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Getting ER Into the Curriculum: No More Excuses!

Extensive reading (ER) is a research and theory–supported approach for language and reading development in an additional language, yet its implementation is limited, particularly in English-dominant contexts. This article addresses many of the uncertainties and perceived obstacles to adding ER to a language curriculum. After reviewing relevant aspects of L2 learning in general, L2 reading more specifically, and the compelling results of recent research on ER itself, the author provides suggestions regarding the implementation of ER. These include addressing issues of the teacher's role, ER materials, and assessment.

Harold Palmer (1968, cited in Day & Bamford, 1998) is credited with first using the expression "extensive reading" (ER) to refer to "an approach to language teaching in which learners read a lot of easy material in the new language" (Bamford & Day, 2004, p. 1). Palmer contrasted this with "intensive reading," by which he meant the close study of texts using dictionaries and grammars to ascertain and retain the meanings and language of the text. In contrast, ER focuses on the content meaning with language learning becoming a wonderful side benefit. While it seems uncontestable that to become a good reader one has to read a lot, Williams and Moran (1989) point out that most class time, including reading class time, is spent on almost anything but reading itself. Although theoretical and empirical evidence of the value of ER in a second language curriculum, and in particular the reading curriculum, continues to grow, ER remains what Richard Day and Julian Bamford call "an approach less taken" (1998, p. 3). Although the biannual Extensive Reading World Congress includes about 400 participants from more than 20 countries, with up to 200 peer-reviewed presentations, and the number of ER affiliates is growing in Asia and Southeast Asia, ER implementa-

tion is still quite limited globally and especially in English-dominant contexts such as the US.

A variety of reasons are likely for this oversight, but perhaps foremost among them is the false notion that students in second language (SL) contexts already have unlimited and sufficient access to SL input, thus making ER superfluous. If only this were true, but as most of us have experienced, SL students tend to spend much of their time out of class with their primary language compatriots. To add to this problem, the economic and political forces that determine immigrant and international student enrollment in US language programs have more recently resulted in many classrooms with considerable if not complete primary language homogeneity, much like classrooms in foreign language (FL) contexts.

Then there are several obstacles related to the understanding of the principles and practices of ER. Based on comments I have heard and received on ER proposals for conference presentations, the specter of basal readers is still alive in some minds, and the idea that ER programs often use "graded readers" yields an immediate rejection of the entire approach. Although ER readers are sometimes modified versions of original texts, the means by which this is done today is highly sophisticated, being based on vocabulary and text research supported by corpora analytical tools. More important, though, high-quality original language-learner literature is growing at a fast pace, and not just in English.

The confusion about what ER means is not limited to the outdated approach to reading based on basal readers. I have attended many a session at state and international conferences eager to hear about an ER program or ER research only to discover that the speakers have used ER to define a way of reading that is not ER. For example, sometimes it is used to refer to the reading of longer texts, which is better described as "extended reading," or it has been used to label reading a lot in one subject area, which is known as "narrow reading" in the research literature. Other reading schemes have also been conflated with ER, such as "sustained silent reading," "Stop, Drop and Read," or "free voluntary reading." While each of these does share certain characteristics with ER, none meets the criteria that have been used to define ER in research and practice for several decades now.

Another factor that constrains administrators and instructors from adopting ER as a viable component of a reading curriculum is the current emphasis on testing and assessment, which tends to focus on the results of explicit instruction since they are more easily measured than the results of implicit learning. Finally, even for those who may be convinced of the efficacy of this approach to language acquisi-

tion and reading development, yet another concern may linger, which is whether students, parents, and administrators will understand why students are reading in school and assume that the teacher is lazy or incompetent.

In this article, I hope to provide information and evidence from research, theory, and practice that will remove or at least reduce the impact of these perceived obstacles. First, I will review relevant aspects of L2 learning in general and L2 reading more specifically. This will be followed by a review of recent research on ER itself, which provides compelling evidence for the efficacy of ER in reading and language development. Finally, I will offer some suggestions regarding the implementation of ER, including recent developments in ER materials and resources.

