

Extensive Reading in Foreign Language Classes

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Abstract

Extensive reading (ER) has been advocated for having numerous benefits and values to foreign language classes. The Faculty of Education, Tribhuvan University has prescribed a wide range of textbooks, reference materials, and web-based materials, especially for Masters' students. Besides, these learners are required to read out-of-the-course materials, too. These contexts call for extensive reading on the part of the learners. Based on this background, the present study aimed to explore the learners' choice for reading materials, their purposes of reading, and the expected teacher roles. The study followed the survey research design. The respondents were 100 M.Ed. 1st and 2nd year English students of the academic year 2014-15 A.D. of Prithvi Narayan Campus, Pokhara. The respondents preferred easy, interesting, informative and enjoyable materials to read; their objective of reading was to obtain general information; and they expected teachers to be prompter, participant, counselor, and role model.

Keywords: Extensive reading, materials, objectives, teacher roles

Introduction

The term 'Extensive Reading' was introduced by Palmer in 1917, distinguishing it from intensive reading in terms of the amount of reading, degree of depth, and the extent of comprehension. ER is founded in Krashen's (1982 & 1985) Input hypothesis which shows the necessity of comprehensible input for second language acquisition; and pleasure hypothesis which claims that the enjoyable activities provide comprehensible input and lower affective filters. ER is also associated to the Book Strap hypothesis which asserts on learners' initial successful experiences; and the Flow theory which concedes learners' deep involvement in reading (Chien & Yu, 2015).

Extensive reading (ER) is an approach to reading in which the readers enter into the text for obtaining pleasure and general information. ER is useful for setting reading habit and so it does not call for teacher's assistance in general. The readers can select the text themselves independently and read rapidly in a bird's eye-view. This is evidenced in Rivers' (1968) words, "The purpose of the extensive reading programme will be to train the students to read directly and fluently in the foreign language for his own enjoyment without the aid of the teacher (p. 229)." Thus, ER is also called independent rapid reading. For such a faster activity, silent reading is advisable, in which a good reader's eyes move fast in the text. Therefore, ER is "reading in

quantity" and is intended to "develop good reading habits, to build up knowledge of vocabulary and structure, and to encourage a liking for reading" (Richards, Platt, & Weber, 1985, p. 100). Supporting these views, Harmer (2008a) purports that "a teacher encourages students to choose for themselves what they read and to do so for pleasure and general language improvement" (p. 283). Further, Extensive Reading Foundation (ERF, 2011) has put forth the view that in ER, the students "read quickly and enjoyably with adequate comprehension so they don't need a dictionary" (p. 1). ERF also labels ER as "individualized/self-selected reading", "sustained silent reading", or "drop everything and read" (p. 3). Thus, ER means: (i) to read for pleasure and information, (ii) to read without the help of the teacher, (iii) to read silently and quickly, (iv) to read without using a dictionary, (v) to read for setting habit, (vi) to encourage liking for reading, and (vii) to read for gaining taste of foreign language.

There is a good rationale to encourage learners to read extensively. ER, which is also considered one of the vital 21st century skills, is essential to develop good readers overall. When the readers read extensively in a foreign language, they can improve reading fluency, and build new vocabulary knowledge and structure. ER allows learners to improve their listening, speaking and writing abilities, too. ER also develops positive attitudes, and increases motivation and self-confidence in foreign/second language (Ono, Day & Harsch, 2004; Neupane, 2005; & ERF, 2011). In an empirical literature, Kalengkongan (2012) has exhibited benefits of ER in terms of spoken and written performance, learners' attitudes and fluency, spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and text structure. In the similar reviews, Chien and Yu (2015) have observed impacts of ER on the following aspects: learners at different levels/contexts, both

L1 and L2, receptive and productive skills, general language competence, affective domains, learners' confidence and the like. These reviews give impetus to claim that ER is important to trace out the avenues to enter into the fertile ground of knowledge.

For encouraging ER, different tips and principles have been forwarded by several scholars. One of them is a set of top ten principles recommended by Day and Bamford (2002, pp. 2-6)), out of which, the first, the second and the third claim that ER materials should be easy and within the readers' comfort zone. Availability of the variety of materials encourages readers to follow a flexible approach. Then, the readers enjoy freedom of choice of the reading materials. The fourth, the sixth, the ninth, and the tenth indicate necessary conditions for encouraging ER. The readers should be provided with: opportunity and incentive to read more, chance for reading as an end itself, and allow the readers to go with "reading gain without pain" (Day & Bamford, 1998, p. 121). Further, the teachers should be readers themselves as "reading is caught, not taught" (Nuttall, 1996, p. 229). The fifth principle exhibits the purposes of ER, and the seventh and the eighth demonstrate the silent, individual and fast nature of ER. Therefore, ER is a silent, individual and fast reading, in which fluency is a key for extensive reader.

