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Chapter 8
Extensive Reading and Listening in the L2 Classroom

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8.1 Introduction

There is now a wide consensus among L2 researchers and practitioners that input is a key factor in language learning. Research to date has provided sufficiently convincing empirical evidence that when L2 learners are frequently exposed to a large amount of language input, their word recognition skills improve, their vocabulary expands, their ability to process oral and written text fluently increases and their overall proficiency also goes up. Harmer (2003), for example, writes, "Students need to be exposed to the English language if they want to learn it, and one of the best ways of doing this is through listening (p. 29)."

Many scholars (e.g., Day & Bamford, 1998; Maley, 2005; Nuttall, 1982, 2008) have suggested that another excellent way of providing language input is through reading. Summarizing research findings on the benefits of extensive reading (ER), Bamford & Day (2004, p.1) conclude:

> Good things happen to students who read a great deal in the foreign language. Research studies show they become better and more confident readers, they write better, their listening and speaking abilities improve, and their vocabularies become richer. In addition, they develop positive attitudes toward and increased motivation to study the new language.

While the benefits of ER have now been documented and widely acknowledged (Mori, 2015; Waring & McLean, 2015), very little is known about the benefits of extensive listening (EL). L2 listening researchers have only recently begun to investigate the effects of EL on language

learning. Although the number of empirical studies is relatively small, there are encouraging indications that L2 learners who are engaged in extensive listening can also enjoy numerous language learning benefits, including improved ability to perceive and parse L2 text (Renandya, 2012; Wang & Renandya, 2012), increased listening fluency (Chang, 2014), and enhanced overall listening comprehension skills (Onoda, 2014; Zhang, 2005).

This chapter first looks at ER and EL separately, highlighting the language learning benefits of the two approaches to language learning. It then discusses ways of implementing the two together in input-poor L2 contexts where the quantity and quality of the target language input tends to be severely limited. In these situations, the main source of input comes from the classroom teachers and the coursebooks, which, while useful, tends to have limited impact on L2 learning. By implementing both approaches, L2 learners could be exposed to far richer and greater quantity of language input, which in turn would have a more pronounced salutary effect on their L2 learning.

8.2 Extensive Reading

What is ER?

ER is defined in many different ways, and it is not always easy to find one definition that captures all of the essential elements of ER. This is particularly true when ER is defined in the context of a particular research study. Researchers often define ER in ways that fit the specific purposes and contexts of their own studies. However, a survey of the literature shows that most ER definitions include at least three elements that most ER scholars consider crucial when discussing the concept, i.e., amount of reading, focus on meaning and general understanding and faster reading rate.

Carrell and Carson's (1997) definition provides a good starting point where the three elements above are included: "extensive reading … generally involves rapid reading of large quantities of material or longer readings (e.g., whole books) for general understanding, with the focus generally on the meaning of what is being read than on the language" (pp. 49-50). Other researchers have included another key element, which describes the difficulty level of the reading materials, which they all agree will have to be within L2 learners' independent level. Thus, according to Grabe and Stoller (2001), ER is defined as an "approach to the teaching and learning of reading in which learners read large amounts of material that are within their linguistic competence" (p. 286).

Since the effect of ER is not immediate, L2 learners are normally expected to invest a rather substantial amount of time on reading. This can take up anywhere from six to twelve months

and beyond. In fact, in a comprehensive survey of research on extensive reading (Krashen, 2004) found that the effect of ER is likely to be stronger and more durable when students do ER for one whole year. A recent meta-analysis on ER research by Nakashini (2015) confirmed Krashen's earlier findings, i.e., that longer term ER studies produce a more substantial effect size. On the issue of length of ER instruction, Grabe (2009) stated that "reading extensively, when done consistently over a long period of time, leads to better reading comprehension as well as improved abilities in several other language areas" (p. 328).

Because the language learning benefits of ER emerge only after students have read for an extended period of time, motivation becomes a key factor here. Less motivated students and those who are initially motivated but are unable to sustain their motivation often drop out of ER programmes and fail to reap the benefits of ER. Some ER scholars (e.g., Mori, 2015), therefore, include motivation in their definition, arguing that unless the students read interesting and enjoyable materials that can satisfy their motivational needs, they will soon get bored and stop reading. Mori suggests that since reading in a foreign language is a cognitively and linguistically challenging activity, "motivation is essential to reading extensively" (p. 129).

