Extensive Reading in Foreign Language Learning Contexts: Issues and Implications

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Abstract

Extensive reading (ER) as an approach to teaching reading has been shown to produce favorable effects and is highly recommended in first language (L1) and second language (L2) classrooms. Over the past decade, findings from research have provided further evidence of the benefits of ER for learners in foreign language learning contexts. An ER approach, if implemented under appropriate situations over some period of time, has been seen to contribute to L2 learners’ vocabulary knowledge, improve reading comprehension skills, make reading an enjoyable experience, and promote learners’ confidence and motivation in reading. Given the merits of ER, this paper argues that an ER approach can and should be incorporated into the foreign language curriculum. Challenges facing the implementation of ER in L2 reading classrooms are also addressed in this paper.

Key words: extensive reading, first language, second language, vocabulary knowledge, reading comprehension skills, foreign language curriculum

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I. Introduction

It has been widely recognized that ER benefits L1 and L2 learners in many ways. A review of earlier ER research has shown that ER has resulted in gains in the following areas for language learners’ reading achievement, attitudes and motivation, literacy skills, conceptual-knowledge growth, and reasoning ability (Grabe, 2009); comprehension skills, automaticity, background knowledge, vocabulary and grammar knowledge, production skills, and motivation (Hedgcock & Ferris, 2009). In addition to its many and various cognitive and affective benefits for language learners, ER has been considered an important way to provide learners with readily available comprehensible input and numerous meeting with previously learned language, especially in input-poor foreign language learning environments (Maley, 2008). More importantly, ER has been seen to “provide the quantity and exposure to the patterns of language that give native-speaking students such a head start” for second or foreign language learners (Hedgcock & Ferris, 2009, p.214). In consequence, ER has been highly recommended to be used as an approach to teaching reading and to instilling a love for reading in language learners. As Day and Bamford (2002) stated, “extensive reading, apart from its impact on language and reading ability, can be a key to unlocking the all-important taste for foreign language reading among students” (p.136).

As proponents of ER, Day and Bamford (2002) expanded on the ten principles for teaching foreign language reading originally put forward by Williams (1986) and proposed their own version of the top ten principles for teaching ER:

1. The reading material is easy.
2. A variety of reading material on a wide range of topics must be available.
3. Learners choose what they want to read.
4. Learners read as much as possible.
5. The purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information and general understanding.
6. Reading is its own reward.
7. Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower.
8. Reading is individual and silent.
9. Teachers orient and guide their students.
10. The teacher is a role model of a reader. (pp. 137-139)

Day and Bamford (2002) expect that their ten principles “will give teachers food for thought and reflection as they consider their beliefs about how best to help their students become proficient foreign-language readers” (p.140). A review of ER studies over the past decade has shown that a large number of researchers examining the effectiveness of an ER approach in foreign language learning settings generally use guidelines such as Day and Bamford’s ten principles in their research design, even though there are some individual variations.

This paper aims to review some of the recent studies in foreign language learning settings and give a general picture of the latest findings on the following: How ER contributes to build learners’ vocabulary knowledge, whether ER improves learners’ reading speeds and comprehension skills, if ER makes reading fun, and how ER associates with attitude changes toward reading. Results from the review will form the basis of an argument for the inclusion of ER in the foreign language reading curriculum.

i. ER and Vocabulary Knowledge

It has long been argued that much of our vocabulary is acquired through exposure to
comprehensible input, and ER provides the most readily available input source (Huckin & Coady, 1999; Krashen, 1993). Earlier research has suggested that new words can be learned incidentally from ER, but the number of words being learned is small (Hayashi, 1999; Horst, Cobb, & Meara, 1998; Mason & Krashen, 1997). Recent studies, however, have produced quite mixed results. While some studies suggest significant gains in vocabulary growth, most of them yield evidence that seems congruent with earlier findings.

Leung (2002), in her diary study, explored the influence of her self-study of Japanese over a period of twenty weeks. Leung’s research questions included whether ER could improve her vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension. To answer this, 150 words were selected from Japanese for Busy People. These words were considered useful for the most common daily situations. Following that, a random choice of 50 words was administered for the pretest and posttest. Each word was given a score on a 0-4 scale, which was taken from Paribakht and Wesche (1997). Results of the tests showed that there was an improvement in the subject’s vocabulary knowledge by 23.5% in one month. Leung commented that “the largest improvement was manifested in her [Leung’s] ability to identify words and use them to construct more semantically and grammatically correct sentences in the second test (from 10% on the first test to 16% on the second test)” (p.70).