Following these ten principles, Ono, Day and Harsch (2004) have posited these ten tips for reading extensively: read more, read easy books, read interesting books, re-read interesting books, read for general understanding, skip the difficult words, avoid using dictionaries, expand reading comfort zone, set reading goals and keep a reading log, and enjoy reading. These tips show that ER means learning to read but not reading to learn. The former refers to extensive reading whereas the latter to intensive reading. Since ER is a quantitative

type of reading, purposes and materials are important. Using dictionaries to find the meaning of unfamiliar words is time consuming and this activity reduces reading speed. That is why, such words should be skipped for general understanding and the use of dictionary is discarded. Regarding the type of materials for ER, Neupane (2005) has also observed that materials for ER should be easy, pleasing, striking, resourceful, informative, interesting, and easy. If the text possesses these features, he purports, learners are encouraged to read extensively. However, not only materials but also settings and tasks play crucial role for ER. Tuning this view, Harmer's (2008a) advice is that learners should be provided with "appropriate materials, guidance, tasks, and facilities" (p. 283). Furthermore, the following four factors contribute to the success of ER: library, choice, feedback and time (Harmer, 2008b).

These delineations pave me a way to envisage into appropriate materials and goals to ER, expected teacher roles, and task to be done by the learners. Accordingly, this study aims to explore the nature of appropriate materials to ER, expected teacher roles, and reasons for reading extensively.

Methodology

Since this study focused on learners' needs and interests towards extensive reading (ER), I adopted the survey research design. For the execution of this design, I selected one hundred students studying English at M. Ed. 1st and 2nd year in Prithvi Narayan Campus, Pokhara as a census because they were regularly present in their classes. The selected respondents were observed for their concepts and behaviours towards reading prescribed books, references, and additional/supplementary materials

extensively, which are mentioned in M. Ed. English Syllabus of annual exam system of T. U. The tool for collecting data was piloted questionnaire (Appendix A), which consists of five point Likert scale (Kumar, 2006) as SA- Strongly agree, A- Agree, NAND- Neither agree nor disagree, D- Disagree, and SD- Strongly disagree. Of these, SA and A were treated as positive responses, SD and D as negative ones, and NAND as undecided ones. The data were collected in three parameters such as materials, objectives, and expected teacher roles. The study followed descriptive-analytical approach for the discussion/interpretation of results. Therefore, the collected data were presented, analysed, and interpreted based on the three domains respectively by means of tables to draw inferences.

Results and discussion

The collected data were presented, analysed, and interpreted in terms of three parameters such as reading materials, objectives, and expected teacher roles, which reflected major needs, interests, concepts and behaviours of the learners towards ER.

Reading materials

As the main purpose of ER is to read in quantity, reading materials should be motivating to the readers. This study also showed that the respondents preferred easy (65%), interesting (80%), informative (80%), and amusing/enjoyable (85%) materials for ER (Table 1). These data justify the claim that ER aims to please and inform the readers. These data also confirm that learners read only if the materials are within their comfort zone. The respondents showed their tendency to read accessible (70%) materials which are based on their needs, tastes, and interests (90%). This exhibits that the materials should be not only interesting and informative but also

accessible to the learners. It implies that if the learners have to wander, they cannot be motivated in reading such materials. Further, encroached, assigned, and sophisticated reading materials distracted the learners' interests. Therefore, reading materials should be captivating and easily accessible for learners.

Table 1: Extensive reading materials

Reading materials should be:	SA	A	NAND	D	SD
Easy	45	20	15	15	5
Interesting	65	15	5	-	-
Resourceful	10	15	70	5	-
Informative	28	62	5	5	5
Amusing/ Enjoyable	30	55	2	8	5
Striking	5	8	80	2	5
Innovative	2	7	75	5	11
Accessible	20	50	15	5	10

Table 1, furthermore, demonstrates that the respondents were undecided towards resourceful (70%), striking (80%), and innovative (75%) materials. This shows that even M. Ed. students are not motivated and conscious to read resourceful and innovative materials, which is indicative of the fact that even the higher level learners prefer easy and informative materials. Therefore, this study also justifies the theoretical stances asserted in Day and Bamford (1998 & 2002) and Chien (2015), and empirical evidence presented in Kalengkongan (2012).

Reading objectives

Unlike in the domain of reading materials, the respondents showed variations in responses in terms of ER objectives (Table 2). They read for obtaining general information (60%), but not for getting pleasure (60%). The results show controversy as it justified one major ER

objective, i.e. reading for general information but falsified the other, i.e. reading for pleasure. One possible reason behind this is that the respondents read for information as they were test-oriented and accordingly, they preferred the texts which were inevitable for their examinations.

