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DESIGNING AN EXTENSIVE READING SCHEME: SOME CONSIDERATIONS

Introduction

Research on extensive reading has proved its positive effect in the improvement of students' language skills, such as: reading comprehension and speed, acquisition of vocabulary, phonetics, writing, examination performance, and students' attitudes towards learning a foreign language.

Despite this fact, in Mexico and many other countries, extensive reading has not been used on a systematic basis in many EFL classrooms, let alone implementing, maintaining, and running an extensive reading programme. Macalister (2008) stated that "extensive reading as a component of an English language teaching programme remains the exception rather than the rule", and continued stating "It tends to be present as a recommended, extracurricular activity". The underlying question is why it has not been considered as a fundamental part in language learning when it is very likely that without incorporating extensive reading into the curriculum, students are more likely to do other activities in their free time rather than read English books.

What is an extensive reading scheme (ERS)? How can it be integrated in an EFL programme? What principles must be considered while developing an ERS? What are the positive effects of using extensive reading? What are some problems we may encounter? What solutions have been found to these problems? These are some questions that may arouse when trying to design and start an ERS in an EFL program.

Defining an Extensive Reading Scheme (ERS)

Several authors have repeatedly pointed out the quantity of materials that learners must be exposed to; furthermore, they have promoted extensive reading as a comfortable and pleasurable activity, instead of one that stresses students.

Pino-Silva (2009) described ER as an activity that involves reading large amounts of L2 written material for pleasure with the purpose of learning to read by reading. Furthermore, in 2008, Brown described ER as "reading as much as possible and reading material at a comfortable level for the learner; in practice, for the majority of students, this means reading graded readers" (p. 241). Arnold (2009) described extensive reading as a means to an end, with a focus on meaning and general comprehension. The reader's goal is enjoyment and/or to gain information.

Colin Davis (1995) provides a more elaborated definition of an extensive reading programme (ERP), describing it as a supplementary class library scheme, attached to an English course, in which pupils are given the time, encouragement, and materials to read pleasurably, at their own level, as many books as they can, without the pressures of testing or marks.

Characteristics and principles of an ERS

In 1995, Davis included quantity and variety as key features of a functional extensive reading programme. Quality, on the other hand, didn't seem as important because books should be selected according to their attractiveness and relevance to students' lives, rather than literary merit.

On the other hand, Day and Bamford (1998) listed ten principles to consider when implementing an extensive reading scheme:

1. The reading material should be easy for the learner. Students should be able to read at a comfortable pace, rather than facing a lot of unknown words, which will very likely lead him to frustration and/or overuse of dictionary while reading. Allan (2009) considered graded readers as a useful way of motivating learners to read extensively, since it makes reading for accessible for the student by limiting the number of headwords.

2. A variety of reading material on a wide range of topics must be available. Davis (1995) suggested that ideally, each class should have a book box or book basket of different titles and topics, and colour-coded. Again, there is a difference on the number of books that should be available for students to choose from. While Davis (1995) states there should be at least 10 per student, Waring (n.d.) considers it is only necessary to have 3-4 books per learner to ensure sufficient variety, range of levels, and interest.

3. Learners should feel free to choose what they want to read. Due to the lack of resources, in many English classrooms, students are assigned the specific titles that must be read. However, in very few cases students are given a questionnaire to ask about their reading preferences or interests.

4. Learners should read as much as possible. Likewise to language acquisition, the more the student is exposed to the materials, the more benefits he will receive. Macalister (2008) proposes twenty minutes at the end of each class, but could be extended to 25 or even 30 minutes, depending on how many hours per week, and weeks there are in a course.

5. The purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information, and general understanding. Although in many cases, and as a part of Mexican culture, students are used to read what is assigned in class as homework and are usually more academic oriented texts, one of the main aims of extensive reading is reading for pleasure.

6. Reading is its own reward. Monitoring could be included in the programme; however, students should not feel pressured or threatened by tests or marks. Reading should become something so pleasurable, they will feel motivated to do so, and not only because of the mark they might receive.

7. Reading speed is usually faster than slower. Extensive reading will help students increase their reading speed; especially when books or materials are chosen accordingly to students' level.

8. Reading is individual and silent. It is important that students are able to feel comfortable by reading at their own pace, both inside and outside of the classroom. Additionally, it will allow more concentration for other students who are also engaging in their reading activity.

9. Teachers orient and guide their students. It is important that teachers set out goals concerning how much reading should be done and by when. Additionally, it is essential that all participants (teachers and learners) are aware of the programme's objectives.

10. The teacher is a role model of a reader. For an ERS to work effectively, teachers' full commitment is required. Therefore, it is very important that teachers are aware of the benefits of ER inside and outside of the classroom, and of course aware that they are a model being observed by their learners.

Waring (n.d.) proposed the following characteristics to be considered when setting up an ERS:

1. It must be an integral part of the school's curriculum.

2. It should raise the learner's reading ability and general English level and have knock-on effects on their writing skills, spelling, grammar, and speaking.

3. It should motivate learners to read, and learn from their reading.

4. It should have goals that set out how much reading should be done and by when.

5. A reading library from which learners can select their own texts is required.

6. It is necessary to have systems in place for cataloguing, labelling, checking out, recording and returning the reading materials.