Waring and Takaki (2003) conducted a study at a university in western Japan in which 15 Japanese learners were asked to read the graded reader – A Little Princess. To examine the rate at which vocabulary was learned from this reading, 25 target words of differing frequencies of occurrence were selected. These target words were changed into substitute words that looked like possible English words to ensure the words were not known to the participants and would not be encountered later in other ways. Tests containing word-form recognition, prompted meaning recognition and unprompted recognition were given immediately after reading, one week later, and three months later. Results showed that incidental word learning did occur in this way, but not significantly. The study also found that words which appeared more frequently in the reading were more likely to be learned and remembered.

Brown, Waring, and Donkaewbua (2008), replicating the study by Waring and Takaki (2003), examined the rate at which English vocabulary was learned from reading, reading-while-listening, and listening to stories by 35 Japanese students of English literature. Three graded readers The Elephant Man, One-Way Ticket, and The Witches of Pendle, were selected. All three graded readers were thought to be within the subjects’ reading ability. As in the study of Waring and Takaki (2003), a total of 84 target words representing common concepts were substituted for other words (e.g., mird for happy). The results showed that in the reading-only mode new words could be learned incidentally, but the percentage of learning through reading was at a low of 15%. The researchers also found that the more frequently a vocabulary item was encountered, the more likely it would be learned and retained.

Kweon and Kim (2008) reported on a study which investigated the number of vocabulary words that could be acquired incidentally from ER of three authentic teen novels. Twelve Korean learners of English taking an intermediate English reading course were tested on their knowledge before reading (pretest), immediately after reading (posttest 1), and one month later (posttest 2). A total of 367 words were tested, using Wesche and Paribakht’s (1996) vocabulary knowledge scale (VKS) to determine vocabulary gains. Results of the tests showed that
there was significant difference in vocabulary gains between the pretest and posttest 1, but no significant difference was found in posttest 1 and posttest 2, indicating that vocabulary words could be acquired incidentally through ER and most words could be retained after one month. However, since the learners were pretested on the vocabulary words from the novels and told to read for general understanding without focusing on learning unknown words, it maximized the possibility that the learners paid attention to the unknown words and studied them deliberately.

In his 2010 study, Poulshock examined whether learners learned vocabulary from reading the liberal arts and sciences (LAS) stories extensively. Learners who read traditional graded readers in combination with short graded stories in the liberal arts and sciences (LAS) were pretested and posttested on a total of 50 words from the stories to check their vocabulary learning after one semester. Test results indicated that students made considerable improvement on the posttest, with 76% of their answers correct on the posttest, compared to 60% on the pretest. Poulshock noted that vocabulary learning appeared to be an additional result of the ER process. However, just as the study conducted by Kweon and Kim (2008), the improvement on vocabulary knowledge might not be a result of incidental learning since the students were told they were going to be tested on the words from the LAS stories.

Pellicer-Sanchez and Schmitt (2010) conducted a study with 20 advanced Spanish learners of English as a foreign language who were asked to read the unmodified authentic novel Things Fall Apart for pleasure with no need to focus on unfamiliar vocabulary. Thirty-four African words in the novel were chosen as target words to measure incidental vocabulary gains. Tests included spelling recognition, word class recall, meaning recall, and meaning recognition. Results showed that measurable progress was observed on all word knowledge aspects (9.39 out of the 34 target words) with the largest gains on meaning recognition (43%). The study suggests that given enough exposures to the target words, learners may be able to improve on meaning recognition and meaning recall. However, as shown in the studies conducted by Waring and Takaki (2003) and Brown, Waring, and Donkaewbua (2008), in which substitute words instead of real words were used to measure vocabulary gains, there was no way to know whether learners acquired these African words or other unknown English words in similar or different ways.

