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Teaching Extensive  
Reading in Another  
Language



I.S.P. Nation and Rob Waring

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Reviewed work

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Nation and Waring's *Teaching Extensive Reading in Another Language* is invaluable as it presents a thorough research-based understanding of Extensive Reading (ER) which has been lacking in previous ER literature. The book, which consists of 13 chapters, reports wide-ranging research findings with a focus on those related to vocabulary learning through ER. It demonstrates that ER plays a pivotal role in providing second/foreign language (L2) learners with abundant meaning-focused input, incidental L2 learning opportunities, and fluency development. The text also incorporates the authors' personal experiences of ER.

In "Chapter 1: Keeping extensive reading simple", the authors state that what ER entails is learners independently and silently reading large quantities of texts, at the right level, with comprehension. Here, the crux of ER is learners' reading at "the right level". This is explained by the authors in terms of vocabulary difficulty; that is, texts that have less than 2% of unknown words. The chapter further outlines that meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development should be equally provided in a L2 course, and that ER should make up most of the reading for the meaning-focused input strand.

"Chapter 2: What are graded readers?" justifies the use of graded readers (GRs) in ER. GRs are readers systematically controlled in grammar and, more importantly, vocabulary. Based on vocabulary research findings, the authors claim that GRs give learners an authentic reading experience and efficient, cyclical vocabulary learning conditions. This is due to their low density of unknown words and high repetitions of useful words in various textual contexts.

The eight case studies presented in "Chapter 3: Case studies of extensive reading programs" cover various factors including instructional circumstances and levels, socio-economic situations, local reading habits, and possible challenges. Thus, prospective ER practitioners can choose a model from the case studies that best fits their circumstances. The studies also highlight keys to successful ER such as plentiful materials, committed teachers, learner

orientation/training, and close ongoing monitoring to maintain learners' reading habits and motivation.

"Chapter 4: How do you set up and run an extensive reading program?" furthers the discussions of Chapter 3. Specifically, subjects such as the provision of interesting texts with right levels, the inclusion of ER-related activities in class, and the enlightenment of learners regarding the benefits of ER, are raised. Keeping abreast with the digital age, the authors recommend the use of online resources like MReader and Xreading when obstacles are encountered with hard-copy GRs.

"Chapter 5: How vocabulary is learned from extensive reading" describes how vocabulary learning from ER occurs as a result of numerous repeated and varied meetings with lexical items through large quantities of comprehensible input. ER, especially when controlled texts such as GRs are used, provides learners with cumulative vocabulary learning both in the form-meaning stage, and the subsequent word knowledge expansion stage of vocabulary learning. Here, GRs are again espoused as a means to create excellent vocabulary learning conditions.

"Chapter 6: The most important studies on extensive reading in a foreign language" presents eight significant studies chosen for their experimental and corpus-based focus, in order to provide convincing findings to advance the practice of ER. The studies verify ER's significant contribution to learners' general language gains, especially those of vocabulary knowledge and reading fluency. One of the studies also clarifies how much learners need to read in ER in order to make advancements in their learning. Problematic aspects detected in the chosen eight studies will no doubt guide future ER studies.

"Chapter 7: Research findings: motivation and pushing learners to read" discusses numerous approaches which teachers can take to encourage learners to read more in ER programs. The authors state that teachers can help learners achieve a sense of self-efficacy and autonomy as well as an understanding of the virtues and rewards of ER. This can be done by setting challenging yet achievable targets, conducting ER-related activities in class, and crediting the reading done in grades.

In "Chapter 8: Research findings: Does extensive reading result in reading fluency and comprehension improvement?", the authors define the term "fluency" as the reading rate (measured in standard words per minute) at which learners read a text with satisfactory comprehension, and report the studies which verify the positive effects ER has on reading fluency. In regard to comprehension improvement, it is indicated that different researchers use a variety of methods to measure the elusive construct of comprehension, and that the effects ER has on comprehension improvement are less striking, though they are likely to be positive. The research findings reported also suggest that ER increases other areas of language proficiency including writing.

"Chapter 9: Research on vocabulary learning from extensive reading" asserts that ER should be given a complementary but major place in EFL (English as a foreign language) programs. The authors propose that it should be included in tandem with other components, such as deliberate learning, since it fosters various types of incidental learning which enrich existing L2 knowledge. This point is justified by a number of studies that report significant vocabulary gains through ER. The chapter further points out that observable vocabulary learning depends on factors such as the level of texts being read, the sensitivity of

measurement tools, the aspect of vocabulary knowledge being measured, the amount of input and repetition, and the availability of glosses, dictionaries, and audio assistance.

