

EXTENSIVE READING IN THE EFL CLASSROOM:

STEPS AND BENEFITS.

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● ملخص :

إن إبراز الدور الفعال الذي للقراءة المكثفة وكذا المطالعة في تعلم اللغات الأجنبية وفي مقدمتها اللغة الانجليزية أصبح الشغل الشاغل للعديد من الباحثين والدارسين في مجال تنمية قدرات الاستيعاب لدى الطالب وتمكينه من اللغة بطريقة تساعده على الاسترسال العفوي فيها والقراءة السلسة لنصوصها. وبمعنى آخر : يتلخص مضمون هذه الورقة في تركيز اهتمام كل من الأستاذ والطالب على الأهمية القصوى للمطالعة والقراءة المكثفة باختلاف أنواعها على العملية التعليمية والتقنية بصفة عامة ، وعلى الرصيد اللغوي والمعلوماتي للطالب القارئ بصفة خاصة.

في هذا الإطار سنحاول استدلالا بما توصلت إليه لدراسات الحديثة في مجال القراءة التطرق إلى مفهوم المطالعة المكثفة من جوانب عديدة أهمها الجانب البيداغوجي التعليمي. كما سنسلط الضوء على مجمل الخطوات التي يجب إتباعها من طرف الطالب والأستاذ في قسم القراءة المكثفة والمعايير التي

يفترض الاعتماد عليها للتسيير الصحيح لعملية القراءة . وفي ختام هذا البحث سنبرز مسؤولية كل من الطالب والأستاذ في استدراك الفوائد غير المحدودة للقراءة المكثفة ، والتي طالما كانت ولا تزال الممول الأساسي والفريد الذي يثري حاجتنا للارتقاء في تعلم اللغات في ظل تغيرات عصر المعلوماتية.

الكلمات الدالة: القراءة المكثفة- قسم اللغة الانجليزية - الأستاذ- الطالب.

***Abstract:**

The present work is an attempt from the researcher to ignite teachers' enthusiasm and increase students' curiosity for EFL Extensive Reading (ER). In other words the main concern of the present paper is to focus teachers as well as students' attention on the importance of a skill (ER) which is most of the time-not to say all the time- given little concern in our EFL classrooms especially at the university level. To feet this aim, a definition of extensive reading is presented followed by the crucial steps and procedures the two partners teachers and students have to consider for a successful extensive reading program. Furthermore both teachers as well as students roles and responsibilities in the EFL extensive reading classroom are focused. The concluding part of the work is reserved to an illustration of some of the endless benefits and advantages of the fruitful skill of extensive reading with an emphasis on the support it may offer to the teaching/learning process as a whole.

Key Words:

Extensive Reading (ER) - EFL Classroom- Teachers- Learners.

1- Introduction

Associated with other learning skills, Reading is a key to success in foreign language learning and a serious occasion do develop knowledge about the language and its components. Reading can in addition provide immense help for foreign language learners at different levels from intermediate to advance. It is then essential to give this fruitful skill its right place in our foreign language classes starting from middle and secondary school to the university where time for reinforced, individual extensive reading becomes a major requirement.

2- Rationale and Enquiries

It is unfortunately becoming a reality in most EFL settings especially the university that students do not read neither inside nor outside the classroom. School libraries are constantly suffering from the very limited number of students who lend books for extensive reading. If they do it is generally to fulfill classroom requirements or the teacher's assignments. Lack of reading is thus an alarming situation that needs to

be given much concern by instructors and specialist in the field of foreign language teaching/learning due to the vital role reading plays in our lives and the life of our students.

With reference to what has already been mentioned, we saw it an urgency to reserve this paper to *Extensive Reading* and measure the degree to which it may become crucial in every step we perform in the learning of a foreign language (the EFL in particular). Accordingly we addressed the following research questions:

- *What do we exactly mean by Extensive Reading in an EFL environment?*
- *Is really Extensive Reading (ER) worthwhile in the EFL classroom? If yes, what are its main benefits?*
- *Is it always done outside the classroom?*
- *What are teachers and students' roles in the EFL Extensive Reading Classroom?*
- *What kind of help can the EFL teacher provide in ER?*

We hypothesized that:

- *Extensive Reading (ER) means reading and reading a lot for enjoyment and information (reading great deal, individually at ones' own pace self-selected materials without doing any assignment).*

- *Extensive Reading is worthwhile in the EFL classroom and most of the time indispensable.*
- *Extensive Reading is the type of reading which if practiced regularly can yield to satisfaction from the reader at different scales (language itself, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, background knowledge, spelling, pronunciation, comprehension...)*
- *Extensive reading is most of the time an outside class activity but it can also take place inside the classroom and with the participation of the teacher*
- *Both teachers and students have complementary roles in the EFL extensive reading classroom starting from the chosen material to the reading act.*
- *The EFL teacher has a lot to do in the EFL extensive reading classroom in coordination with students of course.*

The present work is in sum an attempt from the researcher to answer the already asked research questions and to test the effectiveness and credibility of her hypotheses. To do so a general viewpoint on the background of extensive reading and its definitions is necessary.

