



RESEARCH ARTICLE

RAISING AWARENESS OF EXTENSIVE READING PROGRAMS AND RESEARCH FOR SOUTH KOREAN GRADUATE SCHOOL TEACHER-TRAINEES

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Abstract

Extensive reading program (ERP) implementation has steadily increased in past decades in South Korean K-12 EFL learning contexts, but there has been less usage at the collegiate and graduate school level. Therefore, most of my TESOL graduate school teacher-trainees lack a foundational awareness of what an ERP is – its definition, principles, and practice. Subsequently, there is also a clear lack of research awareness about ERPs among this student population. What accounts for this lack of awareness of ERPs and ERP-related research at the graduate school level? How can awareness be raised? I attempt to address these two issues by sharing the reasoning behind two select classroom processes: literature circles and journal response assignments. Teaching implications are discussed, and future research considerations are proposed.

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Introduction and Literature Review:-

Reading management programs (RMPs) or Extensive Reading Programs (ERPs) using extensive reading (ER) and intensive reading (IR) have had a long tradition of use in native and non-native (EFL/ESL) English-speaking classroom contexts in efforts to expose learners to English literature. Bamford and Day (1997) offer common definitions of ER and IR, stating that ER means, “to read widely and in quantity...with the aim of getting an overall understanding of the material,” whereas IR means, “the careful reading (or translation) of shorter, more difficult foreign language texts (for) complete and detailed understanding.” (n.p.). Related, narrow reading (NR), is defined as “a subset of Extensive Reading and is applied to ‘reading in only one genre, one subject matter, or the work of one author’” (Cho, Ahn, and Krashen, 2005, p.58, as cited in Bryan, 2011, p. 117).

While these are the most practical definitions to present to learners, ER can also be defined according to educators' purposes. Bamford and Day (1997) mention three different types of extensive reading (with sources cited in sequence, respectively): 1) it is a form of “pleasure reading” (Mikulecky, 1990); it is a reading procedure (Krashen, 1993), such as free voluntary reading or Sustained Silent Reading, “where students and teacher quietly and independently read self-selected material; or, it may take a different form depending on classroom parameters and/or student needs (Bamford & Day, 1997) (jalt-publications.org).

Contextual background

A question I often pondered in regard to ER usage at the collegiate-or-higher level is one asked formerly by Renandya (2007) and Macalister (2010) – Why isn't everyone doing extensive reading? While Renandya's in-article question was more rhetorical, Macalister (2010) explicitly asked this of a small group of language teaching center

teachers working in New Zealand. The teachers' answers mostly mirrored my own general observations of my present-day teaching context: there was mostly an overall awareness of what ER is* (*less so in my Korean context); there was a positive attitude about how ER promotes language learning processes; and lastly, most teachers promoted reading for pleasure to their students. These results, as related to my Korean context offer hope, as there are more similarities than dissimilarities. Conversely concerning, however, is that Macalister (2010) also noted a "lack of awareness about research into the benefits of extensive reading, and the lack of a shared understanding about the nature of extensive reading" suggesting that ER "requires greater emphasis in language teacher education" (p. 69). As a graduate school instructor whose teacher-trainees will teach in future contexts, either in Korean or English, this finding clearly resonated with me.

Additional observations from Renandya (2007) on intensive reading illustrate other similarities between EFL/ESL teachers in both Western and Eastern contexts. For example, in terms of the preference for teachers to not want to relinquish control, teachers of IR may prefer to be "more center-stage in what is happening in the classroom" (p. 146). This 'top-down' teaching style is very commonplace in Korean public and private school contexts. In fact, it is a preferred style in that test preparation academies need to move through large amounts of data to better prepare students for impending language tests. Aside from public school employment, this type of academy format is likely one in which a majority of my teacher-trainees will teach.

Many teacher-to-student instructional contexts, from cram schools to graduate schools, however, do share similar goals. Some goals may be: an effort to convey the greatest amount of information as efficiently and in the shortest amount of time as possible and to offer lessons that meet learner needs and/or goals. On the other hand, these contexts can be quite different, too. First, unlike academy or secondary school curriculums, graduate school teaching offers more flexibility when planning course content. Needs analysis, for example, helps me to tailor course content to better match students' academic and/or professional needs. Such flexibility keeps me motivated and interested in teaching at this level, a motivational carryon. Lastly, graduate students, are often in their mid-20's or older and may already have teaching experience of one sort or another. They therefore may be more receptive to varied classroom learning processes and likely to have more to contribute to such processes.

