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USING EXTENSIVE READING PROGRAMS TO FOSTER AUTONOMY AND READING FLUENCY IN EFL LEARNERS

Keywords: *extensive reading, reading comprehension, reading fluency, learner autonomy, language acquisition*

Introduction

Reading is a fundamental skill in second and foreign language learning, serving as a primary vehicle for vocabulary acquisition, grammar reinforcement, and overall language development. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), learners often encounter challenges such as limited exposure to authentic texts, low motivation, and slow reading fluency, which hinder their ability to engage with language meaningfully (Nation, 2009, p. 50-51). Developing both reading fluency and learner autonomy has become a central concern in modern EFL pedagogy, as these elements are closely linked to lifelong learning and effective language acquisition (Ningsih, 2019, p. 355).

Extensive Reading (ER) programs have emerged as a widely researched approach to enhance reading skills while promoting learner autonomy. Unlike intensive reading, which focuses on detailed comprehension and language analysis, ER encourages learners to read large quantities of material for general understanding, fostering enjoyment and intrinsic motivation (Day & Bamford, 2002, p. 138). Studies indicate that ER not only improves reading speed and comprehension but also contributes to vocabulary expansion and the development of independent learning strategies (Renandya & Jacobs, 2002, p. 298).

Autonomy in language learning refers to the learner's ability to take responsibility for their learning process, including setting goals,

selecting resources, and self-monitoring progress (Benson, 2013; Little, 1991). Integrating ER into EFL classrooms provides a practical pathway to cultivate such autonomy. When learners choose texts aligned with their interests and read at their own pace, they gain a sense of control and motivation, which enhances both engagement and achievement.

Despite extensive research on ER, challenges remain in effectively implementing ER programs in diverse educational contexts. Factors such as limited library resources, varying proficiency levels, and insufficient teacher training can impact program success. Therefore, this article aims to synthesize existing research on ER, examining how well-structured ER programs can foster both reading fluency and learner autonomy in EFL settings. The discussion focuses on practical strategies for integrating ER into curricula, the scientific evidence supporting its benefits, and implications for teaching practice.

Purpose of the study: This article seeks to provide EFL practitioners with a comprehensive overview of ER programs, highlighting their potential to enhance reading fluency and autonomy while offering practical recommendations for implementation.

Research questions addressed in the article:

1. How do extensive reading programs contribute to EFL learners' reading fluency?
2. In what ways do ER programs foster learner autonomy?

3. What practical strategies can teachers employ to integrate ER effectively in the classroom?

Literature Review

Extensive Reading (ER) is widely recognized as a pedagogical approach designed to enhance language acquisition by exposing learners to large quantities of comprehensible input (Day & Bamford, 2002, p. 138). Unlike intensive reading, which emphasizes close analysis of texts and language structures, ER encourages learners to read for general understanding, often selecting materials based on personal interest and reading level (Nation, 2009, p. 49). ER programs aim to create a reading-rich environment, fostering both motivation and linguistic competence.

Research has consistently highlighted the benefits of ER for vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, and overall language development. For instance, Robb and Susser (1989, p. 248) compared ER with traditional skills-based instruction in an EFL context and found that learners participating in ER programs demonstrated greater improvement in reading speed and comprehension, while also reporting higher levels of enjoyment and engagement. Extensive exposure to written texts enables learners to internalize language patterns naturally, supporting the development of implicit linguistic knowledge.

Reading fluency encompasses not only the ability to read accurately and quickly but also the capacity to comprehend texts efficiently (Grabe & Stoller, 2011, p. 11-12). ER has been shown to facilitate fluency by providing repeated exposure to vocabulary and sentence structures in meaningful contexts. Studies indicate that learners engaged in regular ER improve reading rate and comprehension without explicit grammar instruction (Nation, 2009, p. 56).

Sustained ER contributes to significant gains in reading speed and comprehension. Learners who participate in daily reading activities are more likely to develop automaticity in word recognition, a critical component of fluency. Moreover, the motivational aspects of ER – such as choice of materials and enjoyment of reading – have been linked to higher reading

engagement, which indirectly supports fluency development (Thuy & Thuc, 2020, p. 44).