The research findings reviewed above show the challenges researchers face when trying to measure incidental vocabulary learning through ER. Although different degrees of vocabulary learning are reported in these studies, it is not unexpected that most of the studies do not suggest considerable new vocabulary gains from ER. This could be due to the fact that studies undertaken to explore the effect of an ER approach on vocabulary development normally span over a period of one or two semesters. This time period may not be long enough to show the real effect of incidental vocabulary exposure on vocabulary knowledge. Also, most of the studies generally follow Day and Bamford’s (2002) principles for teaching ER in the research design. These general principles include using well-chosen reading texts appropriate for learners’ reading competence and asking learners to read for pleasure, information, and general understanding rather than for deliberate vocabulary learning. This could mean a large percentage of the running words in the reading texts may be already known by the learners, making it possible for learners to read the texts enjoyably without paying much attention to the
unknown words. Although gains of incidental vocabulary learning from ER may not be impressive in these studies, it cannot be denied that an ER approach has its benefits. ER provides learners with opportunities to be exposed to a large amount of language input, to encounter previously learned vocabulary items, and to extend and consolidate previous vocabulary knowledge. All of these are considered essential for language learning to occur. As Hedgcock and Ferris (2009) noted, “extensive reading naturally exposes readers to naturally-occurring phrasal and clausal patterns, repeated and alternate uses of lexical items and their spellings, and a range of other graphological features such as paragraphing, punctuation, and capitalization conventions (p.214). Still, further research is required to demonstrate how previous vocabulary and other aspects of linguistic knowledge can be extended and consolidated through ER.

ii. Reading Speed vs. Reading Comprehension

It is widely accepted that good readers read a lot, and that is why they comprehend better. On the contrary, weak readers read little, and this makes them poor comprehenders. This concept was illustrated by Nuttall (2005) in her description of the vicious circle of the weak reader and the virtuous circle of the good reader (p.127). Nuttal explains the virtuous circle of the good reader shows that good readers tend to read more, and this leads them to better understand and enjoy reading. When readers enjoy reading, they will in turn read faster. If the theory of the virtuous circle holds true, we would expect that an ER approach, which usually requires learners to read often and widely, will naturally improve learners’ reading speed and comprehension skills. A number of studies in the past decade have been conducted that verify this supposition.

Bell (2001) led an experiment to determine whether ER could enhance learners’ reading speed and reading comprehension in the Yemen Arab Republic. The experiment involved 26 elementary-level learners who were divided into an experimental group and a control group. While the subjects in the experimental group extensively read class readers and graded readers from the library for two semesters, the control group received an intensive reading course that focused on a close analysis of grammar and rhetoric. Results from pretests and posttests showed significant differences between the reading speed and reading comprehension of the two groups; learners in the extensive group achieved significantly higher scores on the reading speed and reading comprehension tests. Bell suggested that an ER program may lead to considerable improvement in language learners’ reading speed. On the contrary, exercises used in the intensive reading lessons such as referential questions, re-ordering sentences, and gap-fills may slow down the development of learners’ reading speed. As for reading comprehension, Bell suggested that the ER program may be much more successful than the intensive-reading course in developing learners’ reading comprehension.

Leung (2002) conducted a diary study to examine the impact of ER on her self-study of Japanese over a period of 20 weeks. Data from her journal entries showed that there was slow but regular progress in her reading comprehension ability. As Leung commented,

Improvement in reading comprehension is a gradual process; it does not happen overnight. While the instructions Wendy [Leung] received from the textbooks and her tutor gave her the basic foundation to improve her comprehension, reading extensively gave her the opportunity to practice and expand her
reading comprehension skills. (p.73)

Leung concluded that “the key element in the success of extensive reading is having access to a large quantity of reading materials geared to an individual’s level of proficiency and interest … although the instructions … contributed to the improvement of her vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension, reading extensively also played an important role in her learning process” (p.78).

Hitosugi and Day (2004) measured the impact of including an ER program as a part of a regular Japanese course at the University of Hawaii. By asking 14 learners to read Japanese children’s literature extensively (an average of 32 books per student) as homework and in-class assignments over a period of ten weeks, Hitosugi and Day found that learners in the ER program performed better on the traditional reading comprehension activity than those in the regular class. Even though Hitosugi and Day acknowledged that a ten-week session may not be long enough to show any noticeable gains in learners’ reading ability, the outcome of the study was up to then encouraging; the learners in the ER program did read a large number of books and did well on the three-part reading test.

