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**I.Plavutska, PhD., Assoc. Prof., N. Denysiuk, PhD., Assoc. Prof.**

Тернопільський національний технічний університет імені Івана Пулюя

## EXTENSIVE READING IN ESP LEARNING

Reading literature is an excellent way for students to make progress in English language learning; it exposes them to exciting plots, interesting characters, and authentic dialogues as they learn the language in context. Reading assignments also make it practical to integrate the other skills: students speak and listen when they discuss the texts in small groups, and write when they perform pre-, during-, and post-reading activities. In spite of these benefits, the wrong approach to reading literature can make it a boring and frustrating endeavor. If the texts are too difficult, if students do not know the objectives, and if instructors have no guidelines for assignments or assessment, reading is drudgery for students and teachers alike.

Extensive reading motivates learners to read a large number of texts on a wide range of topics because the students themselves select the reading material based upon its relevance to their interests, knowledge, and experience. Students read texts that match their language level, and they choose the time and place to read. Extensive reading “is generally associated with reading large amounts with the aim of getting an overall understanding of the material” (Bamford and Day 1997). Extensive reading allows students to find pleasure in reading as they gain a general understanding of literary ideas, learn reading strategies, acquire new vocabulary, and increase their English proficiency. Since students read a large amount of material both inside and outside of the classroom, it is important for the teacher to make the objectives clear and properly monitor the students’ progress. This includes knowing how to make reading interesting for students and also what assignments and assessment procedures contribute to a successful reading project.

This article will discuss the rationale for using extensive reading of literary texts in the EFL classroom and describe how to integrate writing tasks with a reading project by using a *reading log* (also known as a reading journal, a response journal, or a reading diary) for pre-, during-, and post-reading activities.

Over the years, numerous studies have reported that extensive reading benefits language learners in a variety of ways, including in the area of critical literacy. These studies claim that prolific readers noticeably improve their reading proficiency, reading habits, reading fluency, and vocabulary retention, as well as writing and spelling (Nation 1997).

In addition to gains in a range of language skills, students experience delight in language learning and positive feelings as extensive reading motivates them for further study and reading. Gee (1999) argues that the more we read, the more competent language learners we become, and the more we enjoy reading; the more we enjoy it, the more we read, and the more competent language learners we become. This cycle consolidates language learning in other important ways as well: we gain more competence in the target culture and acquire broader background knowledge for more complex reading.

When students read in a foreign language, there is often a tendency to focus more on new words or structures than on content or opinions (Freebody and Luke 1990). This happens not because the readers are incapable of reading for content due to their limited knowledge of the target language, but because they very often do not know *how* to make reading more meaningful. For example, language learners should know that numerous strategies are available to obtain information from the text as well as to get aesthetic pleasure out of reading.

Extensive reading entails reading widely for pleasure, without the interruption of exercises such as daily oral reports or difficult reading comprehension questions. Therefore, a

reading log should not disrupt the goal of extensive reading, but rather should become a part of the overall project. Although they are different skills, reading and writing supplement each other in the learning process because of what they have in common, including awareness of the composition process, discourse conventions, and rhetorical elements that make up literary texts. Therefore, a reading log is an ideal method to ease access to literary texts. The various sections of a reading log activate background knowledge and introduce strategies to help students recognize the difficult features of setting, narration, plot, characters, and theme.

### **Reading comprehension and vocabulary strategies**

Awareness of those reading strategies that help learners understand the text is essential for reading success; according to Farris, Fuhler, and Walther (2004), reading strategies fall into two main categories:

**1. Comprehension strategies** help students better appreciate the text. Some of these strategies include brainstorming, skimming for general meaning, scanning for special details, asking others for help, stopping to summarize, taking notes, making outlines, and engaging in self-reflection and peer review. These comprehension strategies help readers activate background information, predict upcoming events, visualize scenes, summarize the story, compare and contrast ideas, monitor understanding, analyze and synthesize information, and express valid opinions.

**2. Vocabulary strategies** help students deal with unknown words. Students practicing extensive reading learn to skip unknown words and continue to read; however, on occasion it is helpful for students to attempt to guess a word by looking at the surrounding context.

When they successfully apply these and other strategies, learners become deeply engaged in reading and change the way they think and learn. Teachers can use these strategies to develop the following components for the reading logs that will receive entries at one of the pre-, during-, or post-reading stages of the extensive reading project.

Extensive reading of literature is a fruitful way to learn English, and when it is combined with writing tasks in the form of reading logs, students will arrive at a deeper understanding of reading strategies, literary elements, and the English language. The success they experience with extensive reading will be revealed in their reading logs by an understanding of the motives of characters, a description of an unfolding plot, and reflections on how the story relates to their own experiences. Through the connection with literature, students become inspired to offer their opinions and tell their own stories; as a result, they gain confidence as readers, writers, and independent learners. With clear guidelines and objectives, extensive reading offers students the opportunity to not only recognize how they learn, but also to actively participate in that learning.

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