Teaching context

The students that I teach are Graduate School of Education majors at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, in Seoul, South Korea. Students' ages on average range in age from the mid-20's to the low-40's. Their teaching experience usually varies from a mix of pre-service training (via 4-week internships during the regular semester) to either short or long-term private or public-school classroom teaching experience. The course meets for 90 minutes a week for 16 weeks.

Methodology:-

Teaching this 'how to teach English reading' course to graduate students over the past several years has led me to incorporate both intensive and extensive reading approaches. The main reason for this approach is that reading skills training and ERP materials have become increasingly more popular, familiar, and thus beneficial for students in South Korea over only roughly the last few decades in various formats (Kwon, et al, 2017; Shin & Ahn, 2006) (refer to Wang and Wang (2013) for a critique of ER goals for collegiate students); subsequently, many of my students lack awareness of and proper training in these areas. Put another way, the majority of older students have seemed to mostly 'missed out' on opportunities to learn skills-based training (in the four skills, particularly in English courses) and are thus not strong readers of materials (magazines, news stories, novels, etc.) in English.

Let me first generally explain how I implement an intensive approach. As most of these students have usually not had any reading strategy skills training in their earlier educational contexts, the main task work involved with this approach is the training of students in select IR skills: skimming, scanning, using context clues, and summarizing. After explicit training with the use of short informative texts, students further apply these skills toward several different assignments. The purpose for this training is to help students, 1) learn (or reacquire with) the skills in order to, 2) successfully complete course learning goals.

The first activity with IR strategy reinforcement that students complete is a Literature Circle Connector summary assignment. Though an extensive reading task overall, a few of the worksheets that students complete require IR skills. Specifically, the Summarizer role (also named Super Storyteller, Book Reviewer, Reporter, or Comprehension Master), in literature circles (LCs) requires a short (100-200 word) summary of what the student read (either a

chapter or whole book). The Summarizer is one of five LC tasks that each student performs as they read multiple books over a 10-week period. (See Jobbitt, 2018 or Scott, 2015) for more on LC roles and how LCs are performed).

The second IR task students complete is a reading response journal. This assignment first has students searching for an academic research article related to one type of reading— extensive or intensive with subsequent derivatives — that we perform or discuss about in class. In support of this assignment, I also introduce and train students in the use of Cornell Notes (CN), which supports their response journal work. After reading and taking notes, students respond to the article by completing the following three steps:

- 1) a *summary* of the main research content of the article (not of the entire article);
- 2) a *reaction* to the content via answering several questions (How did reading about this topic make you feel?; What was surprising or interesting to you about the article?; Could it work in your teaching context?); and lastly,
- 3) a *reflection* on the process of reading the academic article (What was challenging for you as a reader about this article? What was easy for you?/What's getting easier?).

A typical response for each step is roughly one-third to one-half of a page (around 150w) for each of the three steps. Two to three (depending on needs assessment) reading response journals are assigned per semester. The following week, after students complete this assignment, they are put into discussion groups where they each present their article and response journal to the group. This 15-20 minute sharing usually creates some interesting discussion amongst the students with the goal being to increase exposure to different types of reading research. As these teacher-trainees are education majors, one caveat of this assignment is that students must find an article about 'reading' in English related to English education.

The third task that students complete is a video response journal. This task is a 'light' form of narrow listening (NL), which when combined with the NR research articles, potentially yields several benefits for students: a recycling of common words between the listening and reading texts, vocabulary consolidation, and improved comprehension, among others (Chang, 2017; Kimura & Sali, 2009; Renandya & Jacobs, 2016). This assignment has students listen to an English-only lecture presentation from a recognized authority in the field. One source for such videos is the Extensive Reading Foundation (ERF) website. The format response is identical to the reading response journal (summarize, react, reflect).