L2 Learning and Reading

In spite of the differences between first and second language learning, certain aspects of similarity are often underrepresented in second/foreign language learning contexts. Of these, the role of implicit learning is one that seldom gets mentioned in methods courses or shows up in curricula, and yet it is the primary explanation of how we learn our primary languages, and it plays a significant role in how we learn additional languages. The interface of explicit and implicit memory, learning, and knowledge continues to be investigated, but the advent of high-speed computing and big data analyses along with fMRI technology has led to a better understanding of the roles of each type of learning. Nick Ellis (2005, 2008) points out, for example, that it is now known that for simple language features or conversely, complex features that are salient with a limited number of variables, explicit instruction leading to explicit knowledge can be very useful. However, when material to be learned is "more randomly structured with a large number of variables and when the important relationships are not obvious, then explicit instructions only interfere and an implicit mode of learning is more effective" (p. 5). Furthermore, "driven by exposure to a massive amount of data, utterances that exhibit statistical regularities at many levels," language acquisition by explicit means only will likely never be sufficient to attain adequate proficiency for work or school (Seidenberg, 2017, chapter 5, para. 9). According to Mark Seidenberg, a neuroscientist, psychologist, and reading researcher, this volume of input, or as he describes it, "statistical learning," occurs when we are using language for a variety of purposes and are not focused on the language system directly:

> Statistical learning takes place without conscious awareness or in-

> tention. It is a kind of implicit, subconscious learning, a complement to the explicit learning with conscious awareness that occurs with overt instruction or listening to a TED talk. The two types of learning are different but linked because both result in changes of the neural systems for long-term memory. Well-timed and targeted instruction is effective because it accelerates the acquisition of this enormous data structure. Explicit instruction and conscious effort are the visible tip of the iceberg; statistical learning is the mass below the surface. (Seidenberg, 2017, chapter 5, para. 9)

There is no intention by those who advocate for ER to undervalue explicit instruction, but rather to consider how we might increase the amount of implicit learning to which our students must have access. Easy, self-selected reading perfectly fits the need for large amounts of accessible language data for language acquisition, and it perfectly fits the role of building comprehension and fluency in the highly complex language task of reading. Hudson (2007) says reading is "at least as magic as pulling rabbits from hats" (p. 7), and Seidenberg (2017) describes this complex phenomenon as that which truly distinguishes human cognition from that of all other species. SL reading expert William Grabe (2017) noted that the necessary reading skills of automatic word recognition, rapid sentence processing, a large sight-word vocabulary, skilled strategic processing, and fluency will only develop through a large amount of engaged reading involving deliberate practice. Of course, individuals who are learning to read for the first time, whether in their primary or another language, are not ready for ER. First, they need explicit instruction to make the initial connections between phonology and orthography. Also, for those who already know how to read in their primary language, explicit instruction for initial vocabulary learning and to enhance noticing is essential when beginning to learn a new language, but after that implicit learning will be necessary to achieve high levels of fluency and comprehension.

Even if reading proficiency is not the primary purpose of a language learner, the foundational necessity of a large vocabulary to accomplish anything with language is enough reason to include ER in a language curriculum. Communicative classroom activity and direct classroom instruction can certainly contribute to vocabulary growth, but there simply is not enough time to ensure that learners acquire even the 3,000 most frequently used words in English. These words account for at least 80% of oral and written language, and for which rapid word recognition is necessary to communicate with fluency. Unfortunately, an efficient reader needs to know 98% of the words in

a text (Nation, 2006). The less frequent words typically will not show up in classroom interaction, but only through reading, and only if the reading promotes optimally spaced rehearsals, or "meetings," with the vocabulary in varied contexts.

What the ER Research Shows

A body of quality research is growing on the benefits of ER for language learners. Although ER research has a history extending from the 1980s, not all of the studies provide sufficient information to evaluate the claims, and others do not account for all the variables that pertain to an investigation of what has been a primarily out-of-class activity and one that promotes implicit learning. Nonetheless, benefits of ER have been demonstrated for many aspects of SL learning and for SL learners. In a variety of mostly FL contexts, studies show that students who engage in regular ER have better reading comprehension than those who do not (Ewert, 2011, 2012; Lightbown, Halter, White, & Horst, 2002; Robb & Kano, 2013; Suk, 2017), better reading rates (Beglar & Hunt, 2014; Beglar, Hunt, & Kite, 2012), richer vocabulary (Horst, 2009; Horst, Cobb, & Meara, 1998; Lao & Krashen, 2000; Pulido, 2009; Waring & Takaki, 2003), improved listening ability (Robb & Kano, 2013), and writing (Im, Ahn, & Yoon, 2010; Tsang, 1996). Of great importance also are the studies that indicate increases in motivation among students who engage in ER (Al-Homoud & Schmitt, 2009; Suk, 2016; Takase, 2007, 2009). After all, one of the major problems with becoming a good reader is that language learners do not like to read in the target language because it is hard, so they do not read, which further increases the resistance to reading in what Nuttall (1982) called the "vicious cycle of reading." Student motivation is critical since implicit learning is based on the high volume of language input, and studies have shown that significant gains are observed after learners have read more than 200,000 words (Suk, 2016).