To summarize, ER involves L2 students reading large amounts of motivating and engaging materials which are linguistically appropriate over a period of time where they read with a reasonable speed for general understanding, with a focus on meaning rather than form.

What are the language learning benefits of ER?

There are numerous benefits associated with ER (Extensive Reading Foundation, 2011; Jacobs & Farrell, 2012). When students read extensively over a period of time, their reading fluency improves and their ability to comprehend texts also increases. Discussed below are more specific benefits students can get from ER (Renandya & Jacobs, 2002).

First and foremost, ER has been shown to enhance vocabulary development. When students do a lot of reading, they have multiple meaningful encounters over time with words and word patterns. Over that time, their vocabulary size tends to increase and they can also develop a deeper understanding of the words. Words learned in this way can be incorporated into students' speech and writing (Nation 2008; 2015).

Second, research suggests that students who do ER gain a better grasp of the grammar of the target language. In formal classroom settings, students are introduced to grammar rules and conventions, which, while useful, are of limited value. They know the rules but often find that they cannot use them for real communication. In ER, students repeatedly encounter a variety of grammatical patterns in contexts that allow them to develop a better sense of how these grammatical patterns are used to communicate meaningful messages. Not surprisingly,

students who read a great deal develop a deeper sense of how grammar works in context, which in turn may enable them to use this grammar for real communication (Ellis, 2005).

Third, ER helps L2 learners to read at a faster rate (Day & Bamford, 1998; Nuttall, 1982). Faster reading speed is important for fluent reading. When students read too slowly, they will not have enough cognitive resources to comprehend the overall message of the text. ER can help them develop their word recognition skills, enabling them to move over words in meaningful chunks with sufficient speed, with ease and with greater comprehension.

Fourth, as students read a variety of reading material as part of ER, they become more knowledgeable about many different topics. Research suggests that successful reading requires both language and content knowledge. ER not only helps students develop language skills, but also expands their knowledge base. They know more about different subjects and how these are presented in different text types (e.g., recounts, expositions, and narratives). With increased background knowledge, students are able to read a diverse range of topics more fluently and with greater comprehension.

Fifth, students who do ER can develop higher confidence and motivation. L2 students, especially those with low proficiency, often find learning English a frustrating experience. They often have to deal with reading passages that are several levels beyond their current proficiency level. These students often report that their confidence and motivation level becomes lower and lower as time goes by and they finally lose their interest in learning English. ER can be a confidence and motivation booster for this group of students. When they read materials that are within, or slightly below, their competence, they can read with greater enjoyment and comprehension, thus helping them become more confident and motivated readers.

Sixth, ER helps students develop more positive attitudes towards reading. Students who read in quantity and enjoy what they read often report having more positive attitudes towards reading and becoming more eager to go beyond their comfort zone and explore a wider variety of texts, including more challenging texts. Their positive attitudes often have positive influences on the other skill areas of language learning, such as listening, speaking, and writing. They become more confident listeners, speakers, and writers.

Finally, there is a good chance that with time students can develop a healthy reading habit. A good reading habit is the ultimate goal of a reading programme. Students who can read with confidence and a great sense of enjoyment are likely to develop a healthy reading habit. Once they have developed this habit, they are more likely to continue to read extensively on their own without the need for the teacher to continually encourage them to do their reading.

8.3 Extensive Listening

What is EL?

EL is similar to ER in many ways; in fact, EL has been referred to as “the sister to Extensive Reading” (Extensive Reading Foundation, 2011, p. 12). Just like ER where the goal is to build reading fluency, EL aims to help develop listening fluency. Fluency in listening allows L2 students to process spoken text with greater ease and accuracy. In order to build fluency in listening, students will need to do a large quantity of extensive listening so that they can recognize words they hear effortlessly, at the same time understanding the overall meaning of the texts to which they are listening. As with ER, the process of building listening fluency also takes time and effort; in addition, the other language learning benefits also emerge with time. Thus, rephrasing the definition of ER in the previous section and replacing the word ‘reading’ with ‘listening’, we arrive at the following definition:

> EL involves students *listening* to large amounts of motivating and engaging materials which are linguistically appropriate over a period of time where they *listen* with a reasonable speed for general understanding, with a focus on meaning rather than form.