Iwahori (2008) examined whether an ER program helped English as a foreign language (EFL) learners become more fluent readers. The study involved 33 public high-school students in Japan. Students were assigned 28 graded readers and some comic books as homework to read over seven weeks. Pretests and posttests on reading rate (one-minute reading probe) and general language proficiency (a 100-item cloze test) were administered to the participants before and after the ER program. The results showed significant difference in participants’ reading rates on the pretest and posttest. The reading rates were shown to increase by around 30 percent after the ER treatment period. The difference in participants’ cloze test performance was also significant on the pretest and the posttest, indicating that the participants’ general language proficiency improved after the 7-week ER program. However, Iwahori commented that since there was no control group, it was impossible to determine the real effect of the ER program on reading fluency. Also, by using the cloze test as a way to measure general English proficiency, there was no way to tell what specific language skills (e.g., vocabulary, grammar, or text structure) the participants actually gained from the ER program.

Nakanishi and Ueda (2011) investigated whether ER improved their learners’ reading comprehension as well as the effectiveness of combining ER activities with shadowing, or “task of listening in which the learner tracks the target speech and repeats it immediately as exactly as possible without looking at a text” (p.4). Three reading comprehension tests, including one pretest and two posttests were administered to four groups (two experimental groups and two control groups) before the treatment, after the first semester, and after the one-year treatment. The test results showed that although there was no indication that learners in the ER group and the ER plus shadowing group performed significantly better than those in the control groups on the posttests, posttests scores of the ER group and ER plus shadowing group did show substantial improvement. Nakanishi and Ueda concluded that ER appeared to improve students’ reading comprehension as effectively as other conventional teaching techniques.

The most recent large-scale ER study was reported by Robb and Kano (2013), who examined the effectiveness of an ER program, the MoodleReader program, conducted outside the classroom in a university in Japan. A pre/posttest
comparison of reading and listening performances was made between two groups of students: those who enrolled in 2008 and were not given outside reading assignments and those who enrolled in 2009 and were required to do extra reading using the Moodle course management system. The results indicated that students from the 2009 cohort who participated in the ER program performed much better on the reading test than those from the 2008 cohort who were not required to do extra reading outside the classroom. Robb and Kano concluded that ER done outside the classroom was shown to benefit students’ reading ability and that an ER program can be successfully implemented if the problem of final reading assessment and book circulation can be dealt with.

There is good evidence for the influence of ER on reading speeds and reading comprehension. Learners who are engaged in reading materials within their vocabulary level are able to read a large number of books over an extended period of time. There are also gains in the learners’ reading speeds after the ER treatment. These findings seem to be consonant with Day and Bamford’s observation that “when learners are reading material that is well within their linguistic ability, for personal interest, and for general rather than academic purposes, it is an incentive to reading fluency” (Day & Bamford, 2002, p.138). The findings also fit into Nuttall’s (2005) virtuous circle of the good reader: if one enjoys reading, then he or she will read faster. Learners who are treated in the ER program are also shown to perform better in standardized comprehension tests (e.g., cloze tests or multiple choice questions), an indication of improvement in their general reading proficiency. However, it is still unknown how reading a large volume of graded readers or authentic texts in or outside the classroom can contribute to the improvement of the learners’ general reading proficiency as measured by scores on standardized comprehension tests. As Hedgcock and Ferris (2009) stated, “reading comprehension is a complex construct … It goes far beyond the ability to state the main idea of a text in one sentence, answer questions about details, define vocabulary, accurately read the text aloud, and so forth” (p.210). There is still a lot to be learned about how an ER approach correlates to learners’ general reading capabilities.

iii. ER as an Enjoyable Reading Experience

Day and Bamford (2002) argued in their article, Top Ten Principles for Teaching Extensive Reading, that unlike usual classroom practice, ER as an approach to teaching reading normally involves learners choosing whatever they want to read from various reading material on a variety of topics. The reading material must be “within their [beginning readers’] reading comfort zone” (p.137). ER also encourages learners to read for pleasure, information, and general understanding rather than for one hundred percent comprehension or gaining knowledge. This means that personal reading experience will have to take precedence over other reading purposes. Furthermore, ER suggests that learners are able to read at their own pace and that there will not be any test after reading. Given the conditions under which ER is commonly carried out, it is predictable to assume that a successful ER program will make reading an enjoyable experience for language learners and eventually lead to more reading. A number of studies have been reported to investigate what language learners actually experienced while they were engaged in ER tasks.