Jeon and Day's (2017) meta-analysis of ER research highlighted some additional insights. They found that ER appears to be more effective with adult learners than with children and adolescents, and web-based stories had a greater effect than paper books. They also found that ER as part of a curriculum showed the highest mean effect for all types of ER. Interestingly, they found that ER seemed to have higher effects in FL settings than in SL settings, but this may be the result of so few quality studies of ER in SL contexts. (A lengthy bibliography of ER research is maintained by members of the Extensive Reading Foundation and can be found on their website: erfoundation.org.) The student comments interspersed below, however, come from a study of international students in a US IEP (Ewert, 2012).

Putting ER Into Practice

ER has been implemented in a considerable variety of models around the world. Some of the variation is related to the degree to which those implementing the program follow the "principles" of ER that Day and Bamford (1998) advocated (see Appendix A). In a more recent review of these principles and their implementation, Day (2011) found that although some variation was inevitable because of local educational constraints, most principles were so foundational to the approach that without them a reading program could not be considered ER. The most often "violated" principle regarded follow-up activity. In some educational contexts, administrators, parents, teachers, and sometimes, even students insisted that the students' reading be checked in some way to avoid cheating and to confirm some level of comprehension. Beyond that, where materials are scarce, students are not always given much choice in what to read and sometimes are limited in how much they are required or allowed to read. With the increasing availability of both print and online materials for ER, in English at least, the latter problem is decreasing. The postreading testing activity seems to be continuing but in less intrusive ways, again made possible by different online platforms.

The most typical implementation of ER is as a course component either in the classroom or online. As such, ER as an approach is usually taught through explanation and modeling in the classroom first, and then it moves to a primarily out-of-class activity. Other implementation models for ER include an independent course within a broader curriculum, and a cocurricular activity supported by a self-study center. Some instructors require a certain number of books to be read, others focus on the total number of words, and yet others require a certain amount of time to be spent in ER. Since ER materials vary in length, word counts are probably more useful for equity, and some research suggests that 200,000 words is a good target since significant gains in reading scores are likely with this amount of reading. On the other hand, considering the variability of reading speed in a group of students, time on task might be the most equitable approach to assigning an amount of reading. Each of these has its benefits and limita-

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"[ER] books are easy to read for me and so fun, because I can read books smoothly, and easy to understand. There are many kinds of books … I read 19 books, so I want to read more books."

"I like outside class. One of my favorite outside place is the Union. I didn't know what reading a book with drinking coffee make me happy."

tions, but critical to them all is the percentage of time given overall in the curriculum. Nation (2001) suggests that in any curriculum, 25% of the time should be spent on fluency development and another 25% on comprehensible meaning–oriented input. ER accomplishes both of these curricular functions. This might be more than most could give to ER; however, in no case is 10-15 minutes here and there sufficient to be considered ER. A concentrated period of at least 30 minutes should be given at one time, and the number of times per week will depend on the nature of the curriculum overall for that period. Since in most implementations, ER is eventually done primarily out of class, the commitment of class time is needed at the early stages of implementation, and once in a while after that for some interactive or reflective activity on students' reading experiences.

Whatever the model, the role of teacher is extremely important in implementing ER effectively. Without being provided a clear and substantiated rationale for the activity and ample time to figure out the difference between easy and not-easy reading, students will soon be reading non-ER materials for non-ER purposes, and the benefits of this implicit reading-development method will be lost. Teachers sometimes model the process by reading the same books as the students, and sometimes by reading easy readers in the other languages they are learning or know. Including some in-class or on-location (i.e., library, café, bookstore) reading can also be useful in getting a sense of how the students are engaging with their reading. Observing students' reading can sometimes make very clear which students are struggling to focus on the task. The teacher can then open a discussion with the student about interests and previous reading activity in the primary language, which, in turn, can give the teacher an opportunity to make suggestions for reading material and reading practices.

