

## INDIVIDUAL WORK – EXTENSIVE READING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

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**Rezumat.** *O competență comunicativă înaltă în limba engleză nu poate fi dezvoltată doar în timpul lecțiilor. La mijlocul secolului al XX-lea, lingviștii moderni au definit mai multe teorii despre modul în care se învață o limbă străină (și, prin urmare, despre cum ar trebui predată). Lingviști, precum Stephen Krashen și Noam Chomsky, au dominat domeniul lingvistic prin Teoria Achiziției Limbii. În mare parte teoria admite faptul că elevul asimilează limba străină mai bine atunci când se confruntă cu situații comunicative reale. Autonomia elevului a fost un domeniu major de interes în predarea limbilor străine de aproximativ 30 de ani. Aceasta îmbunătățește calitatea învățării limbilor străine, promovează principiile societăților democratice și pregătește elevii pentru învățarea pe tot parcursul vieții. Acesta este un drept al omului și le permite receptorilor să folosească cât mai bine oportunitățile de învățare în și în afara clasei.*

*Scopul proiectului desfășurat în instituția noastră este de a dezvolta competențele de citire ale elevilor și în același timp de a le îmbunătăți autonomia în procesul de învățare a limbii engleze. Citirea extensivă a fost selectată ca metodă de îmbunătățire a vocabularului, gramaticii și abilităților de vorbire ale elevilor.*

**Abstract.** *Good communicative competence in English cannot be developed only in the classroom. In the middle of the 20th century, modern-day linguists tossed about different theories on how language is learned (and thus how it should be taught). Linguists, like Stephen Krashen and Noam Chomsky, broke onto the scene with the Language Acquisition Theory (LAT). A part of LAT suggests that language learners best learn from useful and communicative input. Learner autonomy has been a major area of interest in foreign language teaching for some 30 years. It improves the quality of language learning, promotes the principles of democratic societies, and prepares individuals for life-long learning. This is a human right, and it allows learners to make the best use of learning opportunities in and out of the classroom.*

*The purpose of our project is to develop students` reading competences and namely improve their autonomy in the process of English language learning. Extensive reading was selected as a method of improving students` vocabulary, grammar, and speaking skills.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *competență comunicativă, citire extensivă, vocabular, gramatică, vorbire, abilități, autonomia elevului.*

**Key words:** *communicative competence, extensive reading, vocabulary, grammar, speaking, skills, learner`s autonomy.*

**Extensive reading: An alternative approach to develop students` language competences and their autonomy**

It is simplistic, but nevertheless true, that the more students read, the better they become at it “Reading... must be developed by using extensive and continual practice. People learn to read, and read better, by reading.” States David Eskey, that is why the '*extensive reading approach*' appears as an alternative approach in developing students' language competences and autonomy in learning English [2]. An extensive reading approach aims to get students reading and liking it. Extensive reading is “...intending to develop good reading habits, to build up knowledge of vocabulary and structure, and to encourage a liking for reading” [1]. Students are allowed to choose the books they read depending on their interests, and there is not always a follow-up discussion or work in class. In this way, students are encouraged to read for pleasure.

During our project we noticed that students are interested in an active participating, even those of them who have modest results in English, are attracted to the opportunity of learning at their own pace, choosing texts from the offered reading sources according to their own interests.

Today in language teaching terms extensive reading is recognized as one of four styles, or ways of reading, the other three being skimming scanning and intensive reading.

### **Intensive and extensive listening/reading**

*Extensive Reading* can be defined as a casual reading performed for pleasure or gaining general understanding on a topic when the students are reading a book, a magazine or a newspaper. In this approach students read long texts only to enjoy the reading and gaining a better understanding of the concept, while *Intensive Reading* can be understood as the reading method which requires a detailed study of a text with the objective of getting its literary or linguistic meaning. The readers are supposed to read the text with concentration and due care, in detail, as it has certain learning aims and tasks. It aims at identifying the answers to the questions of reading comprehension. Moreover, it can be used for the purpose of skimming and scanning. It involves an analysis of the text by the deconstruction of the sentences and looking over each word, phrase and collocation which is not understandable with an aim of extracting the essence and meaning of the text as much as possible. The main focus of the learner is on the language used, rather than the text. In the following chart we have stated the main differences between these two types of reading.

<b>BASIS FOR COMPARISON</b>	<b>EXTENSIVE READING</b>	<b>INTENSIVE READING</b>
Meaning	Extensive reading is an approach to language learning in which long/short text and a large amount of material are read by the students for general understanding.	Intensive Reading is a reading method wherein learners are supposed to read the short text carefully and deeply so as to gain maximum understanding.