Nishino (2007) conducted a longitudinal case study over a period of 2.5 years, looking at the reading experiences of two motivated Japanese middle-school students. Following the principles for teaching ER proposed by Day and Bamford
(2002), Nishino allowed her subjects to choose books from graded readers and books for native speakers. The subjects were allowed to stop reading if the books were of no interest to them. They were also told not to use a dictionary and to read for pleasure, although they could consult the glossary or the researcher if necessary. Through interviews and observations, Nishino found that her subjects enjoyed reading graded readers because most of the books they read were interesting to them. Nishino also found that as her subjects read more, the time they spent on reading increased and that while they were reading *Harry Potter IV*, a book written for native speakers, they were deeply engrossed in the story.

Poulshock (2010), who explored how first and second year students at a Tokyo university perceived their experiences while reading traditional graded readers in combination with non-fiction graded texts (5 levels) in the liberal arts and sciences (LAS), found that the 34 learners involved in the ER program found joy in doing extensive graded listening and reading in LAS over the course of two semesters. The learners also perceived that they could learn from reading LAS texts:

... learners indicated that LAS stories were a bit more interesting and enjoyable than the graded readers ... learners felt that this interest and enjoyment also gave them a little more motivation for reading LAS stories than the traditional graded readers. Though this is preliminary data, these learners appear to agree that both traditional graded readers and LAS stories are interesting and motivating, and that the LAS stories have a slight edge in this regard. (p.310)

Poulshock emphasized the way which language learners perceived their learning exerted far-reaching consequence because their perceptions would have a wide influence on their intrinsic motivation.

At a private high school in Osaka, Japan, Judge (2011) worked with nine independent and highly motivated students enrolled in the school’s ER program. By analyzing interviews, questionnaires, and email correspondence, Judge found that these students perceived a “flow experience”, or a feeling of joy while engaging in free reading (see Csikszentmihalyi, 1990 for more on Flow Theory). He commented that “extensive reading provided these nine individual learners with the autonomy, the access to interesting materials, and the positive reinforcement needed for continued L2 acquisition. ER supported their affective bond with reading in general” (p.178). Judge concluded that “extensive reading can and should be a part of any L2 curriculum, for it empowers individual learners to find for themselves a path toward second language acquisition while furthering a love of reading that will benefit them years into their futures” (p.179).

Kirchhoff (2013) has reported similar flow experience that language learners have gone through while doing ER. Adopting the Flow Theory proposed by Csikszentmihalyi, Kirchhoff explored the questions of whether her learners enjoyed a “flow experience” while reading graded fiction and non-fiction books outside the classroom and whether those who enjoyed a flow experience would develop a tendency to read more. Working with 74 Japanese learners of English in an ER class at a junior college in Japan for 15 weeks, Kirchhoff found that the learners in her study appeared to perceive the flow experience repeatedly while doing ER, but the enjoyable experience did not seem to be able to prompt them to spend more time on reading outside the classroom. Kirchhoff concluded that “the flow experience has been suggested to contribute to motivation in reading and may assist in reading...
engagement” (p.208). She also determined that keeping learners motivated over long periods of time was not simple and many different methods were needed to stimulate reader motivation.

Research evidence from the studies above has shown that ER can be an effective way to give language learners the pleasure of reading. Learners may enjoy the flow experience while they are reading graded readers, authentic texts, or doing any free reading. They may feel more comfortable when they are allowed to read at their own pace and when vocabulary is no longer a problem for them. When learners are allowed to read purely for enjoyment, reading itself becomes rewarding. However, as Kirchhoff (2013) pointed out, pleasant reading experiences may not certainly lead to more reading or reading for longer periods. This can easily be affected by factors, such as other course demands, extracurricular activities, or learners’ social lives. Learners need to be kept motivated in order for them to maintain positive reading experiences.

iv. ER and Positive Attitudes Toward Reading

In the model of the major variables motivating the decision to read in a second language, Day and Bamford (1998) argued that attitudes toward reading in the second language can strongly influence learners’ desire and motivation to read in a second language. If learners fail to have positive attitudes toward reading in the second language, they will not be motivated to read the second language. They contended that an ER approach has the potential to help learners build positive attitudes toward second language reading if learners read at levels appropriate to them and if learners can see the target culture and people in a favorable way through their reading. A number of recent studies have been conducted to test this hypothesis.