Introducing students to ER can take many forms, but making some comparison between what students normally do with reading tasks in second or foreign language classrooms with the principles of ER will reveal a stark difference (see Appendix B). Also, discussing variations in reading purposes may be helpful in positioning ER within a range of reading purposes they are already familiar with in

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"A chat circle was very good. In first I forgot everything I read, but when we start I remember some story and some details. I think all books I read are interesting. And it was easy to read. Also, I understood all story. Then, of course, I felt very good. Time is running quickly, especially in this course. Because when I start to read any store I cannot stop if I didn't finish. In fact, I learn many things of skills. I feel much better reading."

their own language, such as those described by Williams and Moran (1989) in terms of speed and the degree of rereading or skipping text. Scanning is the fastest with the most skipped text; skimming is a bit slower with some skipping; intensive reading is quite slow with lots of rereading and no skipping; and extensive reading is a little faster than intensive with very little skipping and almost no rereading. Carver (2000) conceptualizes five reading processes, but the issues of speed, repetition, and skipping still pertain. Memorizing is the slowest reading process with many repetitions; learning is not as slow but some repetition is needed; "rauding" (what we would likely call normal reading for general information or pleasure) occurs fluently and silently at a moderate speed with little repetition for sufficient comprehension; skimming requires a quick pace with no repetition for an overall sense of the meaning; and scanning requires skipping text at a fast pace to find specific information. In addition, I have also found it useful to provide adult learners in IEP or higher-education academic English courses with some of the research (including citations) on the need for 98% rapid word recognition for adequate comprehension and speed (Beglar, Hunt, & Kite, 2012; Nation, 2006) and the role of implicit learning in language acquisition (Ellis, 2008) and reading development specifically (Seidenberg, 2017). While I hope the reading will be pleasurable, I want my students to understand that the approach is backed by science and not my personal interest (or laziness).

Another important role for the instructor is to keep track of students' reading and to help the students to participate in this process. In what Day (2011) called "pure ER" there is no testing or checking up on students regarding comprehension, but there is still the need to know what and how much they have read. Without turning this record keeping into a writing project that takes more time than the reading, students can also provide a quick "thumbs up or down" on the text, and how long it took them to read it depending on the ER requirements. There are a variety of ways to manage the record keeping,

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"I like to go to the public library. If class don't bring me to the public library, I wouldn't know that library. There are a lot of resources that I can borrow in the library. O love to go and I will go there next ti me. I am not afraid of reading in English. I started reading novel in English. I enjoy reading English."

"I read a lot of books in the class. I could understand almost all, but there were some difficult words and topics. However, I could enjoyed from book's information. I learned fun of reading, because it was my first time to read in English."

from a paper fill-in form (see Appendix C) to shared Google-sheets or as part of an online ER platform (discussed below). The growing list of texts read can be motivating feedback for the student, as is an occasional graph (see Appendix D) reflecting the amount of each (unnamed) student's reading up to that point in the class. Occasionally, a reading competition emerges among a few students that spurs even more reading.

Language learner literature, especially in English, is expanding rapidly both in print and online, and instructors need to stay aware of these developments in order to best help students find materials that match their levels of reading comfort and their interests. The best source of information is the Extensive Reading Foundation's website, since materials from all the ER publishers both in North America and around the world are included. The ER Foundation also provides a Graded Reader Equivalence Chart to help instructors compare the relative level of books produced by different publishers using different leveling scales. Additionally, as part of its annual activity, the Extensive Reading Foundation hosts a competition for the best new language-learner literature published in the previous year at six levels of proficiency. Experts judge all the entries and then interested readers are given the opportunity to judge the top candidates in each category. While much of this literature is original and authentic, as it is written for learners of English, some of the texts are modifications of classics, including some rewritten as graphic novels. The body of ER literature includes nonfiction and fiction with multiple genres in each category. While it may be beneficial to train students in ER practices with paper books in a classroom, the options for relatively inexpensive online ER platforms are expanding (see Paul Goldberg's Xreading web-based computer or mobile device platform for ER at http://xreading.com, for example). Although Day and Bamford (1998) suggest that one can begin an ER program with as few as one book per student and 10 extras for swapping, building up levels and variety of paper texts can be limited by budget constraints. In such cases, one can supplement even

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"I learned that I can find books by myself. The books are my reading level. I also learned that I can guess words meaning without a dictionary."

"I have learned so far enjoying the books in English is so important for learning English because I think enjoying books encourages me to learn English. When I read only books which have difficult words, and are so severe I feel so boring to learn English. But the Extensive Reading makes me remember pleasure of English!!!

a very small library with free online reading from various sites, such as newsela.com or er-central.com.