7. It is necessary to have a variety of materials to read, not only graded readers and other simplified materials.

8. It should prove to teachers, parents and the administration that you take ER seriously.

9. It should have targets of both learner and program attainment that clearly show the success of the program.

10. It should be bigger and more resilient than one teacher and have sufficient support that it will continue indefinitely.

Although perhaps Waring's proposal is a little more explicit, in general terms, it summarizes down to Day and Bamford's ten principles. Evidently, extensive reading has been proven useful for different purposes, from academic achievement in language skills, general knowledge, etc., to a more positive attitude towards reading in general. However, for an ERS to be successful, it must meet the previous principles.

Results from previous research

Several recent studies in different contexts confirm the benefits of extensive reading in the teaching of a foreign language. For instance, Rosszell (2007) found out that members of the ER group in his study made considerable and sustained gains in both depth and breadth of lexical knowledge.

Al-Homoud and Schmitt (2009) studied Saudi EFL learners. The results showed that students who self-selected and read graded readers for pleasure improved at least as much as those students who received intensive instruction in reading, on attitudes towards the reading, reading comprehension, reading fluency, and vocabulary knowledge.

Arnold (2009) concluded that learners of German who participated in an online extensive reading programme gained self confidence and were motivated to read. They also developed into skilled language learners and were able to make conscious decisions about the reading process.

Brown (2009) states that even textbooks used for teaching English should encourage extensive reading so that more teachers and institutions can be persuaded to adopt extensive reading.

Benefits of Extensive Reading (ER)

Extensive reading is considered to provide students with many benefits in terms of their improvement in different language skills and also their attitude towards learning English. Therefore, some benefits of ER will be considered according to different authors.

Davis (1995) grouped several benefits he identified in his experience in the field under the following four headings:

1. Reading skills: Students came to see reading as a pleasurable activity, and at the same time, improved their overall comprehension skills.

2. Language skills: Students increased their vocabulary, sentence structure, writing, and speaking.

3. Personal growth: Students showed a more positive attitude towards studying and increased their understanding of people and different cultures.

4. Examinations: Students performed significantly better on exams.

Bell (1998) explained with more detail the benefits of extensive reading in the following ten aspects:

1. It can provide "comprehensible input": This idea was taken from Krashen's theory, stating extensive reading leads to language acquisition, provided there is an adequate exposure to the language, interesting material, and a relaxed, tension-free learning environment.

2. It can enhance learners' general language competence: Extensive reading provides learners with significant gains in different language skills.

3. It increases students' exposure to the language: Extensive reading provides learners with the possibility of being exposed to large quantities of reading materials, and therefore acquire new forms from the input.

4. It can increase knowledge of vocabulary: Research has suggested that traditional approaches to the teaching of vocabulary (words often being presented in related sets), is much less effective in vocabulary retention than simply getting students to spend more time on silent reading.

5. It can lead to improvement in writing: Several studies have proven that writing is one of the skills in which more significant improvement has been observed by using an ERP.

6. It can motivate learners to read: Since extensive reading programmes are adapted to students' needs and interests, it motivates students to read more.

7. It can consolidate previously learned language: Through the use of graded readers, students are provided with the opportunity of reinforcing and recycling language learnt previously.

8. It helps to build confidence with extended texts: Extensive reading is considered valuable in developing students' confidence and ability to face longer texts.

9. It encourages the exploitation of textual redundancy: According to insights from cognitive psychology. Word-by-word reading does not allow a good comprehension of the text due to the excess of visual signals the brain receives. Therefore, extensive reading is seen as the perfect means for recognizing and dealing with redundant elements in texts.

10. It facilitates the development of prediction skills: Extensive reading helps the reader decode, read between lines, and interpret the message as it unfolds while reading.

Problems and solutions

There are many advantages of designing and implementing an Extensive Reading Scheme in an EFL programme; however, there are also some problems that surface:

1. An extensive reading scheme costs a certain amount of money; it is necessary to come up with funding to buy graded readers, and consider follow-up funding for improving the stock and replace damaged or lost items.

2. An extensive reading scheme requires a lot of planning, organization, and collaborative work. For some teachers, a supplementary reading scheme or sets of class readers may be much easier to handle in the classroom.

3. Students and teachers' perceptions of integrating an extensive reading scheme into the language course programme could be a problem. Since in many cases, "silent reading" is not perceived as teaching, the demands of syllabus, constraints of time, competition from other activities, and possible doubts about the impact of extensive reading could become overwhelming for all of those involved.

According to Davis (1995), even without the luxury of donated book boxes or book baskets, it is quite possible for the teacher to set up an extensive reading programme, tailored to the needs of his or her pupils. Some useful tips to help teachers develop their own programmes are:

• *School Policy:* It would be very useful to present the ERS to the principal, faculty members, and teachers so that it becomes an agreed school policy, supported by everyone.

• *Time-tabling:* It is extremely important that extensive reading is built into the time-table or syllabus of each class.

• Finance: If there is not sufficient funding for having books available in each class, another possibility could be using resources in library/self access centers.