3- Background on Extensive Reading (ER)

Reading as a language skill is generally divided into two types: *intensive* done inside the classroom under the teacher's guidance and

extensive done freely outside the classroom without any aid from the teacher. Long ago investigations in the field of second/foreign language learning focused more on intensive reading in expense to extensive reading which was given little space of interest.

Palmer was indeed among the pioneers who established the theory and practice of extensive reading in teaching modern languages, while Day and Bamford (1997) focused on extensive reading as an approach to the teaching of second/foreign language reading. Palmer argued the importance of both types of reading being extensive (done by the students themselves) or intensive (under the teacher's supervision), because for him the main goal in both readings is to comprehend the printed pages. In Palmer's opinion intensive reading means to: *“take a text, study it line by line, referring at every moment to our dictionary and our grammar, comparing, analyzing, translating, and retaining every expression that it contains.”*(Palmer, 1921/1964:111). On the other hand he defines extensive reading as *“rapidly”* (Ibid) reading *“book after book”* (Palmer, 1917/1968:137).

It was only at that time that reading was given a new pedagogical dimension in language teaching and extensive reading gained much concern in foreign language instruction. Such concern contributed in the birth of the new status extensive reading gets in foreign language

pedagogy since *“texts were being read for ordinary real-world purposes of pleasure and information”* (Day and Bamford, 1998: 05).

In this context we saw it essential to shed light on the different definitions of extensive reading which though numerous share the same believe that *Extensive Reading is a valuable experience* for teachers and students alike.

4- Definitions of Extensive Reading

Extensive reading is recognized in language teaching as one of the four styles of reading: skimming, scanning and intensive reading (Williams and Moran 1989, Day and Bamford ,1998). Different terms are frequently attributed to extensive reading and used exchangeably, we state here:

* *“Supplementary reading”* (West, 1926/1955:26).

* *“Free voluntary reading”* (Krashen, 1993).

* *“Pleasure reading”* Mikulecky (1990) and Palmer (1964).

For Kembo (1993) extensive reading refers to *“the less rigorously supervised reading that pupils will do both in and outside the classroom. The texts read will normally be those of their own*

choosing, even though the teacher's guidance will be crucial at the beginning.” (Kembo, 1993:36)

In general, extensive reading requires students to read great amount of materials that interest them, because *“lots of people.... get turned on to all kinds of materials that someone would not put in a pile called pleasure reading....Extensive reading is people willing to engage... (with) a lot of extended texts for a variety of reasons.”* (Grabe, 1995). Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics states that extensive reading is: *“intended to develop good reading habits, to build up knowledge of vocabulary and structure, and to encourage a liking for reading.”* (Richards, Platt, & Platt, 1992:133)

It is in fact this kind of reading, i.e, extensive reading, that inspires students to read more on their own and practise reading as an enjoyable long life activity. Reading must then be encouraged and developed *“...and can only be developed, by means of extensive and continual practice. People learn to read, and to read better, by reading.”* (Eskey, 1986:21)

In this token and to convince students of the value of extensive reading a possible solution is to introduce this skill in the EFL classroom following certain steps and procedures.

5- Integrating Extensive Reading in an EFL Environment

There is a common belief among most foreign language teachers that extensive reading should be practised outside the classroom by the students themselves and without any help or guidance from the teacher. Those teachers ignore the fact that students with negative attitudes towards reading will never feel the desire to read extensively especially outside the classroom and on their own.

It is worth reminding in this respect that love, motivation and positive attitudes for reading start from the classroom experiences with reading where students have the chance to interact with various materials in collaboration with each other and with the teacher's cooperation. Once students feel comfortable with reading inside the classroom and their motivation and interest for this skill increase, they will gradually transfer the reading they enjoy with their teacher and classmates in the classroom to reinforced individual extensive reading outside the classroom. In this way and in Mayne (1915) words *“reading classes will give students a love for reading in the foreign language, a thirst for it that will stay with them throughout their lives.”*

In this part of the work we will try to argue the value of extensive reading when introduced inside the classroom and to convince EFL

teachers -especially those who are eager to help their students enjoy extensive reading and benefit from it- that there is always a possibility to make of extensive reading a priority of the majority of students. *When, How and where to start?* Are questions that will be discussed in this paper.

Based on Day and Bamford (1998) there are various ways to deal with extensive reading; it can be included in a second/foreign language curriculum in four main ways, as:

- A separate course
- Part of an existing reading course
- A noncredit addition to an existing course
- An extracurricular activity.