Assessment of learners in an ER program as well as the ER program itself will most likely be necessary to get buy-in from all the stakeholders. However, the very nature of implicit learning through ER does not lend itself to immediate assessment for improvements in reading comprehension or vocabulary growth. For this reason, ER practitioners use a variety of alternative means for assessing ER either as a course component or as a stand-alone course. While some feel compelled to have students complete short quizzes for each book they read, which are now readily available at M-Reader (https://mreader.org) or through Xreading (https://xreading.com), many others prefer to use a pass/fail system instead of letter grades to assess students' reading. A specific amount of time spent, words, pages, or books read, and journals or reflections submitted often make up the categories of a pass/fail system. In addition, the reading log that students keep can be monitored regularly, especially if it is a shared digital document. Sometimes, students contribute to their own final grade by providing a self-assessment. In my experience working with adult learners, the vast majority participate with integrity in self-reporting schemes, especially once they start to experience the pleasure of actually reading comfortably in the target language.

An important component of getting administrators and external stakeholders to appreciate the crucial role of ER in an FL/SL language curriculum is evidence of the effectiveness of an ER program through time. Other than the already published research supporting ER, an instructor can begin to collect evidence of the local value of the ER activity. Quantitative data from pre- and postplacement tests or just reading tests are going to be difficult to get unless a large number of students are included in the data pool or the measures are taken over a relatively long period. Qualitative evidence, however, from student reading journals and logs as well as from pre- and post-motivation/reading experience questionnaires is easy to collect, evaluate, and share with others. The student comments from reading journals that have been distributed throughout this article are the kind of evidence that most teachers would be happy to get from their students and reason enough to include ER.

"I have a little experienced in reading in English because in general about reading I do not like read so much even in my native language which is Arabic. ... When I went to education library I felt I can choose the books better than in the past and most of books that I chosen them I interested of them I like them."

Individual contexts certainly vary and this article could not possibly address all the complications or problems that might arise in considering or implementing ER, but I am hopeful that some of the excuses have been challenged and concerns mitigated. Now, we just need more teachers and program administrators to turn ER into an approach most taken.

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Appendix A
Day and Bamford's 10 Principles of Extensive Reading

The reading material is easy.
Students read as much as possible, perhaps in and definitely out of the classroom.
A variety of materials on a wide range of topics is available so as to encourage reading for different reasons and in different ways.
Students select what they want to read and have the freedom to stop reading material that fails to interest them.
The purposes of reading are usually related to pleasure, information, and general understanding. These purposes are determined by the nature of the material and the interests of the student.
Reading is fast. The materials are well within the linguistic competence of the students in terms of vocabulary and grammar. Dictionaries are rarely used while reading because the constant stopping to look up words makes fluent reading difficult.
Reading is individual and silent, at the student's own pace, and, outside class, done when and where the student chooses.
Teachers orient students to the goals of the program, explain the methodology, keep track of what each student reads, and guide students in getting the most out of the program.
The teacher is a role model of a reader for students—an active member of the classroom reading community, demonstrating what it means to be a reader and the rewards of being a reader.
Reading is its own reward. There are few or no follow-up exercises after reading.

Note. Adapted from Day and Bamford (1998, pp. 7-8).

Appendix B
Comparison of Intensive and Extensive Reading

Type of reading	*Intensive reading*	*Extensive reading*
Class goal	read accurately	read fluently
Reading purpose	answer questions study	get information enjoy
Focus	words pronunciation	meaning
Material	teacher chooses often difficult	student chooses easy
Amount	not much	a lot
Speed	slower	faster
Method	must finish use dictionary	change books if no good no dictionary

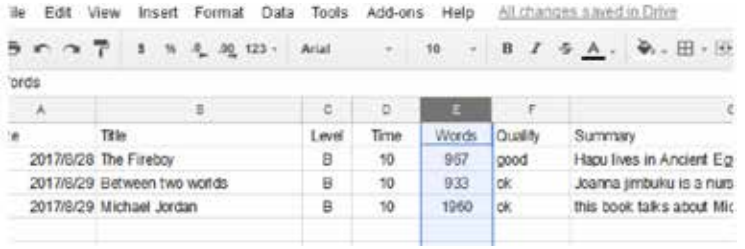
Note. Adapted from Day and Bamford (1998, p. 123).

Appendix C
Record-Keeping Methods

Paper

Name _____			Class _____		
Title	***Book level***	***Reading time in minutes***	***Number of words in the book***	***Level: easy, good, difficult***	***Opinion: good, fair, poor***
The Long Road	B	30	1,056	easy	good
Peanuts	B	15 10 20	2,300	good	good

Electronic—Google Doc



Appendix D
Reading Minutes Student Comparison
After Four Hours of Required Reading