Hitosugi and Day (2004) measured the impact of including an ER program as a part of a regular Japanese course at the University of Hawaii. The study found that while a couple of students in the ER program did not like the program, results from two affective questionnaires showed some difference between students in the ER program and their counterparts in the regular class. Students in the ER program reported developing a more positive attitude toward learning the Japanese language, such as reading Japanese books, comics, or newspapers and watching Japanese television programs outside of class. The authors noted that reading Japanese children’s books in the ER program provided students opportunities to learn more about cultural information, and this may have led to some positive attitude change. An ER program implemented in the following semester also yielded similar results. Although the program was not appealing to some students, other students in the extensive program began to show more interest in Japanese culture such as Japanese cartoon, and began to read more independently.

In her longitudinal case study of two Japanese middle school students, Nishino (2007) explored the issue of what strategies her subjects used while they were engaged in reading graded readers and books for native speakers as well as how ER influenced her subjects’ motivation. Data from interviews and field notes showed that from the very beginning both her subjects enjoyed the reading a lot. Reading graded readers appeared to give Nishino’s subjects a rewarding reading experience. As time passed by, her subjects became more fluent and independent readers. They wanted to read more independently and asked for more challenging reading materials instead of graded readers. As one of Nishino’s subject, Fumi, stated:
Although the vocabulary is difficult, *Harry Potter* is much more interesting to read than graded readers. For me, romantic stories about boys and girls of my age are appealing. If I finish reading *Harry Potter*, I want to read the black books of Stage 4. I’ll also try to read a book by Darren Shan in English by myself. I don’t need your [the researcher’s] help. (p.91)

The more Nishino’s subjects read, the longer their reading sessions lasted. Although the subjects’ motivation to read seemed to diminish as they were faced with university entrance examinations, they reported that they would continue reading English novels after they got into university. They both hoped they would find jobs involving English or study abroad in the future. Reading extensively appeared to steer the subjects in a positive direction toward reading and the English language.

A recent single case study was conducted by Ro (2013), who looked at how an adult reader’s motivation and anxiety toward reading changed while reading extensively over an 8-week period. Data from questionnaires, interviews, and observations suggested that ER, or reading for pleasure, reduced the learner’s anxiety toward L2 reading and helped build the learner’s confidence in reading. Ro analyzed the contributing factors for anxiety reduction and motivational enhancement and reported that since the learner was allowed to read at her own pace anytime and anywhere, she felt comfortable to do more L2 reading. Also, the enjoyment from reading comics reduced her anxiety when she learned some catchy expressions from the comics and wanted to use them to communicate with her foreign friends. The sense of success and satisfaction gained from reading English books provided the learner with a strong reason to do further reading:

While I was doing ER [extensive reading], I did not feel any intimidation; in fact, I was very happy when I realized that my comprehension skills were improving as I did more ER sessions. I was able to comprehend more of the contents and meanings of expressions by merely referring to the contexts as I did more ER …. (p.225)

Ro noticed that these positive changes in attitude toward reading continued even after the ER sessions ended. The learner began to use the words and phrases from the reading more frequently to communicate on social networking websites.

Yamashita (2013), attempting to answer the question of how ER affected attitude toward reading in a foreign language, involved 61 undergraduates from a Japanese university. Two reading attitude questionnaires were administered before and after the 15-week ER of graded English readers. Results of the study saw an increase of comfortable feelings and a decrease of anxiety toward reading among the ER learners, suggesting a positive effect of ER on second language reading attitude. Yamashita stated that “ER exerts a readier effect on the aspects of reading attitude that may foster intrinsic motivation … positive feelings fostered through ER may indeed enhance the decision to read and create a virtuous circle of reading” (p.258). However, Yamashita commented that 15 weeks of ER may not be long enough to see the real effects on reading attitude and that how long the positive effect of ER would last was still an issue that needed to be dealt with. The researcher also noted that positive attitudes toward reading did not necessarily lead to more reading. For example, Crawford-Camiciottoli (2001) examined the reading frequency and attitudes toward ER in English at an Italian university and found that
although a positive attitude toward English reading was advantageous, learners in the study did not do much reading in English regardless of attitude. Crawford-Camiciottoli found the learners did not have as much time as may be necessary to read extensively, that there was not much appropriate reading material available, and that they did not have any idea what kind of reading would be interesting or useful to them. Yamashita concluded that ER might not be the only way to foster positive feelings towards reading and improve the “excitement about learning” because some learners may prefer to be taught (p.259).