This video response journal follows the reading journal procedure but with elements of a jigsaw task. First, students view a 20-30-minute video lecture on one aspect of reading on their own. Three students might watch the same video and complete their response, for instance. There are usually five or six videos used. After they take notes and complete their initial response journal, they meet in master groups to share and clarify ideas and information presented in the video; then, they break into mixed groups and present their response to that mixed group. This jigsaw process is a helpful 'check' on their individual summarizing skills, and a motivational assist to their presenting of content in the mixed groups. Although this assignment has students listening to only two different lectures (which they might listen to several times), informal feedback from students reveals that they do generally prefer the NL video journal over the IR/NR reading journal assignment.

Course design considerations

Elements of an interactive approach are also incorporated into the course design of this class. For clarity, Anderson (2008) explains that an interactive approach "combines elements of both bottom-up and top-down approaches" (p. 7). Bottom-up models have students move from letters to words, phrases, etc., to longer text "and finally meaning in achieving comprehension," while a top-down model "begins with the idea that comprehension resides in the reader" (Anderson, 2008, p. 5). The latter has the reader using their own background knowledge for predictive work along with text searching for clarification. Additionally, elements of a whole-language approach have been implemented into the course. Anderson (2008) helpfully notes the key features of a whole-language approach to teaching reading:

- 1) it is a literature-based approach (books contain authentic language);
- 2) it is student-centered (students read what they want to read);
- 3) reading is integrated with writing (being done simultaneously);
- 4) emphasis is on constructing meaning ("keeping the language whole").

My course strongly follows features #1 and #4, and narrowly follows #2 (book selection is limited). Feature #3 is not observable by me, but it is likely that note-taking is done while reading, and the journal questions are completed after the reading of the article.

Principles for implementing ER and NL

Because my students perform literature circles, read academic research journals and view video lectures, it may be helpful to review the principles and processes of both ER and IR, plus NR and NL. Bamford and Day (2002) have suggested the following principles for an extensive reading program:

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

These ER principles have been, according to Renandya and Jacobs (2016), usually used by researchers “as a basis for discussing the principles and benefits of EL (extensive listening) on L2 learning” (p. 5). Narrow Listening (NL) would then logically follow EL principles. Proposed, logical modifications by me to the above ER principles’ list, as applied to the video journal’s intensive NL focus, could then perhaps be as such:

1. The listening material is easy.
2. A set of listening material within a narrow scope or theme must be available.
3. Learners choose what they want to listen to within the scope/theme of material offered.
4. Learners listen to as much text as possible.
5. The purpose of listening is related to information and general understanding.
6. Listening yields benefits.
7. Listening comprehension usually improves.
8. Listening is individual and silent.
9. Teachers model, orient, and guide students with the scope of the NR program.
10. The teacher is a role model of a listener.

Such principles oblige execution based appropriately on the teaching context. Chang (2017) offers some insight on implementing NL texts for beginners or lower-level students, who, as she states, “usually need more assistance and guidance than higher level students,” suggesting that educators may, “select texts by the same author, by the same genre, by the same title, or by the same linguistic level” (p. 7). In line with these suggestions, I have chosen a thematic application with my reading and video journal assignments for my upper-intermediate level students. Students usually choose one particular aspect related to reading (ER, IR skills, NR, vocabulary gains, LCs, etc.) that piques their interest.

Just as ER principles flow to IR, it logically follows that IR principles flow to NR. While IR principles are not noted above, it may be useful to share how I follow these principles to implement select IR/NR activities in my course. One example is the use of a lesson titled, “The Silk Road” from the text *Ready to Read More* by Blanchard and Root (2006), Pearson Longman. The unit goal is that of ‘identifying the main idea’. What makes this text so helpful is that it has a clear series of tasks for each stage of the PDP (pre-during-post) receptive skills framework. After students complete the unit as a ‘student participant’, we then examine each PDP section separately as ‘teachers’ and discuss whether the tasks were effective, why or why not, what we would adapt, etc. To illustrate, the Pre-stage preview task has students: skim the title, subtitles, pictures, captions and section headings (to gain input in a top-down manner), discuss about the preview input (activate/use background knowledge) and make predictions (to generate interest), preview lexis (to clarify or introduce new language), and set a purpose (students make their own questions to boost reading motivation).