Learner autonomy, defined as the capacity to take charge of one's learning, is a key factor in successful language acquisition. ER programs inherently support autonomy by allowing learners to select texts according to their interests and reading level, set personal reading goals, and monitor their progress. This self-directed approach encourages reflective learning and fosters responsibility for one's own language development.

Numerous studies have explored the relationship between ER and autonomy. Learners involved in ER programs reported greater control over their learning, choosing books that aligned with personal interests and reading comfort levels. Ningsih (2019, p. 358) argued that autonomy cultivated through ER enhances motivation, leading learners to engage in reading activities beyond the classroom. ER thus provides a dual benefit: improving linguistic competence while strengthening learners' capacity to manage their own learning process.

Despite its documented benefits, implementing ER in EFL contexts presents several challenges. Resource limitations, such as inadequate access to graded readers or large-scale libraries, can hinder program effectiveness. Learners' proficiency levels may vary widely, requiring careful scaffolding to ensure comprehension and sustained engagement. Additionally, insufficient teacher training in ER methodologies may reduce program impact.

To address these challenges, researchers recommend structured ER programs that include a variety of text genres, regular monitoring of reading progress, and integration with classroom activities to maintain motivation. Teacher guidance remains important, not to control reading choices, but to support learners in selecting appropriate materials and tracking development.

Existing literature provides strong evidence that ER enhances reading fluency and learner autonomy in EFL contexts. However, there remains a need for comprehensive studies that examine the integration of ER into diverse educational settings, including its long-term impact on autonomous learning habits and reading pro-

iciency across proficiency levels. Moreover, while studies frequently highlight the benefits of ER, empirical evidence regarding the most effective program design and teacher facilitation strategies is still limited.

Designing and Implementing Extensive Reading Programs in EFL Contexts

Effective Extensive Reading (ER) programs are grounded in several pedagogical principles that promote both reading fluency and learner autonomy (Day & Bamford, 2002, p. 137-140; Renandya & Jacobs, 2002, p. 296-298).

Learner-Centered Approach: ER emphasizes learner choice, allowing students to select texts according to their interests, reading level, and personal goals. Such autonomy increases intrinsic motivation, encourages self-directed engagement, and fosters responsibility for one's own learning (Ningsih, 2019, p. 355-356).

Volume and Variety of Reading: Exposure to a wide range of texts, including graded readers, short stories, and adapted literature, ensures sufficient comprehensible input. This variety supports vocabulary acquisition, reading speed, and comprehension across different genres and topics (Nation, 2009, p. 52; Robb & Susser, 1989, p. 248).

Consistency and Sustained Engagement: Regular reading sessions, even of short duration, help learners develop fluency through repeated exposure to language structures. Programs that encourage daily or weekly reading practice show stronger impacts on both speed and comprehension than sporadic reading activities.

Integration with Classroom Activities: While ER prioritizes independent reading, integrating reflection activities, discussions, or book reports enhances accountability and deepens learning. These activities allow learners to process content meaningfully, reinforcing comprehension and retention (Day & Bamford, 2002, p. 138).

Teacher as Facilitator: The role of the teacher in ER programs is supportive rather than directive. Teachers guide text selection, monitor progress, and provide encouragement, while respecting learner autonomy. This bal-

ance ensures learners remain motivated without feeling controlled.

Designing a structured ER program involves clear, practical guidelines to maximize effectiveness:

Text Selection: Learners should have access to a range of appropriately leveled materials. Graded readers, adapted novels, and culturally relevant texts help maintain comprehension while avoiding frustration. Allowing learners to choose topics of interest enhances motivation.

Scheduling Reading Sessions: A consistent reading schedule, such as 20–30 minutes per day or multiple sessions per week, fosters habitual reading and fluency development. Programs may set flexible targets (e.g., pages per week) rather than rigid requirements.

Progress Tracking: Learners can maintain reading logs or journals to record completed texts, reading duration, and reflections. Peer sharing or short presentations encourages accountability and engagement (Day & Bamford, 2002, p. 139).