In “Chapter 10: Developing reading fluency”, the authors explain that the three physical phenomena involved in reading (fixations, saccades, and regressions) change with fluency development. They propose that one-third of allocated ER time be used on fluency development, and a speed-reading course be included in such a component with an aim to achieve a reading rate of 250 words per minute. The chapter maps out the order and the requirements of fluency training in detail.

“Chapter 11: Designing research into extensive reading” discusses that, although accumulated research findings demonstrate the benefits of ER in regard to language learning and increasing motivation in L2 reading, some methodological flaws have drawn criticism, and prevented ER from flourishing further. The flaws pointed out include: inconsistent treatments of the rate, amount, and duration of reading due to the fragmented conceptualization of ER; the fact that false equivalences tend to be examined when studies compare the benefits of ER to those of other approaches; and the dilemmas which exist between the need to control variables and maintain the face validity of ER.

In “Chapter 12: What makes a good graded reading scheme?” the authors elaborate the process of constructing a successful GR scheme for future GR writers. They assert that storylines are the foremost importance in regard to learners being able to enjoy reading large quantities of GRs. Concurrently, GRs need to be written to pre-determined guidelines in order to be cyclical, structured, and scaffolded input. Specifically, constructing a good GR scheme starts with a grammar syllabus and a wordlist which sensibly reflects L2 learner corpora, and involves varied considerations along its development stage.

“Chapter 13: A way forward” is significant in that the authors seek to free practitioners from the rigid form of ER unwittingly envisaged from Day and Bamford's (2002) “Top ten principles for teaching Extensive Reading.” Their new flexible ER framework is based more on linguistic than affective arguments, and affirms that various types of ER can be employed as long as learners read fluently with a sufficient amount of comprehension. The authors further argue that the default mind-set prevalent in EFL (i.e., that learners should study a course book) needs to be overturned in order for ER to thrive. Timely discussions of online ER, well thought out research questions for future studies, and encouragement of extensive listening studies presented in this chapter are highly beneficial to readers.

This book has several strengths. Firstly, the accessibility created by the authors' simplicity of style is one of its best qualities. Secondly, it addresses the shortcomings of its two iconic predecessors, as pointed out by Haynes (2001, 2010). Specifically, its evidence-based stance gives more theoretically-sound justifications to ER than the motivation-based *Extensive Reading in the Second Language Classroom* (1998) by Day and Bamford. Nation and Waring's book also clarifies how to select appropriate texts for learners, a point that is left somewhat unclear in Grabe's *Reading in a Second Language: Moving from Theory to Practice* (2009). Thirdly, the book is useful to prospective ER practitioners as it offers concrete resources (e.g., the ER Foundation, MReader, and Xreading) which they can use when facing problems. The work is even more valuable to researchers since it provides thorough examinations of existing ER studies and highlights what researchers should be aware of (e.g., what aspects of vocabulary learning should be examined).

The book does, however, have some weaknesses, but these can largely be attributed to the immaturity of the ER research context. Firstly, the book predominantly taps into factors related to L2 English. Although the authors provide ideas of alternatives for GRs for other L2 learners in Chapter 2, the advice should be taken cautiously and with a full understanding of the requirements of ER in order to prevent breaching them. Secondly, the authors wisely repeat the phrase “for beginning and intermediate learners” throughout the book. This implies that ER research on advanced L2 learners is not yet mature. Thirdly, due to its focus on experimental studies, the book does not examine qualitative ER studies much. This is, therefore, an area that future scholarly research should focus more attention on. Lastly, a comprehensive table of the major studies reported would be useful to readers.

In conclusion, *Teaching Extensive Reading in Another Language* is an invaluable addition to ER literature. While making readers aware of the complementary relationship between vocabulary learning from ER and deliberate vocabulary learning, the authors assert that ER is possibly the best remedy to problematic L2 curricula. Such a claim is assuredly justified by research and empirical findings. This book also makes ER accessible to practitioners by providing examples of ER practice, while simultaneously encouraging researchers to advance ER research by outlining methodological pitfalls. This volume can, therefore, be considered as a source of inspiration for existing and future ER proponents.

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