Table 2: Objectives of extensive reading

ER is aimed to obtain:	SA	A	NAND	D	SD
Pleasure	17	13	10	40	20
General information	20	40	17	13	10
Reading habit	5	10	60	18	7
Reading fluency	5	18	59	10	8
Other skills	12	18	68	5	7
Vocabulary and structure enhancement	5	9	30	39	17

The respondents were undecided for using ER in order to build reading habit (60%), increase reading fluency (59%), develop listening reading and writing skills (68%), and enhance vocabulary and structure (50%). These results can be interpreted to mean that even the masters' level students are unaware of the proficiency level to be acquired by the good readers. Until the learners obtain the general proficiency level in ER, they cannot develop these skills. Therefore, the respondents' ER proficiency level was poor. These delineations show that the theoretical stances of ER cannot be backed up by this study in terms of the objectives of reading extensively.

Expected teacher roles

Teachers are dynamic powers of whole educational system as they are mobilisers of educational policy into the learners' level. They are at the core of teaching learning process. To put in Neupane's (2016) words, "Teachers are at the centre of concentric rings of education system. [...] the figure of teacher reflects some

spectra, which are essentials for professionalism” (p. 261). Out of some spectra, teacher roles are vital for learners. For this study, I have selected teacher roles from Kumaravadivelu’s (2003, p. 2) concept “strategic thinkers/practitioners” and of Farrell and Jacobs’ (2010, p. 2) “co-learners”. Table 3 shows the tested expected teacher roles in ER.

Table 3: Expected teacher roles

Learners want ER teachers to be:	SA	A	NAND	D	SD
Authority/Controller	10	12	28	50	10
Prompter/Catalyst	33	27	11	19	10
Organizer	5	23	17	25	30
Participant	24	38	18	12	8
Administrator	9	21	15	28	27
Initiator	12	18	53	14	3
Counsellor	22	33	10	25	10
Role model	25	37	28	4	6

Table 3 exhibits that teachers were expected to be prompter/catalyst (60%), participant (62%), counselor (55%), and role model (62%). On the other hand, teachers were rejected as authority/ controller (60%), organizer (55%), and administrator (55%). However, teacher’s role as initiator (53%) was undecided.

The results showed that the respondents needed some “agency” (Harmer, 2008b, p. 21), i.e. they wanted to take responsibility for ER. They required relative freedom and responsibility for their sustained drive for reading extensively. Since the respondents desired to be self-administrators and self-organisers, they should have right to choose materials for “joyful reading” (Harmer, 2008b, p. 110), and they can select and organize reading materials themselves. However, the results also exhibited that the respondents wished teachers to prompt and to counsel for selecting and organizing these materials. Further, teachers were expected to be co-readers and role models for the learners.

Conclusion

This study testified respondents’ ER concepts and behaviours in terms of reading materials, objectives, and expected teacher roles. The reading materials were preferred to be easy, interesting, informative and pleasing. It implies that ER materials should be easily accessible to the learners. They should also be in perfect harmony with the learners’ needs, tastes, and interests. In foreign language classes, the learners were observed not to have motivation for resourceful, striking, and innovative materials. Regarding objectives, the learners read for information because they were exam-oriented. So, they showed inclinations to be information-collectors rather than extensive readers. They did not read for pleasure and entertainment and so reading for them was only for passing exam rather than gaining true knowledge and obtaining pleasure simultaneously.

Furthermore, the learners did not desire to set reading habit, develop reading fluency, and used ER for enhancing vocabulary and structure of foreign language. In terms of teacher roles, the learners expected them to be prompters, counselors, participants, and role models. They did not expect teachers to be authority/controller, which is traditional role type. In a nutshell, the learners desired to take responsibility for selecting and organizing ER materials. Despite this, teacher role was facilitative of their extensive reading ability.

However, it is early enough to conclude this way as this study had limitations in data, time, and study area. This small scale study, yet, can leave trace-effects for further studies in this field of extensive reading.

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Appendix A
Questionnaire for Students

1 Extensive reading materials should be:

	SA	A	NAND	D	SD
Easy					
Interesting					
Resourceful					
Informative					
Amusing/ Enjoyable					
Striking					
Innovative					
Accessible					

2 I read extensively for:

	SA	A	NAND	D	SD
Pleasure					
General information					
Reading habit					
Reading fluency					
Other skills					
Vocabulary and structure enhancement					

3 What types of teacher roles do you expect for better extensive reading?

	SA	A	NAND	D	SD
Authority/Controller					
Prompter/Catalyst					
Organizer					
Participant					
Administrator					
Initiator					
Counsellor					
Role model					

Note: SA- Strongly agree, A- Agree, NAND- Neither agree nor disagree, D- Disagree, SD- Strongly disagree