(Day and Bamford, 1998:41)

As an attempt from the researcher (an EFL teacher) to rationalize the extensive reading program and emphasize its main benefits, she introduced an extensive reading program in the English curriculum as part of an existing reading course. Participants in the program which lasted for 6 months (2 semesters) were a class of 30 students. All the class (including students and their teacher) was supposed to read for 30 minutes materials chosen from the university library or brought by students themselves. Because of time constraint it was impossible

usually for students to finish reading a book or a short story in one session. Thus, students were allowed to take books at home and finish their readings. Simultaneously, participants were given the total freedom to stop reading the material and change it when necessary. In the program, extensive reading started immediately after the 60 minutes of intensive guided reading. Each time a student finishes reading he was asked to exchange his material with other mates. Students were also required to prepare the book-report sheet on the material they read and to justify their choice for the chosen material. This was done purposefully to encourage students express their viewpoints on the material including what they learnt from it and also to help the teacher know more about students' preferences and interests to provide them with enjoyable books.

For better results, the teacher focused in his program on Day and Bamford's (1998) ten principles of extensive reading, i.e, the characteristics of a successful extensive reading program and which are:

- ❖ Students read as much as possible, perhaps in and definitely out of the classroom.
- ❖ A variety of reading material on a wide range of topics must be available.
- ❖ Students select what they want to read

- ❖ The purposes of reading are usually related to pleasure, information, and general understanding
- ❖ Reading is its own reward
- ❖ Reading materials are well within the linguistic competence of the students in terms of vocabulary and grammar
- ❖ Reading is individual and silent
- ❖ Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower.
- ❖ Teachers orient and guide their students.
- ❖ The teacher is a role model of a reader for students.

(Day and Bamford, 1998: 7/8)

After the first semester (3 months) of extensive reading, students were asked to continue reading during holidays and to prepare a list for the materials they read in addition to the book-report sheets. Surprisingly and just after the holidays, about 90% of the students showed enthusiasm to restart the program. Some of them even suggested their need for supplementary separate extensive reading sessions where they can have additional sufficient time to read for pleasure.

6- Major Gains and Benefits.

The benefits and effectiveness of extensive reading in second/foreign language teaching/learning in general and reading in particular have been demonstrated by a number of experiments (Nation

1997, Day and Bamford 1998, Elley and Mangubhai 1983, Tudor and Hafiz 1989, Hafiz and Tudor 1989, Elley 1991, Pilgreen and Krashen 1993, Cho and Krashen 1994, 1995, Constantino 1994).

In our experience with the extensive reading program in the classroom, we noticed big progress in students' reading examinations, language and oral skills. It is indeed a reality that “*(...) participating in an ER program tends to be associated with improved performance on tests of reading comprehension, writing, and other integrative measures*” (Horst, 2005).

Among the advantages of the program we cite the following:

- ❖ *Students learnt new vocabulary*
- ❖ *Students' participation in the reading classroom increased, some of them even communicate in English using the words they learnt (development in speaking)*
- ❖ *Students developed in writing thanks to the book-report sheet and the summaries they wrote, in addition to the sight vocabulary they developed*
- ❖ *Students became more confident to read different types of materials that expose them to various registers of language*
- ❖ *Students learnt about different people from different texts (development in students' background knowledge)*

- ❖ *Students relaxation -far from the casual routine of the supervised lessons*
- ❖ *Students expressed their opinions when presenting their book-report sheets, a phase that was a chance for most of them to exchange their interests concerning books they prefer reading*
- ❖ *Students built positive attitudes towards reading in general and regular individual reading in particular*

Briefly speaking, extensive reading helped students *“enter the cycle of growth...The virtuous circle of the good reader: Reads faster; Reads more; Understands better; Enjoys reading...”* (Nuttal, 1996:127). Moreover, *“Longer concentrated periods of silent reading build vocabulary and structur awareness, develop automaticity, enhance background knowledge, improve comprehension skills, and promote confidence and motivation.”* (Grabe, 1991: 396)

Apart from its impact on language and reading ability, extensive reading can in fact be a key to unlocking the all- important taste for foreign language reading among students (Day and Bamford, 1998). Furthermore and in Paran's (1996) words *“(...) One becomes a good reader (in any sense of the word) only through reading large amounts of material. Clearly the role of extensive reading is crucial in this respect”*. EFL teachers have thus to keep in mind that: *“Any classroom will be the poorer for lack of an extensive reading program, and will*

be unable to promote its pupils' language development in all aspects as effectively as if such a program was present" (Davies, 1995: 335).

All these reasons, and others, make it imperative that language teachers seize any existing occasion and introduce extensive reading in the teaching of the English foreign language in general and reading in particular.

