentative texts. Many students encountered difficulties understanding sophisticated vocabulary and complex sentence structures, which significantly hindered their comprehension. This issue was particularly pronounced when students were tasked with analyzing texts that involved specialized language or terminology. One student shared, *“When I saw many new words in the article, I stopped reading because I felt I could not follow the meaning.”* The struggle to understand key terms and concepts prevented students from fully grasping the complexities of the author’s arguments. This challenge suggests that students may benefit from more targeted vocabulary support, such as glossaries, pre-reading activities, or vocabulary-building exercises that focus on academic and critical terminology relevant to IR.

Students also faced challenges related to critical analysis in IR. Engaging in higher-order thinking, such as evaluating the author’s perspective, identifying underlying assumptions, and making inferences, proved difficult for many students. This was particularly true when students were tasked with assessing the strength of an argument or recognizing implicit biases within texts. As one participant explained, *“I can understand what the writer says, but it is hard for me to judge if the argument is strong or weak.”* These difficulties in CT highlight the need for more explicit instruction and practice in analytical reading skills. Students need to be equipped with strategies to break down complex texts, recognize rhetorical strategies, and assess the validity of arguments. Without these skills, students may struggle to move beyond basic comprehension toward more advanced critical engagement with texts.

In addition to these academic challenges, time management issues and reading fatigue were common concerns for students. Balancing the demands of both ER and IR posed significant challenges. Students reported feeling burdened by the dual workload, which often led to rushed readings or incomplete analyses. This pressure was heightened by the cognitive demands of IR, which required sustained effort to analyze texts, answer inferential questions, and evaluate arguments. The exhaustion associated with IR also led to decreased motivation, particularly when students struggled to maintain focus during analytical tasks. One student commented, *“After reading intensively for one hour, I felt tired and did not want to continue with the extensive reading task.”* This issue underscores the importance of providing students with strategies to manage their reading tasks effectively, which ensures that both ER and IR activities remain productive and engaging.

Comparing these findings to the results of relevant studies, it is evident that some of these challenges are widely recognized in the literature. Haswani, Erlita, and Rika (2023) identified that students struggle with balancing extensive and intensive reading, similar to the time management issues observed in this study. Their research also found that students faced difficulties in selecting appropriate materials, which echoes the challenges related to text selection in this study. Similarly, Park (2020) noted that students' lack of engagement with critical analysis was a common issue, aligning with the difficulties many participants faced in analyzing complex arguments in IR. Moreover, Maipoka and Soontornwipast (2021) found that students struggled with vocabulary acquisition, which mirrors the vocabulary constraints reported in this study. The lack of familiarity with reflective and CR practices, highlighted by the limited prior exposure in this study, is also consistent with the challenges noted in other studies (Alsheikh et al., 2020; Suk, 2017), where students found it difficult to engage with readings at a deeper level due to limited prior experience with ER strategies.

In conclusion, the challenges identified in this study highlight several key areas where students face difficulties when engaging in both ER and IR. These include issues with text

selection, lack of prior exposure to reading strategies, vocabulary constraints, struggles with critical analysis, time management, and reading fatigue. These challenges are consistent with those found in previous research, demonstrating that students' difficulties with reading strategies are not isolated to this particular context. More importantly, by situating these findings within the broader research issues, the study shows that integrating ER and IR addresses known pedagogical gaps, particularly the need for balanced exposure to fluency-oriented and analysis-oriented reading practices. This blended approach offers a pathway for designing interventions that not only develop comprehension but also systematically strengthen CR skills. Addressing these challenges will require targeted interventions, including guidance in text selection, vocabulary support, and explicit instruction in CR and time management strategies. By addressing these issues, educators can better support students in developing their CR skills and improving their overall reading proficiency.

In what ways does the integration of these reading strategies influence students' CR skills?

The integration of ER and IR strategies significantly influenced students' CR skills, resulting in improvements across several areas. The findings of this study highlight that the combination of these two reading strategies enhanced students' comprehension, analytical thinking, engagement, and motivation. Students became more adept at understanding and critically engaging with texts, demonstrating greater confidence in discussions and improved inferencing and evaluative skills. The following sections discuss these findings in detail, exploring how the integration of ER and IR contributed to the development of students' CR abilities. Where appropriate, participant voices are included to illustrate how these skills were experienced and expressed in practice.