A related concept that has recently emerged in the literature is extensive viewing, which refers to students watching television, movies, and videos for L2 learning purposes (Siyanova-Chanturia & Webb, this volume; Webb, 2014). Extensive viewing of videos, especially short ones, is a great source of L2 input and vocabulary development. Because of the rich visual elements that provide contextual supports, L2 students find it easier to comprehend videos than audio recordings. In this chapter, the term, extensive listening, is used to include the listening of audio recordings as well as the viewing of videos.

What are the language learning benefits of EL?

Given that ER and EL are informed by the same principle, i.e., exposure to a large amount of comprehensible input facilitates language learning, one could expect the language learning benefits of these two approaches to be largely similar. In fact, L2 researchers who have investigated the effects of EL typically used ER as a basis for discussing the principles and benefits of EL on L2 learning (e.g., Onoda, 2014; Renandya & Farrell, 2011). Drawing a parallel between reading and listening, Renandya & Farrell (2011), for example, claim that just like reading, which is “is best learned through reading (Adams, 1998, p. 73), … listening is best learned through listening” (p. 56).

Drawing on insights from the literature on ER, Renandya (2011) outlined the potential learning benefits of EL, some of which are highlighted below. It should be noted, however, that since research into EL is still in its infancy, the language learning benefits discussed below should be treated as provisional rather than as strongly evidence-based. Firmer conclusions can be obtained when sufficient empirical evidence is available.

First, EL can enhance learners' ability to deal with speech rate. One of the major problems in students' acquisition L2 listening relates to fast speech rate (Renandya, 2011; Wang & Renandya, 2012; Zeng, 2007). Students often cannot understand much of what they hear, not because the content is difficult or the language is too hard, but because the speakers speak too fast for L2 learners to process the incoming data. One of the reasons is that what is considered 'normal' speech by more proficient listeners is often perceived as being too fast by beginning or lower proficiency students. Repeated listening practice via EL is believed to gradually help L2 listeners become accustomed to listening to speech at native speaker rate (Chang, this volume).

Second, it is thought that EL can improve students' oral word recognition skill. Research has shown that L2 students' listening vocabulary is normally smaller than their reading vocabulary. Students may know words in written text, but they may not be able to recognize these words in speech. Wang and Renandya (2012) reported that this phenomenon is quite common among EFL students in China, even among those at tertiary level. Tertiary students in their study recounted being unable to 'catch' words in speech that they already could recognise while reading. The teacher respondents in the Wang and Renandya study suggested that repeated exposure to spoken language via EL could help students develop automaticity in sound-script relationships.

Third, EL can enhance students' bottom-up listening skills. In normal speech, words often take on different forms from when they are said in isolation. A variety of sound blending such as assimilation (e.g., on course – ong course; in class – ing class), contractions (e.g., want to – wanna; going to – gonna), resyllabification (e.g., walked into – walk tin to; went in – wen tin) commonly found in connected speech are known to cause listening problems (Chang, this volume; Renandya & Farrell, 2011). Sensitizing the students to these speech blending phenomena is the first step in helping students deal with them; the next step would be to engage them in frequent practice until they can mark the boundaries between words more clearly and automatically.

A fourth benefit of EL for L2 learners relates to increased familiarity with common language features of spoken form of the target language. Spoken language is different from written language. Spoken language often contains language features not found in written language such as fillers (e.g., you know, er, well, ok) or fixed phrases (e.g., how is it going? got it? see you later; to tell you the truth and if you don't mind, etc.). Spoken language also tends to be

less formal or colloquial, and coloured by the presence of slang or non-standard grammar and vocabulary (e.g., what do you got?, I ain't got nobody) more often than is written language. Repeated encounters with these features can help L2 learners comprehend spoken text more efficiently, and once these features have become internalized and incorporated into their developing linguistic system, students can gradually use these features in their own speech (see Chang, this volume, for further details).

