
การอ่านเชิงกว้างในฐานะเครื่องมือที่มีประสิทธิภาพในการพัฒนาทักษะการอ่าน

Extensive Reading as an Efficacious Tool for Improving Reading Skills

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บทความวิชาการนี้ว่าด้วยเรื่องการอ่านเชิงกว้างซึ่งเป็นการพัฒนาความสามารถทางภาษาอังกฤษโดยตอบสนองความต้องการข้อมูลรับเข้าที่เข้าใจได้ (Comprehensible Input) ของผู้เรียนในหลายๆ ด้าน ที่สำคัญที่สุด คือ การอ่านเชิงกว้างดูเหมือนจะเป็นวิธีที่ดีที่สุดในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษเพราะผู้เรียนมีโอกาสได้สัมผัสกับภาษาอังกฤษน้อยมากในประเทศที่ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศอย่างเช่นประเทศไทย ดังนั้น การอ่านเชิงกว้างทำให้เกิดนิสัยรักการอ่านและเป็นผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษอย่างอิสระด้วยตนเอง

คำสำคัญ : การอ่านเชิงกว้าง / ทักษะการอ่าน / ข้อมูลรับเข้าที่เข้าใจได้

ABSTRACT

This article delineates extensive reading regarding its comprehensible input for English proficiency. It reports that extensive reading (ER) noticeably benefits students in a variety of ways. Most importantly, reading extensively seems to be the best possible way for them to acquire English because exposure to English is rare in their case. Thus, especially for those students of English as a foreign language, such as in Thailand, ER nurtures a reading habit and fosters an independent learner.

Keywords : Extensive Reading (ER) / Reading Skills / Comprehensible Input

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Introduction

Extensive reading (ER) is an important source of comprehensible input according to the Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 2004, p. 26); therefore, students can acquire language through reading on their own, especially vocabulary. As for the application of comprehensible input, teachers should create opportunities for students to access comprehensible input. ER is often preferred because of ample amount of input provided. The theoretical framework supporting ER also includes pleasure hypothesis. Krashen (1982, pp.59-77) proposed that pedagogical activities which help language acquisition are those that are enjoyable. There is evidence that voluntary reading outside the classroom is pleasing. For example, the participants in ER studies in Mason (2006, pp. 2-5) indicated growth of positive attitudes toward reading. That is, they were motivated to do things interesting and enjoyable.

Among the four language skills, reading is part and parcel of learning language. In a way, students learn English mainly through reading. Obviously, students who read with success do not read once in a while but spend much time reading. That is, successful readers read extensively. Many students have found that reading for pleasure tends to enhance language proficiency. ER is seen not just as a means of improving reading skills but also of developing linguistic proficiency.

In today's classrooms, many teachers spend a lot of time teaching students how to read, yet they may neglect extensive reading. What is more, it has long been asserted that in the classrooms, teachers engage in dealing with grammar and new words, thus possibly ignoring the development of reading abilities. Students might not be trained to practice reading skills for successful reading to become confident readers. That is to say, they do not know how to read and get easily discouraged. It seems, therefore, necessary to provide them with ER so as to "develop good reading habits, build up knowledge of vocabulary and structure and to encourage a liking for reading (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, pp. 150-162)". Although it requires a commitment of time, energy and resources from teachers, the benefits with regard to skills development for students far outweigh the engagement involved because merely the ability to read quickly and grasp the main ideas is vital for students. Nevertheless, it is unfortunate in the paucity of pedagogical evidence. ER might be questioned from both a theoretical and practical levels. For this reason, teachers might implement it from their own limited perspectives. The efficacy of ER needs to be examined more closely for its potential contributions. Therefore, to develop reading proficiency, teachers should perceive ER as encouraging and be highly convinced of its values.

This paper will; therefore, focus on definitions, the teachers' roles, implementations and end with conclusion elucidating why ER is an efficacious tool for teaching reading.

Definitions

As Bambord & Richard (2004, pp. 44-47) pointed out, ER generally involves rapid reading of large quantities of material or longer readings for general understanding with the focus generally on the meaning of what is being read than on the language. ER has also reported to enhance student's affective domains, such as motivation and attitude to read (Mason, 2011, pp. 1-5). In short, ER is reading a lot and often, with an aim to developing reading habits and enjoying reading. In other words, students acquire English incidentally as they read to understand. It is well documented that ER is a key to reading skills whereby improving reading abilities and language proficiency.