One of the most notable outcomes was the development of enhanced comprehension strategies. The combination of ER and IR allowed students to employ a broader range of strategies to process texts. ER helped students quickly identify main ideas and understand the general structure of texts, while IR honed their ability to engage with the finer details, such as evaluating evidence, identifying arguments, and analyzing language use. The synergy between the two approaches enabled students to transition more easily between high-level overviews and in-depth analysis, helping them develop more strategic and efficient reading practices. As one student reflected, *"When I read extensively, I understood the story quickly, but intensive reading helped me see how the writer tried to convince readers."* This dual approach fostered flexibility in how students approached reading, thus empowering them to process a wide variety of texts more effectively.

Another significant influence of the integrated approach was the increased engagement and motivation of students. ER allowed students to select texts based on personal interests, which fueled intrinsic motivation and fostered a deeper engagement with the material. Students who felt more connected to their reading were more motivated to apply themselves to the more demanding analytical tasks required in IR. This increased engagement in ER positively impacted their approach to IR, making them more confident and curious about the texts they were asked to critically analyze. One participant shared, *"I liked reading novels of my choice, and it made me more willing to do the harder analysis tasks later."*

Furthermore, the integration promoted the development of analytical thinking. IR provided students with structured opportunities to practice critical analysis, such as identifying the main arguments, evaluating the credibility of sources, and assessing the quality of evidence. By engaging with these tasks, students became more skilled at applying these analytical techniques to other texts beyond the classroom. This transfer of analytical skills was evident in their ability to critically evaluate texts from various genres, demonstrating how the integration of ER and IR can help students refine their CR skills in diverse contexts. As one student explained, *"Before, I only accepted the text, but now I can see if the argument is weak or*

strong.” This development of analytical thinking also empowered students to engage with more complex texts, deepening their understanding and enhancing their CT capabilities.

The improved ability to make textual connections was another key benefit of integrating ER and IR. Students became more adept at linking ideas across different texts, drawing connections between the themes they encountered in their ER selections and the critical discussions in IR. This ability to synthesize information from various sources allowed students to build a more interconnected understanding of texts, facilitating a deeper level of critical engagement. The integration of the two reading approaches fostered a more holistic approach to reading, where students could move between different texts, recognize recurring themes, and apply insights gained from one text to inform their understanding of others.

Another important outcome was the greater confidence in discussion. By engaging with both types of reading, students developed a broader knowledge base from their ER and a more refined set of analytical tools from their IR. This dual exposure allowed them to participate more confidently in class discussions, expressing their opinions with clearer reasoning and supporting evidence from the texts. For example, one participant noted, *“I feel more confident to share in class because I can explain my ideas with examples from the texts I read.”* The integration of both reading strategies provided students with a stronger foundation for articulating their thoughts, which enabled them to engage more effectively in critical dialogue with peers and instructors. This enhanced confidence was a direct result of their improved ability to analyze and evaluate texts, which in turn strengthened their overall CR skills.

Finally, the integration of ER and IR led to improved inferencing and evaluation skills. IR tasks, such as answering inferential questions and evaluating the credibility of arguments, trained students to recognize implicit meanings and assess rhetorical strategies more effectively. These skills were particularly valuable when students were asked to engage with complex texts that required them to make inferences and critically evaluate the author's argumentation. The ability to infer meaning and assess textual credibility is a core component of CR, and the integration of both reading strategies significantly contributed to the development of these abilities. As one student observed, *“I learned how to see the hidden meaning and not only what is written on the surface.”* This enhanced capacity for inferencing and evaluation further strengthened students' overall CR skills.

Comparing these findings with the results of the abovementioned reviewed studies, several parallels emerge. For example, Haswani, Erlita, and Rika (2023) found that integrating ER and IR led to improvements in reading comprehension and student motivation, similar to the results in this study. Additionally, Park (2020) highlighted how ER positively influenced students' attitudes toward reading, aligning with the increased engagement and confidence observed in this study. Maipoka and Soontornwipast (2021) found that integrating both reading strategies enhanced students' reading abilities, which mirrors the improved comprehension and analytical skills reported here. Similarly, Alsheikh et al. (2020) noted that the interplay between ER and IR improved students' analytical thinking and reading fluency, echoing the findings related to enhanced critical analysis and textual connections in this study. Suk (2017) and Park, Isaacs, and Woodfield (2018) also emphasized the impact of the integration on vocabulary acquisition and analytical skills, supporting the argument that the integration of ER and IR fosters a more holistic approach to developing CR skills.