Nature	Supplementary	Comprehensive
Purpose	For acquiring information or for pleasure.	For understanding the literal meaning of the text.
Covers	Reading of novels, magazines, newspaper.	Reading of textbooks.
Material Selection	Reading material is selected by the individual himself.	Reading material is decided and recommended by the teachers.
Involves	Reading of a number of books on a similar concept or subject.	Reading of a book again and again to extract its literal meaning.
Use of dictionary	No	Yes
Helpful in	Developing reading fluency Language skills, learners' autonomy.	Developing reading skills, vocabulary and grammatical knowledge.

In a nutshell, extensive reading is mainly used when an overall or superficial knowledge is required on a subject, as no focus is made on the detailed study. On the other hand, intensive reading is used where due attention is required, to learn specific details about the topic or subject under study.

So, in our project we gain to manage between two types of approaches of reading. Students are free to choose the texts that they are interested in and we give them the opportunity to check their understanding through the process of accomplishing some quizzes. In this way, we are sure that we will reach our goals by letting them learning different aspects of language, by means of texts which they are interested in.

### **The need of equipping students with useful learning strategies (skimming and scanning)**

Reading strategies are assumed to be important for students reading comprehension and the reading strategies equip the students with the skills of how to handle their reading effectively. Research reveals that good readers are actively involved with the text and they are aware of processes they use to understand while they read. Teachers can help students improve their reading comprehension through reading strategies. Reading strategies are purposeful means of comprehending the author's message [10]. They are believed to influence readers in adjusting their reading behaviors to work on text difficulty, task demands and other contextual variables [1]. Adams identified the types of reading strategies as follows:

**Skimming** is a reading technique for speed reading. The purpose of skimming is to get an overview of the organization of the text and its main idea from a passage in a book. To skim a

passage, the readers read through the passage quickly and skip the details. They read the first sentence of each paragraph. Each paragraph usually contains a topic sentence which states the main idea [12].

**Scanning** is a reading skill that allows the reader to locate specific information quickly. The purpose of scanning is to get specific information. Scanning is especially important for improving your reading. Many students try to read every word when they read, so they read very slowly. Scanning can help the students learn to read and understand faster.

According to different purposes of the classroom or extra classroom reading, teachers should try to develop appropriate activities to achieve the established learning goals. A great contribution to reading purposes achievement plays student's skills. As you know, reading involves a variety of skills. The most important are set out below [6].

- Recognizing the script of the language. Automatic decoding, being able to recognize a word at a glance.

- Previewing and predicting. Giving the text a quick look to be able to guess what is to come.

- Deducing the meaning and the use of unfamiliar lexical items.

- Understanding explicitly stated information.

- Understanding conceptual meaning.

- Understanding the communicative value.

- Understanding relations within sentences.

- Understanding the relations between parts of the text through lexical connection devices.

- Interpreting the text by going outside it.

- Recognizing indicators in discourse.

- Identifying the main points or important information in a piece of discourse.

- Distinguishing the main idea from the supporting details.

- Reading faster. Reading fast enough to allow the brain to process the information.

- Drawing conclusions, summarizing.

- Paraphrasing. Re-stating texts in the reader's own words.

- Visualizing. Drawing a picture, a map or a diagram of what is described in the text.

- Reflecting on the read or done reading activities.

All the students who were selected for the project are acquainted with skimming and scanning reading skills. Therefore, they can solve all the items like: questioning, multiple choice and fill in the gapes exercises, which comes after every selected text for the project. All these after-reading activities serve for better understanding of the texts.

## **Aims of extensive reading**

The principal objective of undertaking an extensive reading approach is to get students reading in English and liking it. An increase in reading fluency should be another objective.

Because of this, reading should be a pleasurable activity for the student, promoted as much as possible by the teacher.

Thus, in order to develop the spirit of competitiveness in our students, we have established a remuneration system for the best reader of the week. For this purpose, at the end of each week, the students who presented the best scores are awarded. They win one star each, so the one, who will win the most stars during the whole project, will become the winner of this competition. Even though the autonomy in English language learning has as its main objective learning in a unique way, specific to each student, we have come to the conclusion that competitiveness increases interest in participating in the project, and therefore will help to students' gradual growth of the autonomy of learning English.