Another important potential benefit is that EL can provide L2 learners many opportunities to experience a higher and deeper level of language comprehension than when they listen to a recording once or twice in a listening lesson. What we want our students to experience is a higher and deeper degree of comprehension when they listen to spoken text; it has been suggested that this type of comprehension is more likely to lead to acquisition (Chang, this volume; Dupuy, 1999; Krashen, 1996). Dupuy (1999), for example, reported that for her lower proficiency learners of French as a foreign language, a higher degree of comprehension (95% and above) is possible only after they listened to the same listening material three or four times.

Finally, extensive exposure to oral language can result in higher overall proficiency in the language. Students who are engaged in extensive listening have reported improvements not only in their listening comprehension, but also in their vocabulary, speaking, reading skills as well as higher confidence in the language (Elley & Mangubhai, 1983; Zhang, 2005).

Thus, we can see here that, like ER, EL has the potential to build L2 listeners' listening fluency and comprehension. Through EL, L2 listeners can expect to become more fluent in listening, i.e., their ability to recognize spoken words, phrases and sentences increases and, because of this, their ability to comprehend the overall meaning of the text also goes up. Fluent listening can only develop after learners have ample experience with meaning-focused listening practice via EL (Renandya & Farrell, 2011).

8.4 Principles for Implementing ER and EL

Implementing ER/EL programmes requires time, commitment and careful planning (Extensive Reading Foundation, 2011). Starting ER/EL programmes is not hard to do, but sustaining them for one whole academic year and beyond can be challenging. Discussed below are six principles that could be used to guide successful implementation of ER/EL programmes.

Principle 1: The objectives of the ER/EL programmes should be made clear to everyone involved.

The importance of this first principle cannot be overemphasized. Without clear, well-articulated objectives, the programmes are not likely to succeed. A good objective should minimally describe the expected learning outcomes (e.g., a faster reading/listening rate in terms of number of words per minute), the resources needed to achieve the objectives (e.g., funding and personnel needed to oversee the programme, the amount and type of listening and reading materials) that should be made available, the timeframe needed to achieve the objectives (e.g., one academic year), the way the programme is to be carried out (e.g., as an out of class activity), the instruments to measure the degree of success of the programme. Once the objectives have been formulated, all stakeholders including teachers, library staff, administrators, students and their parents will need to be briefed and more importantly encouraged to support the programme.

Principle 2: The programmes should ensure that students read and listen in quantity.

Quantity is perhaps the most crucial factor that contributes to L2 students' language development. Research has shown that students who do the most reading in an ER programme enjoy the most benefits, as reflected in their higher improvements in their reading ability and overall language learning gains (Renandya, Jacobs & Rajan, 1999). Given the importance of quantity, 'reading large amounts of text' is considered to be one of the 'core essential attributes of ER' (Waring & McLean, 2015, pp. 161-162). By extension, listening to large amounts of spoken text should also be actively promoted and encouraged in the programmes.

But how much reading and listening text is needed to build fluency in processing written and oral text and to acquire the language elements (e.g., grammatical patterns, vocabulary) found in the material? The general consensus seems to be that the more reading and listening students do, the more benefits they will get. A more specific guideline for ER is suggested by Nation and Wang (1999) who recommend that learners need to read at least a book a week. As ER books are typically short graded readers that learners can read fairly fast over a few days, Nation and Wang's suggestion seems sensible. Obviously, there is an urgent need to do research in this area in order to gain more precise and specific information about the absolute minimal amount of reading and listening that students need to do. This is particularly important for EL, because to date no one has looked at the issue of how much (or how little) listening or viewing is required before EL can produce positive, facilitative effects on language learning.

Principle 3: The programmes should make available reading and listening materials which are within students' linguistic competence.

Materials for ER and EL should be at the right level. Materials for EL in particular should be pitched at or even below students' current level of competence. As mentioned earlier, L2

students' listening vocabulary is typically lower compared to their reading vocabulary, so they are likely to appreciate listening to 'easier' texts where the rate is not too fast and the text contains familiar vocabulary and grammatical constructions. The key here is that the students should be able to comprehend the materials on their own, ideally without any external help from the teacher. Ridway (2000) argues convincingly that our students "need to practice listening comprehension, not listening *in*comprehension" (p. 184) as is often the case in intensive listening, where students often have to listen to text that is too difficult to comprehend. The use of easier materials will facilitate students' enjoyment of large amounts of comprehensible language.

