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**Abstract:** This article reports a six-month study that used a matched-pairs pre-test, post-test control group design to measure the relative effectiveness of extensive reading with remedial reading students in a Philippines secondary school (n=60). Ninety percent of students at the school come from low-income homes where reading materials tend to be scarce. The dependent variable, reading proficiency, was assessed using the Informal Reading Inventory and the Gray Standardized Oral Reading Test. Both groups received the same 40 daily minutes of English instruction plus a remedial class. In their remedial class, the control group studied via a traditional approach, emphasizing intensive reading and phonics. For the experimental group, remedial reading class involved reading self-selected materials and doing a variety of post-reading activities. Results suggest that extensive reading led to greater gains than traditional reading instruction. Details on how extensive reading was implemented and a rationale for extensive reading are provided.

## **Introduction**

The benefits of extensive reading (ER) for both first and second language learners are well-researched and well-known (Anderson, 1996; Day & Bamford, 1997; Elley, 1996b; Krashen, 1993; Ng, 1988). However, despite the widely disseminated and strong

evidence for the value of ER, implementation has often been infrequent and a less than complete success, especially in poorer countries which suffer from such problems as lack of reading materials, low teacher salaries, and inadequate preparation of teachers to implement ER (Greaney, 1996). Effective ER programs seem even less common for lower achieving students, as many educators express the view that such students lack the desire and skills to read extensively. Thus, further research is needed to develop and test situation-appropriate ER implementation with lower-achieving students.

In the present article, we report a study designed to examine the effectiveness of an English-language ER program for remedial students at a public secondary school in the southern Philippines. The population of the Philippines totals approximately 70 million with a per capita annual income of about US\$1000. Gonzalez (1997) provides an overview of the education system in the country based on data for the 1994-1995 school year which showed a total of 17,538,049 pupils, with 10,903,529 in 35,671 primary schools (which last for six years), 4,762,877 in 6,055 secondary schools (which last for four years), and 1,871,643 studying at 1,181 colleges and universities. These data excluded students in post-secondary non-degree programmes. While 93% of primary school pupils studied in public schools, only 68% of secondary students and 21% of tertiary level students were in public schools. Class sizes normally ranged from 40-60 students per class. Many classrooms were not able to benefit from electronic teaching aids, as only 51% of municipalities were able to provide distributed sources of power, not to mention the cost of such equipment. However, Gonzalez reports that some affluent schools in urban areas were endowed with electronic teaching devices, including computers.

Since 1974, the Philippines has had a bilingual education policy. Currently, students study some subjects - Mathematics, Science, and English - in English and other subjects - Social Studies, Values Education, Technology and Home Economics, and Filipino - in Filipino, the national language. However, neither Filipino nor English is the first language of many students. For instance, in central and southern Philippines a major first language is Cebuano. Thus, many students face two mediums of instruction, neither of which is their first language.

In the 1960s, literature and language were two separate subjects in the Philippines. Now that they are combined, many teachers no longer push students to read books and stories. Instead, they emphasize the teaching of rules of grammar. ER is now sometimes a privilege only of classes of homogeneously grouped fast learners. Otherwise, in the typical class, oral reading may receive more attention than silent reading, and part-to-whole instruction may dominate.

We now state the research questions used in the present study, one which investigated an attempt to engage a group of lower-achieving Filipino pupils in ER. Then, the methodology used in the study will be described.

### **Research Questions**

Two research questions were formulated:

1. Will there be a significant difference in the pre-test reading proficiency scores of the control group (students who do not participate in an ER program) and the experimental group (students who do participate in an ER program)?
2. Will there be a significant difference in the post-test reading proficiency scores of the control and experimental groups?

The second question was the one of interest. The first one was set in order to test whether the randomization procedures used before the study began had succeeded in yielding control and experimental groups that were indeed matched as to initial reading proficiency.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Students at a public secondary school on the island of Mindanao in the southern Philippines participated in the study. School enrolment stood at more than 2800 for the 1997-1998 academic year, with an average of 52 students per class. Ninety percent of the students at this school come from low-income homes where reading materials tend to be scarce. Many of them do not live with their own families. Instead, they live with other families who pay for their schooling in return for work around the house and elsewhere. Indeed, some students even support their families by working at night. For instance, they might sell "balut" (eggs that are about to hatch). Thus, many have little time or energy after school for academic tasks, and without an in-class ER programme they are likely to do little reading.

