

Supplemental Extensive Reading Curricula

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Introduction

Extensive reading (ER) is a popular tool that English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers use to help increase their students' reading fluency. ER is defined as an approach where EFL learners choose reading materials from a selection of graded readers (books with simplified vocabulary and grammatical structures) or other reading materials with the goal of reaching various targets of vocabulary acquisition and reading times through sustained reading, the majority of which is usually done outside of class (Donnes, 1999; Hill, 1997; Taguchi, Takayasu-Maass, & Gorsuch, 2004). The basic premise of ER as a beneficial language-teaching tool is that reading is more enjoyable when students can choose their own materials, thus leading to increased motivation and exposure to new vocabulary and grammar. As ER becomes increasingly pervasive in EFL curricula, it is important for teachers to think of new ways of supplementation in order to maximize the effectiveness of ER as a tool for language acquisition.

For over three decades, ER has been demonstrated to be an effective means of increasing student motivation, activating cognitive and critical thinking skills, and improving reading comprehension (Day & Bamford, 1998; Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Hit-sogi & Day, 2004; Hosenfeld, 1977, 1979; Huckin & Bloch, 1993; Perfetti, Van Dyke, & Hart, 2001; Takase, 2003). But the pedagogical benefits of ER don't stop there; still more research has shown that ER increases reader confidence and vocabulary (Mason & Krashen, 1997; Nation, 2001; Paran, 1996), develops reading fluency and writing skills (Kusanagi, 2004; Hafiz & Tudor, 1990), and encourages positive reading habits (Nash & Yuan, 1992). Among EFL professionals, dialogue is not about whether or not ER is beneficial, but rather why it is beneficial.

Research has shown enjoyment to be a major factor behind the success of ER

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(Nishino, 2007). Day and Bamford (1998) posit that aside from reading ability and sociocultural environment, materials and attitudes are other essential factors in determining EFL students' reading motivation. It is therefore imperative for language teachers to stay away from making ER burdensome to keep student motivation levels high. Fortunately for the EFL teacher, there are a wide variety of supplemental activities that can be utilized to harness students' creative abilities that not only amplify their reading enjoyment, but increase their critical thinking, cognitive skills, and reading comprehension as well.

Although ER proves to be vastly more effective when students feel comfortable about the material they are reading (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997), other research has shown intrinsic motivation to be the deciding determinant in predicting the amount of material that a student will read extensively (Day & Bamford, 1998; Mori, 2002; Takase, 2003). In short, this means that an accessible reading level leads to students reading more. Freedom to choose texts coupled with curiosity and interest in the reading material has been shown to correlate with higher levels of student engagement both in and outside of the classroom (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Maehr, 1976).

With the various benefits of ER clearly defined through a wide scope of research, the goal of this paper is to briefly explore some possible avenues of supplementation. To accomplish this in a meaningful way, the main goals of extensive reading will be examined so that supplements can become extensions of the original aims of ER without diminishing its efficacy. Next I will outline a variety of examples of supplemental activities and materials that can be used by teachers who want to target specific aspects of language acquisition that can be achieved through ER. While the list of supplemental materials is by no means an exhaustive list of possibilities, I believe that EFL teachers will find both new and old ways of thinking about scaffolding that takes advantage of the inherent strengths of ER.

Extensive Reading Goals

ER relies on high motivation levels, stress-free reading sessions, and overall enjoyment as part of its success, so it is important to tailor supplemental activities in a way so as to not stymie the pleasure in reading a good story. In order to know how best to supplement extensive reading, let's first look at the original aims that it entails.

ER has several main goals: to encourage L2 readers to read for information and enjoyment both inside and outside the classroom, to read for comprehension, promote vocabulary development, and to develop a consistent reading habit (Day and Bamford, 1998; Davis, 1995; Krashen, 1995; Day, Omura and Hiramatsu, 1991; Susser and Robb, 1990). Other aims not usually associated with ER have been shown to be achievable as well, including, but not limited to, enhancing writing

skills (Janopoulos, 1986) and improving oral proficiency (Cho and Krashen, 1994). Taguchi, Takayasu-Maass, & Gorsuch (2004) argue that cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies and schemata should also be carefully considered when dealing with ER in EFL curricula.

By focusing on these main goals of encouraging reading enjoyment, developing vocabulary acquisition, writing skills, oral proficiency, consistent reading habits, and cognitive skills, I would like to demonstrate some ideas for ER supplementation that have been successfully utilized in the classroom with university EFL students in Japan.