Principle 4: Teachers should provide on-going support to every student, especially those who need help most with their reading and listening.

Teachers play an important role in the success of the ER/EL programmes. Struggling readers and listeners in particular need more attention, as they start from a lower base and may not be able to follow the faster pace of the other students in the programme. The teacher can meet these students regularly, giving them words of encouragement, helping them choose suitable materials, pairing them with their more capable peers for a buddy reading/listening programme and teaching them useful strategies for learning new words they encountered in their reading and listening.

Principle 5: Students' motivation should be kept high throughout the programmes.

As reading and listening are challenging activities for L2 students, it is not easy for them to sustain their motivation over the long term. They may initially respond positively to the programme, but as the novelty of the programme wears off and other school-related work begins to keep them occupied, they may soon lose interest and give ER and ER low priority. There are many things that teachers can do to keep students' motivation high for the duration of the programme. Motivational talks by well-known personalities who benefitted from doing ER and EL could be organized to boost students' motivation. Book fairs could be organized in which well-known authors share their experience writing their award-winning books. Older students who have gone through the ER and EL programme successfully could also be invited to share their happy and frustrating experiences. More novel ideas for boosting students' motivation could also be tried out, including exempting students from taking a mid-term test if they read and listen to a number of audio books, exempting students who read the a specified number of books or viewed a specified number of English movies from having to do extra homework assignments that the rest of the class have to do.

Principle 6: Teachers should encourage students to do simultaneous reading and listening.

This principle has some obvious benefits. Simultaneous reading and listening activities such as reading-while-listening can provide an important support to help lower proficiency L2 learners achieve greater comprehension. As was mentioned earlier, L2 listeners are often unable to recognize words that they already know. Reading while listening can help L2 learners match the spoken with the written words, thus allowing them to process the text more efficiently (Chang, 2011). Chang's (2011) study showed that reading while listening to audiobooks had a positive effect on her Taiwanese EFL students' listening fluency and also vocabulary development. In her study, students in the reading-while-listening group outperformed the control group on a listening comprehension test and a vocabulary test.
It should be noted, however, that once students have developed a higher proficiency in the language, they should be weaned away from an over-reliance on simultaneous reading and listening and encouraged to do independent reading or listening.

> *Principle 7: Teachers should provide interesting and enjoyable post-reading and listening activities.*

Reading interesting books or watching fascinating video movies can be a motivating experience for students. Because of this, some writers have suggested that there is no real need for teachers to further motivate their students, as the joyful experience of reading good books and viewing a great movie is already a pleasantly rewarding experience. But repeated observations have shown that interesting and enjoyable post-reading and listening activities can provide a much needed boost to further enhance students' motivation. Of particular value are activities that provide students with opportunities to share their views, opinions, feelings about what stories they have just read, listened to or viewed on the Internet. Some of the popular activities with L2 students include asking students to come up with alternative endings to the story, to retell the most hilarious parts of the story, to design a poster that captures the gist of the story (Bamford & Day, 2004).

8.5 Problems and Concerns

Although input-based learning stands on sound theoretical underpinnings, and the benefits of extensive exposure to meaningful language have received strong empirical support, ER and EL have not always received the kind of support that they deserve. While many ELT practitioners seem to readily acknowledge the usefulness of ER and ER in L2 learning, many are constrained by practical concerns that prevent them from fully adopting ER and EL in their teaching (Brown, 2009; Renandya, Hu & Yu, forthcoming; Renandya & Jacobs, 2002). Below some of the key concerns are discussed.

- Schools often have limited resources to implement ER and EL. Lack of funding is often cited as a key reason for the lack of suitable reading and listening materials. For the more well-resourced schools, the administrators may not be fully informed about the salutary benefits of ER and EL and consequently do not allocate sufficient resources for the programme. Of course, teachers can turn to online reading and listening materials, which are widely and freely available, but for some teachers lack of Internet access and their busy schedules prevent them from allocating time to put together appropriate and useful materials for ER and EL.