Support for Struggling Readers: Teachers can provide scaffolding through reading circles, paired reading, or guided discussions, ensuring comprehension while preserving learner autonomy. Gradually reducing support fosters independence.

The design elements of ER programs directly support the two main outcomes of interest:

Autonomy: Learner choice, reflection activities, and self-monitoring cultivate a sense of ownership and responsibility for learning. Autonomy enhances motivation and encourages learners to continue reading beyond the classroom (Ningsih, 2019, p. 358).

Reading Fluency: Sustained exposure to meaningful, comprehensible texts improves reading speed, accuracy, and comprehension. Variety and volume of reading reinforce lexical and structural knowledge, promoting automaticity in reading (Grabe & Stoller, 2011, p. 11-12; Waring, 2011, p. 3).

Existing studies provide practical examples of ER implementation:

Weekly Reading Challenges: Learners select and complete at least one graded reader per week, tracking progress in logs.

Classroom Book Talks: Students share summaries or reflections, stimulating discussion and deeper comprehension.

Peer Review of Reading Journals: Encourages collaboration and accountability while respecting individual choice.

These examples demonstrate how ER programs can be both flexible and structured, ensuring learners develop fluency and autonomy simultaneously.

Each component of the program design is supported by empirical evidence:

Choice and autonomy → increase motivation and engagement (Ningsih, 2019, p. 356).

Volume and consistent practice → improve fluency and comprehension (Day & Bamford, 2002, p. 138).

Integration with reflection or discussion → reinforces learning and supports self-directed strategies (Renandya & Jacobs, 2002, p. 297-298).

Teacher facilitation → balances autonomy with guidance to maintain progress (Ningsih, 2019, p. 358).

By following these principles, ER programs can be implemented effectively in EFL contexts, providing learners with a practical framework to enhance both reading fluency and learner autonomy.

Results and Discussion

A synthesis of multiple studies shows that ER consistently improves reading fluency among EFL learners. Robb and Susser (1989, p. 248) found that learners engaged in ER programs developed faster reading speeds and higher comprehension compared to learners in traditional skills-based instruction. Sustained exposure to extensive reading materials results in significant gains in reading speed and accuracy.

Research also emphasizes the role of vocabulary acquisition in fluency development. Nation (2009, p. 56) highlights that ER provides repeated exposure to high-frequency vocabulary in context, which supports automaticity in word recognition — a key component of fluency. Moreover, Day and Bamford (2002, p. 137) note that variety in text genres and topics

allows learners to encounter diverse syntactic structures, further consolidating fluency.

While the positive impact of ER on fluency is well-documented, challenges remain. Some learners, particularly those at lower proficiency levels, may experience comprehension difficulties if texts are not carefully leveled. Moreover, inconsistent reading schedules or lack of motivation can reduce program effectiveness. Therefore, teachers play a crucial role in scaffolding text selection, monitoring progress, and providing encouragement.

ER programs inherently promote learner autonomy by giving learners control over text selection, reading pace, and reflection activities (Ningsih, 2019, p. 355). Students who regularly engage in ER report increased motivation, confidence, and willingness to read outside the classroom. ER fosters self-directed learning behaviors, such as goal setting and self-assessment, which are key indicators of autonomy.

Although ER supports autonomy, the literature suggests that autonomy develops gradually. Learners initially require guidance to select suitable texts and structure their reading. Teachers' facilitation, rather than control, is essential to maintain motivation and ensure learners do not disengage due to difficulty or boredom. Additionally, cultural factors may influence learners' willingness to exercise autonomy, highlighting the need for contextual adaptation of ER programs.

Many studies highlight the interconnected benefits of ER: as learners read more extensively, their fluency improves, which in turn reinforces confidence and autonomy (Grabe & Stoller, 2011, p. 11-12). Improved fluency reduces cognitive load during reading, allowing learners to focus on meaning, self-reflection, and strategy use — key aspects of autonomous learning.