To conclude, the integration of ER and IR has a profound impact on students' CR skills. By combining the strengths of both approaches, students develop enhanced comprehension strategies, increased engagement and motivation, improved analytical thinking, the ability to make textual connections, greater confidence in discussion, and stronger inferencing and evaluation skills. These outcomes directly address the broader research issues identified earlier, particularly the need for pedagogical approaches that move beyond rote memorization toward deeper critical engagement with texts. The blended integration of ER and IR, therefore,

represents a response to known gaps in EFL pedagogy by equipping learners with both fluency-oriented and analysis-oriented competencies. These findings underscore the value of integrating these reading strategies to foster a more comprehensive and effective approach to CR. As students become more adept at engaging with texts on multiple levels, they are better equipped to manage the complex demands of academic reading and analysis, thus enhancing their overall reading proficiency.

Implications for Teaching Reading: Enhancing CR and CT in EFL Contexts

The findings of this study have significant implications for the teaching of reading in EFL contexts, particularly in enhancing CR and CT skills. The integration of both ER and IR approaches offers a comprehensive framework for fostering students' ability to engage with texts on both superficial and deeper levels. ER, which exposes students to a wide range of texts, coupled with IR, which demands detailed analysis, helps students develop a more strategic and analytical approach to reading. This dual method not only improves comprehension skills but also enhances the ability to critically evaluate, infer meaning, and assess the credibility of arguments. In addition, fostering intrinsic motivation and deeper engagement with reading materials is crucial for developing CT. As ER allows students to select texts based on their interests, it increases motivation, encouraging them to engage more confidently in IR tasks. This positive feedback cycle, where increased motivation from self-chosen texts leads to greater participation in critical analysis, highlights the importance of teacher guidance in selecting engaging and appropriately challenging materials. Thus, by combining both reading strategies, educators can create an environment that nurtures both CR and analytical thinking, essential for success in academic and professional contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study has provided valuable insights into the integration of extensive and intensive reading strategies and their impact on CR and CT skills in EFL contexts. The major findings highlight that the combination of these two approaches significantly enhanced students' comprehension strategies, analytical thinking, engagement, and confidence in discussion. Students became more proficient at linking ideas across texts, making inferences, and critically evaluating arguments, demonstrating a more interconnected and sophisticated understanding of texts. The integration of both reading strategies also fostered greater motivation and engagement, especially when students were able to select texts that matched their interests. Based on these findings, it is recommended that EFL instructors incorporate both extensive and intensive reading into their curricula, providing guidance on text selection to balance readability with cognitive complexity and encouraging students to apply analytical strategies from IR to their ER materials. Theoretically, this study contributes to the understanding of how combining ER and IR can enhance CR and CT skills, providing a framework for more effective reading instruction in EFL contexts. It emphasizes the value of integrating different reading approaches to promote both comprehensive understanding and deeper, more critical engagement with texts.

However, the study also has its limitations, including the small sample size and the short duration of the intervention. Future research should expand the scope of this study by exploring the long-term effects of integrating ER and IR across different proficiency levels and cultural contexts. Additionally, investigating the challenges students face in managing both reading strategies and the specific impact of this integration on various aspects of language learning, such as vocabulary acquisition and writing skills, would provide further insights into the benefits and limitations of this approach. Further studies could also examine how digital platforms and multimodal texts might support or hinder the integration of ER and IR in contemporary classrooms. Comparative research across institutions and educational systems would be particularly valuable for determining the transferability of findings to broader EFL

contexts. Moreover, longitudinal designs that follow students over several semesters could shed light on the sustained impact of blended reading strategies on critical literacy development.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors wish to extend their profound gratitude to Uhamka, as well as to all student participants who demonstrated remarkable enthusiasm and dedication in contributing to the research endeavor.

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