- ER and EL are often implemented as an out-of-class or extracurricular activity where students are expected to self-select their reading and listening materials and read them in their free time. In the case of ER, for example, the literature has documented reports of successful large scale ER projects (e.g., Davis, 1995; Elley & Mangubhai, 1983; Rob & Kano, 2013); however, smaller-scale, teacher initiated ER programmes are not as successful. In fact, after the initial enthusiasm, teachers may begin to feel overwhelmed by the amount of work related to the running of the programme. As Brown (2009) notes, “The main practical concerns regarding ER are to do with cost, lack of time, monitoring students’ reading, managing the library of books, guiding students to choose appropriate books, and getting students engaged in reading ” (p. 240).

- The benefits of ER and EL can only be felt after a rather lengthy period of time. It is not uncommon that the tangible benefits begin to appear after six months or sometimes longer. Since teachers are pragmatic people, they naturally expect to see the benefits of ER and EL reflected in increased exam scores. When this does not happen after a few weeks or months, their commitment to implementing ER and EL may begin to wane, and they may instead invest their time and effort on the more traditional approaches to teaching such as intensive reading and listening. These approaches are felt by some teachers to yield more immediate and tangible results.

- To get students started on ER and EL, teachers often use curriculum time to provide students with opportunities to do silent reading and/or listening for a period of time. In the case of ER, during a USSR (Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading) session in the classroom, some teachers may feel awkward because they often view teaching as involving talking to and interacting with students, asking questions, explaining language points, arranging students to get students to do individual or group tasks. Day and Bamford (1998) make an excellent point when they say that when teachers walk into the classroom, they like to verbally engage the students in various teacher-guided activities; thus, being silent during a reading and listening lesson is something teachers (and students) do not normally associate with good teaching practice.

- A key concern that teachers and administrators share about ER and EL relates to the issue of legitimacy. Students doing independent silent reading and listening in class with the teachers silently observing them (or reading/listening along with them) are often "not perceived as a class learning, let alone being taught, both by the students themselves and the school administration" (Prowse, 2002, p 144). Not surprisingly, ER and EL are often seen as an optional extra that plays a peripheral role.

The last point above deserves elaboration. For a wider adoption in schools, ER and EL have to be perceived by stakeholders as a legitimate activity. Unless teachers, students and other key school personnel are convinced that ER and EL are credible learning activities that can lead to significant language learning gains, schools may be reluctant to implement ER and EL. One way to deal with the issue of legitimacy would be to integrate ER and EL into coursebooks. Brown (2009) argues that coursebooks can provide legitimacy because they are often seen as "powerful legitimizing tools, for teachers, for learners, and for institutions" (p. 240). Fortunately, some coursebooks have incorporated ER ideas by including longer, more interesting and linguistically suitable reading and listening materials and other activities that encourage out of class reading, listening and viewing (Renandya, Hu & Yu, forthcoming).

8.6 Conclusion

This chapter has looked at ER and EL, discussed their key characteristics and language learning benefits, outlined some of the key principles for implementing these two approaches in L2 learning and also discussed some legitimate concerns that teachers might have about ER and EL. While it is important to acknowledge these concerns and to find ways to overcome these problems, the evidence in favour of ER and EL is so compelling that it would be remiss of us not to give ER and EL a respectable place in our teaching. We believe that when ER and EL are implemented together, their synergistic effect is likely to be far greater than the effect on ER or EL alone.

More thirty years ago, Christine Nuttall (1982), a noted L2 reading specialist, made a bold claim when she said "the best way to improve one's knowledge of a foreign language is to go and live among its speakers. The next best way is to read extensively in it" (p. 168). Some twenty years later, Alan Maley (2005), a renowned ELT expert, reiterated Nuttal's claim and went one step further, saying that ER is perhaps "the single most important way to improve language proficiency" (p. 354). In light of our discussion about the possible synergistic effects of ER and EL, it is perhaps not unreasonable to rephrase the two quotes above into this: The best way to improve language proficiency is to engage L2 students in extensive reading and listening.

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