The literature suggests a positive feedback loop: ER increases fluency → fluency enhances confidence → confidence promotes autonomous reading → autonomy sustains engagement with ER. However, ensuring that learners remain engaged over time requires structured support, periodic assessment, and integration with classroom activities. Without such scaffolding,

folding, some learners may plateau or lose motivation.

Challenges Identified in the Literature:

1. Limited access to graded readers or culturally relevant texts.

2. Variability in learner proficiency, requiring differentiated reading materials.

3. Maintaining consistent motivation and reading habits.

4. Teacher preparedness to implement and monitor ER programs effectively.

5. Pedagogical Implications:

6. Teachers should provide variety and choice to maintain motivation.

7. Structured reflection (journals, discussions) reinforces learning.

8. Programs should balance independence and support to develop autonomy without reducing engagement.

9. Regular monitoring and formative feedback enhance program effectiveness.

Based on the literature, the following practices emerge as most effective:

1. Provide wide-ranging, level-appropriate reading materials.

2. Encourage learner choice and self-directed reading.

3. Implement consistent reading schedules with flexible targets.

4. Integrate reflection and discussion activities to deepen comprehension.

5. Offer teacher facilitation, not control, to maintain motivation and scaffold autonomy.

Conclusion

This article has synthesized existing research on Extensive Reading (ER) programs and their role in fostering reading fluency and learner autonomy in EFL contexts. Evidence from multiple studies consistently demonstrates that ER provides learners with substantial opportunities for repeated exposure to meaningful, comprehensible input, which in turn enhances reading speed, accuracy, and comprehension (Robb & Susser, 1989, p. 248; Waring, 2011, p. 3). At the same time, ER programs promote autonomy by allowing learners to make choices about texts, set personal goals, and engage in self-directed reflection, fostering

motivation and lifelong learning skills (Ningsih, 2019, p. 355-356).

The novelty of this work lies in its integration of fluency and autonomy perspectives within a single framework of ER implementation. While prior studies often focus exclusively on either linguistic outcomes or learner autonomy, this article demonstrates how ER simultaneously supports both dimensions. The synthesis highlights the interconnected benefits of ER: as learners' reading fluency improves, their confidence grows, which encourages autonomous learning behaviors and sustains engagement with reading activities over time. This dual perspective provides a more comprehensive understanding of ER's pedagogical value in EFL contexts.

The findings offer clear guidance for EFL practitioners seeking to implement ER programs effectively. By emphasizing learner choice, consistent reading schedules, reflective activities, and teacher facilitation, educators can design programs that foster both fluency and autonomy. This approach is adaptable to diverse educational contexts, from large university classes to smaller language institutes, and can be implemented even when resources are limited by prioritizing graded readers, digital texts, or collaborative reading activities.

Final Recommendations:

1. Promote learner autonomy by offering diverse and engaging reading materials and encouraging self-directed reflection.

2. Foster reading fluency through consistent, sustained reading practice and exposure to a variety of texts and genres.

3. Integrate ER with classroom activities, such as discussions, journals, or peer presentations, to enhance accountability and comprehension.

4. Provide teacher facilitation, focusing on guidance and motivation rather than controlling text selection or reading pace.

5. Adapt programs to learner proficiency levels, ensuring accessible and engaging materials for all learners.

In conclusion, ER programs represent a powerful pedagogical tool in EFL education, simultaneously promoting linguistic competence and learner independence. The integration

of these two dimensions – fluency and autonomy – creates a positive feedback loop that enhances both the effectiveness of reading programs and learners' long-term engagement with English. Future research could further explore contextual adaptations of ER, examine longitudinal impacts on fluency and autonomy, and develop strategies to optimize ER for learners with diverse needs.