7- Teachers and Students' Main Duties

In the EFL extensive reading classroom the teacher and students have roles to perform and duties to exercise, if these roles and duties are respected the program will yield its successful outcomes.

According to Day and Bamford (1998), students need careful introduction to extensive reading. It is indeed essential for the EFL teacher to teach foreign language reading well, *"to know as much as possible about how the reading process works and how to integrate that knowledge effectively into our reading pedagogy"* (Barnett, 1989: 01).

The teacher as part of the reading class has to take part in the program and read materials he chooses when his students engage in extensive reading. In this way he will not only encourage students to read but also maintain their curiosity for reading as they see the teacher

him self taking part in the reading they do. Obviously a teacher who does not read in the classroom will face difficulties to convince students of the value of in-class silent voluntary reading. Moreover and in Henry's (1995) point of view teachers are *"selling reading"*(Henry, 1995:52) and this can only be done when they act as readers in the classroom. Teachers of extensive reading have then *"to commit to reading what their students do"* (Ibid) and to know that *"Reading is caught, not taught."* (Nuttal, 1996: 229).

In addition and a priority in the extensive reading classroom *"...learners reading texts not listening to the teacher, not reading comprehension questions, not writing answers to comprehension questions, not discussing the content of the text."* (Williams, 1986: 42). Furthermore, it is of paramount importance in the extensive reading classroom to prepare a supportive reading climate in which students feel comfortable to read and read a lot without being interrupted by any intruder. Thus *"Teachers must learn to be quiet: teachers interfere with and so impede their learners' reading development by being too dominant and by talking too much"* (Ibid: 44).

Because students have the freedom to choose materials for free voluntary reading, the teacher can offer special help mainly for weak and anxious students to choose easy materials that are within their

language competence. In here Laufer (1989) suggests that learners need to be familiar with at least 95% of the running words in a text if they want to comprehend and thus perhaps learn from the text. The teacher can also give his opinions on students' choice of the material, advice them, propose some titles he judges suitable and if possible *"Ask them what they like reading in their own language, peer over their shoulders in the library...."*(Williams, 1986: 42).

On the part of students they have as a main duty to read and read a lot during the extensive reading classroom where time, energy and efforts are all unified for the unique objective of reading and enjoying the self selected material. It is only in this way that readers develop *"very positive attitudes toward books as they raised their literacy levels in English"* (Elley, 1991:397).

One necessary thing that students have to bear in mind is what Nuttall (1996) emphasized in the following words: *"We learn to read by reading...We want students to read better...To do this they need to read more."*(Nuttall, 1996: 128). In the same token, Mikulecky (1990) claims that *"Students must develop the habit of reading massive amounts."* (Mikulecky, 1990:13).

Further suggestions and proposals are directed to teachers and students to aid them experience a skill which is mostly absent in most of our EFL classrooms.

8- Proposals and Suggestions

From our experience with extensive reading we suggest the following points to help the two partners students and teachers better benefit from extensive reading and taste the beauty of this fruitful skill.

As a student you have to be sure that extensive reading:

- ❖ Is for all levels and not only for those who are good readers
- ❖ Is the key for success in learning the EFL and developing your language skills
- ❖ Is the eye through which you can see the entire world
- ❖ Is a source for entertainment and learning
- ❖ Is a way to score better in examination
- ❖ Is the solution to most of your language problems

As a teacher, and if eager to introduce extensive reading in your EFL classroom you have to take into consideration some essential points:

- ❖ Extensive reading needs time and effort

- ❖ Students will not benefit from the program if forced to take part in it, the pleasure they will get from reading and reading a lot in the classroom is linked to their interest in the program
- ❖ The benefits of the program do not come in short time
- ❖ Increasing students interest and motivation for reading must be your primary concern
- ❖ You are responsible for how much students enjoy reading by acting as a role-model and a councilor in monitoring your students choices when necessary
- ❖ You have to provide a relaxing climate where students feel the joy of silent reading
- ❖ Your participation in the program as a reader is it self a stimulus for students
- ❖ Providing special support for weak, lazy and reluctant students is also one of your responsibilities
- ❖ Stop reading for your students, let them read and love what they read
- ❖ Start now, do not wait for others
- ❖ Judge the success of your program by the benefits your students will gain from it and not time spent in reading

We hope the proposed suggestions will be of some help for teachers and students especially those who have not yet experienced the power of extensive reading and its benefits.

9- Conclusion

Our intention in the present paper has been to convince teachers and students in EFL settings especially the university, of the immense help and endless benefits extensive reading can provide its practitioners. We have also aimed to motivate them (teachers/students) step a step forward and experience the beauty of a skill they generally tend to give less importance.

Based on the gains obtained in the enrolled program as well as other research on extensive reading one can hypothesize that extensive reading is the activity that kindles every progress in the classroom. It is then time to give it at least a share in and outside the EFL classroom.

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