## **The characteristics of an extensive reading approach**

Extensive reading approach has a certain number of characteristics which should be taken into consideration for a successful reading program:

1. Students read as much as it is possible in and out of the classroom.
2. Teacher should provide a variety of materials on a wide range of topics so encouraging them to read effectively.
3. Students select what they want to read and students have the possibility to stop reading the material which is of no interest for them.
4. The purposes of reading are usually related to pleasure, information, and general understanding. In this way, students are not frustrated, and the process of reading becomes not a necessity, but a pleasure and a good opportunity for entertainment. So, acting like that, we will encourage the students' skills and motivation to read. It is commonly known, that reading is one of the most effective ways to improve our mental health. Based on the foregoing, in the long term, arousing their interest and love for reading is nothing more than the prevention of possible age mental health problems such as Alzheimer's disease, for example. On the other hand, children who love reading train their memory and can remember more information than children who don't. Undoubtedly, this contributes to the overall success in school. For example, students of the 6th grade of the Theoretical Lyceum "Lucian Blaga" from Tiraspol record better results in such objects as history and literature.
5. Reading is its own reward that means no or very few exercises to complete after reading.

6. Reading materials are well within the linguistic competence of students in terms of vocabulary and grammar. Our first task is to promote reading for enjoyment among our students. That is why during the process of collecting materials for our digital or electronic library we should carefully select the possible texts. Speaking about our students, not all of them are of the same language - understanding level so we are trying to make our digital (electronic) library various. From the very beginning some of them were afraid they will not manage to fulfill the tasks, but in the process of reading they got interested in the process, as for the present moment, the level of complexity of the texts is almost the same. Respectively we come to the conclusion that all the students manage to improve their reading skills and have successfully overcome the fear of reading an unknown text.
7. Reading is individual and silent at the student's own pace, done when and where the student will choose. As it was observed this on its turn reduces the amount of time wasted aimlessly on social networks navigation, for example. Being asked our students confirmed that time losing activities on internet were considerably reduced.
8. Reading speed is usually faster than slower as students read books and other material they find easily understandable.
9. Teachers orient the students to the goals of program, explain the methodology, keep track of what each student reads and guide the students in getting the most out of the program.
10. The teacher is a role model of a reader for the students – an active member of the classroom reading community. We as teachers contribute as much as it is possible to encourage our student's reading helping them to rediscover the wonderful world of lecturing. Every time when it is necessary we come with some book's reviews aiming to interest them as readers.

## **Motivation**

One of the key factors to the success (or not) of an extensive reading program is motivation. Capturing student interest is the key. If the materials available are interesting to the students, then they will be far more likely to want to read them. These reading sources should also be at a level appropriate to their reading ability. As mentioned earlier, the texts should not be too difficult so students experience the frustration of not being able to understand the books. Getting the extensive reading program off to a good start is also vital. The aim is for an initial successful experience so that students discover they can read in English and that they enjoy it. This positive experience should stimulate them to read more, increasing motivation, enjoyment and a desire to read.

## **The teacher's role**

The teacher encourages and assists the students with their reading, which the students undertake during and/or after class. Occasional summaries (oral or written) can help with this as they show both that the students are reading and also that they understand what their books are about. The activities can also help students improve their writing or speaking ability. Another activity that teachers can become involved in is individual counselling - this gives the teacher an opportunity to ask students about their reading experiences and can be done by the teacher while the rest of the class is silent reading. Above all, however, extensive reading should be a student-centred and a student-managed activity. Thus, the most important role of a teacher during the extensive reading program consists in consolidation and guidance. We should remain in the shadow of our students, allowing them to make their own choices and to choose their own path to deep knowledge of English language through extensive reading method. Working with children within the framework of this project, we didn't press our students or didn't push them our own opinions. Feeling a complete freedom of choice, our students stopped considering reading a useless and tedious duty. From our point of view, using this approach, we will regain our students back from modern ways of getting acquainted with literature, since even the best film adaptation will not reflect the full deepness of a read novel.

## **Conclusion**

Many researchers put in evidence the benefits that have been gained by the undertaking of extensive reading programs. They emphasized the importance and necessity of extensive reading programs for English language learners, regardless the level of students' language mastering. These include gains in reading and writing proficiency, oral skills and vocabulary, an increase in motivation and positive affect. Better reading, writing, grammar and speaking skills means better English communicative skills. Setting up an extensive reading program should not only lead your students to improve their reading proficiency and other language skills, but will hopefully enable them to take pleasure in reading. Starting our project, we ourselves don't exactly know what the final results will be, but we sincerely hope that this project will allow our students to become more confident in learning English. The skills they are acquiring will open up the wonderful world of English-language literature for them, because from our point of view, reading of the books in original language is a special and completely incomparable pleasure.

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3. [http://www.readingmatrix.com/archives/archives\\_vo11\\_no1.html](http://www.readingmatrix.com/archives/archives_vo11_no1.html)