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Xülasə

Əminə Səfərzadə

İngilis dilini xarici dil kimi öyrənən tələbələrdə müstəqilliyi və oxu sürətini artırmaq üçün geniş oxuma proqramlarından istifadə

Bu məqalədə geniş oxuma proqramlarının ingilis dilini xarici dil kimi öyrənən tələbələrdə oxu sürətinin artırılmasında və öyrənmə müstəqilliyinin inkişafında rolu araşdırılır. Mövcud tədqiqatların sintezi əsasında göstərilir ki, geniş oxuma tələbələrə anlaşılan mətnlərlə təkrar qarşılaşmaq imkanı yaradır, bu da oxu sürətinin yüksəlməsinə, mətnin mənimsənilməsinə və söz ehtiyatının genişlənməsinə səbəb olur. Geniş oxuma proqramları həmçinin tələbələrin maraqlarına uyğun mətn seçməsinə, şəxsi məqsədlər müəyyənləşdirməsinə və reflektiv oxu fəaliyyətlərinə cəlb olunmasına şərait yaradaraq müstəqilliyi gücləndirir. Geniş oxumanın ikili təsiri müsbət geribildirim dövrəsi formalaşdırır: oxu sürətinin artması tələbələrin özünəinamını möhkəmləndirir, bu isə onları müstəqil şəkildə oxu fəaliyyətlərinə daha çox cəlb edir. Geniş oxumanın tətbiqi zamanı resursların məhdudluğu, tələbələrin dil səviyyəsində fərqliliklər və motivasiyanın qorunması kimi çətinliklər də nəzərdən keçirilir və onların aradan qaldırılması üçün strategiyalar təqdim olunur. Müəllimlər üçün praktik tövsiyələrə müxtəlif oxu materiallarının təqdim edilməsi, müntəzəm oxu qrafikinə saxlanılması, reflektiv fəaliyyətlərin inteqrasiyası və tələbələrin seçimlərinə müdaxilə etmədən istiqamət verilməsi daxildir. Məqalə geniş oxuma proqramlarında sürət və müstəqillik aspektlərinin birləşdirilməsinin elmi yeniliyini nümayiş etdirir və onun ingilis dili tədrisində praktik əhəmiyyətini vurğulayır. Ümumilikdə, sintez geniş oxuma proqramlarının eyni vaxtda həm dil bacarıqlarını inkişaf etdirməsinə,

həm də müstəqil öyrənməni dəstəkləməsini təmin edən kompleks çərçivə təqdim edir və bu sahədə müəllimlər və proqram tərtibatçıları üçün dəyərli töhfələr verir.

Açar sözlər: geniş oxuma, oxunu anlama, oxu sürəti, öyrənmə müstəqilliyi, dil öyrənilməsi

Резюме

Амина Сафарзаде

Использование программ обширного чтения для развития автономии и беглости чтения у учащихся, изучающих английский язык как иностранный

В данной статье рассматривается роль программ обширного чтения в развитии беглости чтения и автономии учащихся, изучающих английский язык как иностранный. На основе синтеза существующих исследований показано, что программы обширного чтения обеспечивает учащимся повторное взаимодействие с доступными для понимания текстами, что способствует улучшению скорости чтения, понимания и расширению словарного запаса. Программы обширного чтения также развивают автономию, позволяя учащимся выбирать тексты по интересам, устанавливать личные цели и участвовать в рефлексивных практиках чтения. Двойное воздействие обширного чтения создает положительную обратную связь: повышение беглости чтения увеличивает уверенность учащихся, что, в свою очередь, стимулирует самостоятельное чтение. Обсуждаются трудности внедрения обширного чтения, включая ограниченность ресурсов, различия в уровне владения языком и поддержание мотивации, а также стратегии их преодоления. Практические рекомендации для преподавателей включают предоставление разнообразных материалов для чтения, регулярное планирование занятий, интеграцию рефлексивных упражнений и сопровождение учащихся без ограничения их выбора. Статья демонстрирует научную новизну сочетания аспектов беглости чтения и автономии и подчеркивает практическую значимость обширного чтения для преподавания английского языка как иностранного. В целом, синтез исследований предоставляет комплексную основу для проектирования программ обширного чтения, одновременно поддерживающих языковое развитие и самостоятельное обучение.

Ключевые слова: обширное чтение, понимание прочитанного, беглость чтения, автономия учащихся, овладение языком