ER benefits students in a number of ways. ER is recognized as a source of input for developing L2 proficiency. The pedagogic literature proposes a number of benefits of ER. Hedgcock & Ferris (2009, pp. 4-13) claimed that it:

- improves comprehension skills
- develops automaticity
- enhances background knowledge
- builds linguistic knowledge
- promotes confidence and motivation.

All in all, learning does occur through ER. It is also obvious that, given the limited hours of teaching in the classrooms, students will never be exposed to enough input. Out of class through ER is the most convenient and easiest way of learning. As Maley (2005, pp. 354-355) asserted that, "ER is the single most effective way to improve language proficiency". In essence, learning must be harnessed by means of reading.

Teachers' Roles

Most students will not do a lot of ER by themselves unless they are encouraged by teachers. Clearly, teachers play a part in promoting reading as much as possible, persuading students of its benefits. It is true that teachers should hold positive beliefs about ER and view it as a valid activity in the classroom, as well as showing students how to do it.

What teachers can do is to guide students to read extensively. It means that students select their reading materials to get pleasure, developing positive attitudes and finally language abilities. Teachers can help students choose the right books which students can read, enjoy and profit. They should be neither hard nor easy. Teachers can find out that students like and don't like by talking to each of them. To recommend good books, ask students to write book review and read it to the class. Also teachers can ask other students to talk about the books they have read and enjoyed reading. Besides this, encouraging students to exchange books with their classmates and paying regular visits to the library are necessary. Attention must be given to students with lower reading ability. They are easily frustrated and

need special guidance and assistance. Working with them, in group or individually, needs patience.

Another reason why ER is not done is because teachers are more comfortable to teacher-centered classroom. They do a lot of teaching. In contrast, they don't have to impart on any knowledge and have to guide students in ER. As Day & Bamford (1998, pp. 133-156) put it, "teachers not only don't pass on knowledge, but only guide students and participate with them as members of a reading community." As such, they may reluctant to relinquish control to students.

Implementations

Teachers who implement ER may set up a book corner in the classroom or the library where students can select a variety of books to read at their own pace and exchange as needed. ER has been strongly influenced by the principles proposed by Day (2002 , pp. 125-132) as follows;

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

In terms of implementing ER, Carrell (1989, pp,121-134) described 3 rules for successful ER teaching: (a) students should not use a dictionary; (b) if students encounter some unfamiliar words, students may simply skip them; and (c) students can quit in the middle of reading if they find the book uninteresting and can switch to another book. In addition, one follow-up activity is to have students interview each other through the use of question prompts. If students read a short story, the question prompts might include (Nation, 1997, pp. 9-15):

- What the story title is.....
- What kind of short story it is.....
- Whether the student liked the story.....
- Why the student liked it, or why not.....
- Whether the student would recommend the story.....

Who the story's author is.....

What the main message is in the story.....

In fact, there is no one way of implementing ER but the schemes should be developed by teachers to suit local circumstances (Hayashi, 1999, pp. 114-132). However, there are many drawbacks to the potential benefits discussed so far. Brog (2003, pp. 81-109) indicated problems as lack of reading materials, inadequate preparation of teachers, and a teacher-centered view of reading instruction. Moreover, Hedge (1985, pp. 181-204) said that silent reading is not seen as a good use of classroom time in many teaching situations. As Davis (1995, pp. 329-336) remarked, comprehensive reading agendas seem to be scanty in foreign and second language classrooms in higher education presumably because many language teachers at this level feel apprehensive about incorporating reading time into the course syllabus. That is, the main limitation seems to be that ER is not a legitimate use of time in learning, nor is it met the expectation of the teachers and students. Additionally, it is possible that students bring no motivation to read to the classroom. There are likely to be fluctuations in students' level of interest in reading.

Conclusion

To help students become better readers, it is widely believed that they become better readers by reading a lot, often and silently. For this to happen, teachers should encourage a lot of reading in and outside classrooms so students' motivation to read extensively is nurtured. Over a long period of time and effort on the part of teachers, notable improvement might be made in students' reading abilities. Reading is an important skill for students. With effective reading skills, students develop in all other areas of learning. The role of teachers is integral to success of students. Teachers should view themselves as a facilitator, helping each student read extensively. Just because teachers are reading does not mean that they are prepared to be a teacher of reading. In this way, teachers and students form a reading community, experiencing together the value and efficacy of extensive reading.

It can be claimed with confidence that teachers must ensure that students have access to the input they need by creating opportunities for them. This can be achieved most easily by providing ER as recommended by teachers on how to do so. Reading extensively and exposed to reading as a source of comprehensible input, students can enhance their reading skills and English proficiency.

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