Results from these studies provide insightful findings that advance our understanding of how ER influences language learners’ affective aspects. An ER approach, if put into practice in an efficient manner, can help learners build more positive feelings and thoughts about the reading process. More specifically, learners may experience less anxiety when they are allowed to read whatever and whenever they want at their own pace and levels. They may feel more self-confident about their reading ability when they realize that they can complete a large amount of reading by themselves. Given free choices and encouraged to read topics that interest them, learners may even create a positive view toward using the target language and learning about its culture. ER can be an inspiring approach to motivate second language learners to read. Although learners in these studies are shown to develop positive attitudes toward reading during ER, questions have been raised about how the enjoyment from ER can be maintained and continually lead to more reading (Yamashita, 2013).

II. Pedagogical Implications

The research findings mentioned above help to shed more light on the nature of ER, and could have important implications for L2 teachers who would like to incorporate an ER approach into their teaching. Since an ER approach has the potential of creating a real reading experience for L2 learners, it should serve as a complement to an intensive reading approach. Intensive reading tends to focus on careful study of vocabulary and grammar points in a short passage. An ER approach, which provides L2 learners with the opportunities to see more words in more contexts, should help L2 learners’ vocabulary and grammatical knowledge grow. While some L2 teachers may argue that there is not sufficient time in the already jam-packed classroom schedule and that the goal of ER is not relevant to the syllabus and the examinations students will be expected to attend, Day and Bamford (1998) asserted that “if teachers and administrators support the notion of their students becoming fluent, independent readers in the second language, then time will be found, even if it is only an hour of homework a week” (p.47). To make an ER approach go more smoothly in the classroom, L2 teachers need to provide a wide variety of reading materials that are suitable for their L2 learners’ language proficiency and to help the learners find and choose materials that interest them. Possible reading materials may include language learner literature, children’s literature, magazines, newspapers, comic books, young adult novels, or translations of works from students’ L1s (Day and Bamford, 1998). To ensure that all learners take ER seriously and catch up on the reading, L2 teachers may ask the learners to share their reading experience in the classroom (e.g., giving oral presentations about the reading they have finished or writing reviews of the reading). Once the learners meet the reading requirements, they may get some credits for their reading class (Hedgcock and Ferris, 2009). On the whole, the learners’ reading experience should always take precedence over how much
comprehension is achieved or how much vocabulary is learned.

III. Conclusion

As the literature review above makes clear, an ER approach, implemented under appropriate guidelines, such as Day and Bamford’s (2002), will produce beneficial effects on language learners in their general reading competence and their attitude toward reading and learning. Given the merits of ER for language learners in a second or foreign language, it is highly recommended that language teachers integrate an ER approach into their language curriculum. As Day and Bamford (1998) argued, “if a teacher is firmly committed to extensive reading and promotes it actively, then students generally catch the teacher’s enthusiasm and are drawn to doing it” (p.42). Guidelines on how ER can be implemented successfully in the classroom are becoming more readily available as more and more research findings are added to support the benefits of ER. L2 teachers and administrators should be encouraged to develop an ER approach in the interests of students. As Day and Bamford (1998) emphasized, “reading classes can give students a love for reading in the second language, a thirst for it that will stay with them throughout their lives (p.9).

References


廣泛閱讀與外語學習之探討

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摘要

廣泛閱讀是一種閱讀教學法。研究證實廣泛閱讀不管是在母語學習或外語的教學上都有不錯的成效，因此也常被建議運用在閱讀教學上。近十年來，有越來越多研究顯示廣泛閱讀的確對外語的學習有很大的助益，若能妥善運用，不只能增加語彙知識，改善閱讀能力，還可以讓閱讀變成一種愉快的學習經驗，進而增進對閱讀的信心以及動機。也因此廣泛閱讀應融入在外語教學的課程中。本文同時也探討在課堂上運用廣泛閱讀教學可能會面臨到的問題。

關鍵詞: 廣泛閱讀、母語、外語、語彙知識、閱讀能力、外語教學課程

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