• *The Books:* It is necessary to consider the level of students when choosing/suggesting materials students will be reading. Also, it would be very valuable to consider online books, which provide students the opportunity of having access to a wider range of topics.

• *Grading / Testing:* Students must be monitored in some way, even though they may not receive a mark for doing it, perhaps through an online discussion board, speaker's corner, journal entry, etc.

• *System:* It will be necessary to consider a book management system to control the checking-in, checking out of books, perhaps one that is number and color coded according to its level.
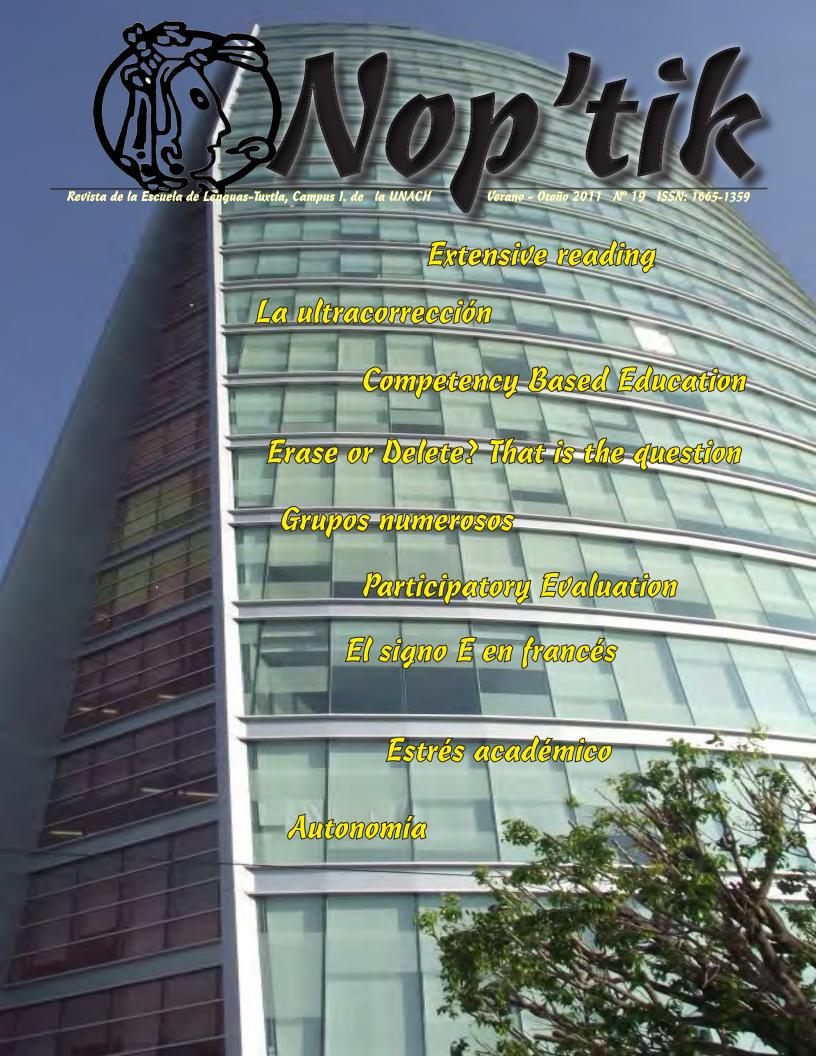
Conclusions

Setting up an extensive reading scheme implies a lot of work, which is probably one of the main reasons why there are so few. However, if it is well planned, structured, implemented and evaluated, it will ease the process. Something that must be considered when designing an extensive reading scheme is it must necessarily be tailored according to the needs of students, considering local circumstances, and also fit in with the goals, aims and objectives of the English programme.

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Nop'tik

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EDITORIAL

En esta edición, estamos reanudando con la publicación de nuestra revista. *Nop'tik* sigue siendo un espacio de discusión y publicación de las inquietudes de los profesores de lenguas y formadores de profesores de lenguas.

Esta vez, abordamos una abanico de temas que abarcan the implementation of extensive readings in classes in order to explore what happens during that process; también se explora la problemática de la ultracorrección, fenómeno observado en los escritos de los estudiantes desde la perspectiva de la sociolingüística. Then, we have a powerfull strand shown and namned as the competency based education, which redesigns our way of teaching and also training teachers. And what to say about the big dilema when facing the case to erase or delete, when confronted with students'writings.

Por otro lado, se proponen pistas concretas, inspiradas en la experiencia de los docentes en el terreno al encontrarse en la situación de dar clases a grupos numerosos. As a consequence of contemporary time, it seems that evaluation has evolved from traditional into one participatory.

Pour ce qui est de résoudre certains problèmes de classe: dans ce numéro nous abordons une des particularités du français son signe diacritique **E** et son utilisation dans des activités de classe. A esta E, se le hace eco la E del **E**strés que padeecen los estudiantes, síntoma cada vez preocupante. ahora bién solo nos queda desearles y confiar en que su lectura sea de utilidad y reiterarle que ... bienvenidas son sus contribuciones futuras.

Rachid Mekki Castillo

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