Limitations and Future Directions:

The real aim of performing literature circles for these trainees is to provide exposure to authentic texts and the literature circle format - the experience of reading the same text and then discussing it; in short, creating a community of readers, a book club. One hopeful aim is to boost vocabulary, but with only several books being read at word counts in sum of maybe 50,000 to 70,000, this is not a major focus. Also, books are not assigned, but can be chosen by groups from a variety of short to long (all authentic) texts; no graded readers are used. Short texts range from 50-150 pages; longer texts range from 300-500 pages.

A key challenge to this ERP is that of time. Macalister (2007, as cited in Wang & Wang, 2013) noted that “time constraints and curricular demands” may limit the practicality of ER programs at the university level, and my graduate-school students do have limited time specifically in two ways: out-of-class reading time and in-class discussion time. Outside of class, students are encouraged to read 15-20 minutes per day, but as these graduate students usually work full or part-time jobs, finding reading time outside of class can be a challenge for them. Additionally, an in-class twenty-to-thirty-minute discussion each week for ten weeks may or may not seem significant to students, yet the full class period is only 90 minutes per week.

A second limitation is book selection and accessibility. Books can be expensive, and there are only so many books available in different formats. Also, the novels used in my course are offered in groupings based on page amounts, with several different genres available in each page count area, so again, novel selection is somewhat limited. Thus far this format has worked in favor of my narrow ERP goals of mainly offering exposure and practice with LCs to help boost motivation and interest in reading. Ideally, more physical books or an online, virtual library like Reading Gate or XReading VL would help provide more variety and perhaps contribute to a greater sense of achievement (Kwon, Chang, Kim, Lee & Jeon, 2017) and be of more interest to students. On the instructor-side, there are practical reasons why students may not have been exposed to ERPs. Indeed, cost and the amount of effort required to set up a program are just two of many reasons suggested (Day, et al, 1998)) for why ERPs may not be more common in language programs. Further, although my graduate school students are quite capable of reading the available texts, they often cite cost as one reason why they do not read English novels often.

A third limitation is that of the ‘light’ NL video journal assignment. The main focus of this task is comprehension of a listening text and a written response journal. There are several benefits to NL. In an earlier language-learning study using narrow listening, Dupuy (1999) noted several features that boosted students’ listening comprehension of audio material: repeated focused listening, self-selection, and topic familiarity. With the earlier reading journal assignments, students have gained exposure to the assignment format as well as familiarity with the topic; however, only a limited exposure to thematic narrow listening is completed. In addition, although students could listen to the video repeatedly, a one-off video journal may invite a ‘one-and-done’ response. Last, videos were assigned, so self-selection with the video journal was not possible, in contrast to the academic articles which could be chosen by the students for the reader response journal.

A few other challenges exist. One additional challenge with the video task could be that of listening strategy skills and the practice of such skills. As Rastegari and Narafshan (2017) state, listening “requires effective use of strategies on the part of the listener” (p. 15), but my graduate students may not have been trained in listening strategies; unfortunately, it is outside the scope of the course. Further, my class teaching time is only 90 minutes, which does not afford the opportunity to teach effective listening strategies for this assignment. Regardless, upon reflection, it may be that it is simply not worth the effort to teach strategies for only one video journal, unlike the ER and NR assignments which apply to broader, repeated aspects of the course. An increase in the number of video journal assignments may or may not improve students’ motivation for the task, also. Tangentially, as the Summarizer role is only done twice in the ten-week LCs, an increase in summary tasks, outside of LCs, for the Summarizer role could benefit students more.

Conclusion:-

The aim of this paper was to clarify what extensive reading, narrow reading, and intensive reading are. Another aim was to illustrate how TESOL teacher-trainers may best be introduced to and use ERPs (such as literature circles) and techniques or activities in support of classroom reading processes (like reading-and-video response journals). A final aim was to show how to raise awareness for teacher-trainers and teacher-trainees alike in how to promote the reading, analysis and discussion of reading research – either ER, NR, or IR.

No syllabus is perfect, and these classroom processes have been consistently modified over time based on informal student-polling feedback and my own reflections. One suggestion for dealing with the implementation of any classroom processes or assignments would be to follow Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle steps in which the teacher would: plan and try out the activities; observe and document your reflections on the activities; 3) modify the activities; and try out the newly modified processes. In short, (Kolb, 2015, as cited in Morris, T.H., manuscript submitted for publication): experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting. Such is the process that I have used throughout my teaching career and will continue to use in future teaching and learning contexts.

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