Supplementing Extensive Reading

Written Book Reports

When thinking about ways to develop writing skills and critical thinking, it is important not to underestimate the old tried and true method of the written book report. When L2 students write about what they have been reading, they are forced to think about the material that they have internalized and give it a concrete means of interpretation. While plot and character summaries can be useful, teachers should remember that cognitive and metacognitive skills can also be activated by having students give their opinions with specific details and reasoning backing their arguments. By letting the students write freely on material that they have read, they hold on to their sense of choice in their reading selection and can reflect on how their initial impressions held up with their actual experience with the book. Teachers should not be afraid to have their students write about what they are reading; it can be a great way to check on reading comprehension and hone writing skills. Just don't over-do it.

Oral Book Reports

While written book reports can have the obvious effect of enhancing writing skills, the audience to which students can portray their ideas to is generally limited to the teacher. This is where oral book reports can be effective. The student is still accessing all of the cognitive skills, but adding in a speaking element and reaching a larger audience as well. The fact that students can listen to each other's opinions about graded readers also serves to help students make educated selections when choosing their next graded reader. Oral proficiency is also an obvious benefactor of the oral book report. It is important to have an integrated approach when teaching language skills, and book presentations are a good way to incorporate speaking and listening practice into reading classes.

Business cards

Gardner (2003) shows how to utilize business cards “to create imagery and support personality traits” of the characters found in books, as well as the authors who wrote them (p. 2). This is an engaging exercise that has students creatively thinking about their reading material in ways that can exceed the boundaries of the actual stories. By thinking about how to visually design their business cards, students identify symbols that connect to authors and characters. Students can also interact with classmates by giving and receiving feedback about their designs, and explore how writing can be shaped by audience and purpose. Oral aspects can also be integrated, with students introducing themselves to each other while handing out their business cards.

Role Playing

Students can also enjoy taking on the roles of characters found in the books that they read. A wide variety of activities can be utilized:

- ad-lib sketches where main characters interact with each other based on previously identified character traits
- re-enactments of scenes with dialogue taken directly from literature
- student written scenes that can serve as an epilogue or prologue to the plot of a book

Role playing can be further explored via video projects, live plays given in front of an audience, or interactive question and answer sessions where audience members must ask prepared questions that a student, in the guise of a character from a book, must answer in character. Oral proficiency is the obvious benefactor of utilizing role-playing activities in relation to ER.

Vocabulary Logs and Lists

With research showing that a small vocabulary is congruous with difficulty in language learning (Leki & Carson, 1994), it is critical that teachers include some sort of vocabulary element in their reading curricula. One effective vocabulary acquisition strategy is the vocabulary log. With students reading relatively large amounts of material outside of class, it can be beneficial for them to write down a few new words that they encounter in a notebook. After their reading session is over, the students can then use various techniques to either guess the meaning of the word, look it up, or both. A weekly vocabulary log can assist language teachers in monitoring not only whether or not their students are actually reading, but how many new words they are learning, as well as a wealth of information on the types

of words they are looking up.

Vocabulary lists can be useful tool for teachers who are using a single extensive reading source for a group or class of students. With a vocabulary list, a teacher can control which vocabulary terms he wants his students to concentrate on, and it is much easier to administer assessments as well. A list also has the added benefit of being able to be easily incorporated into a schedule that students can follow throughout a semester.

Poster Presentations and Book Advertisements

Poster presentations and book advertisements are other examples of unique supplements for ER. These are more time-consuming projects that allows students to showcase design and artistic skills while portraying their interpretation of a book. They can also be an effective means for students to make their case for suggesting a particularly good book to other students or warning other them about a potentially uninteresting read. Posters and advertisements are good supplemental activities because they combine various language skills and creative elements with the reading process.

Conclusion

Extensive reading is a wonderful resource for language teachers looking to improve student motivation and attitudes about reading, vocabulary, and learning a second language in general. ER's benefits have been demonstrated in an almost never-ending avalanche of research. It is therefore important for language teachers to start thinking about how to effectively supplement ER in ways that will accentuate its strengths and bring about even more successful results for the L2 learner. Hopefully, the supplemental materials outlined in this paper will prove as a good starting point for teachers looking to explore the vast array of possibilities for enhancing their students' extensive reading experiences.

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