Most classes last 40 minutes except for Science and for Technology and Home Economics which last 80 minutes. In addition to a bulletin board, every classroom is enlivened by various corners. The Filipiniana corner features displays on Philippines heroes, tourist spots, and folk dances. Other corners focus on science and on drug prevention. Drug abuse is a problem among a small number of students including some who participated in the study.

The study was conducted over a period of six months from September 1996 to

January 1997. In September, 60 first-year students at the school, 30 females and 30 males, who were to be assigned to remedial reading classes constituted the participants in this study. Their ages ranged from 12-18. Using a matched-pairs design, each student was first matched with another of similar IQ, sex, socio-economic status, reading level, and past achievement. Then, one member of each pair was randomly assigned to the experimental remedial reading class, and the other member was assigned to the control class, so as to achieve balance on the variables in the two remedial reading classes.

### **Procedure**

A Pre-test - Post-test Control Group design was used. The dependent variable, reading proficiency, was assessed via two instruments: the Informal Reading Inventory (IRI) (Johnson, Kress, & Pikulski, 1987), which yields scores from 0-100 on reading comprehension, and the Gray Standardized Oral Reading Test (GSORT) (Gray, 1967), which measures reading speed and accuracy, and indicates the grade level at which the student is reading. These instruments had been used previously by local researchers in the same area of Philippines and were found to be useful. Both instruments were administered twice, once two months before the treatment began and again after the treatment had been carried out. The pre-test was administered by the first author with assistance from other teachers at the school, while the post-test was administered by other teachers, in an effort to lessen experimenter bias.

The treatment lasted six months. During that period, both the control and experimental groups received 40 minutes of regular English class daily, plus an additional 40-minute remedial reading class. The first author conducted both remedial

classes, whereas two different teachers taught the regular English classes. The school had no ER program, and it is not common for teachers to have initiated their own. The regular English class followed the same syllabus for both groups, while the remedial reading class varied.

A typical reading class period at the school in which the present study was conducted begins, like all classes, with a prayer, followed by the class and teacher exchanging greetings. The teacher then asks students to open their textbooks to a given page. Next, the teacher might introduce the topic of the reading text and/or ask students to skim or scan the reading passage. The teacher then reads aloud the text, unlocking difficult vocabulary and grammar points. Next, students are asked to answer questions to check their comprehension. This involves silent reading of at least parts of the passage. An integrated skills approach is used, so that in any given lesson in the textbook (it takes several classes to cover one textbook lesson) students are listening, speaking, reading, writing, and studying grammar.

In their remedial reading class, the control group were taught the conventional way from a textbook which included lessons on vowel and consonant sounds, minimal pairs, reading and reciting poems, and reading short selections. The only silent reading the control group did - and this infrequently - was of these short selections from their textbook. In contrast, the experimental remedial reading group took part in an ER program. The core of the ER program consisted of students reading texts of their choice and then doing a variety of post-reading activities. The female students tended to choose fiction, whereas the males often preferred non-fiction, such as news and feature articles from magazines. Care was taken that student chose books that were at their

independent reading level. Obtaining materials took a good deal of effort and time, but a barely sufficient collection was assembled from students themselves, fellow teachers, the school library, and donations of money or materials from the community (Lituanas, 1997). [One method that was not employed was for teachers (Guadart, 1994) and students (Davidson, Ogle, Ross, Tuhaka, & Ng, 1997) to write ER materials.]

In the experimental group's remedial class, students spent about 45% of the time doing silent reading (about 20 minutes per lesson), with another 45% spent on pre- and post-reading activities (mostly post-reading) which included attention to students' problem areas in reading. The remaining 10% of class time was spent on classroom management, including disciplining unruly students.

The teacher used various techniques to encourage students to read more and to increase their reading skills, such as:

1. Reading aloud by the teacher.
2. Asking students to predict what a story was about using such clues as the title, cover, and illustrations.
3. Giving brief summaries/reviews of materials she had read and enjoyed.
4. Asking students to summarize for the entire class material they had read and enjoyed.
5. Chatting with individual students about what they were reading or had read.
6. Monitoring students' progress in ER and involving them in such monitoring.

While students were reading silently, the teacher would:

1. Read on her own (10%).
2. Assist students to select reading material (10%).

3. Help students, e.g., by answering questions and by sitting beside students who had difficulty recognizing words and guiding them (80%).

Ideally, the teacher would have spent a much larger percentage of the time reading on her own as a model for students. However, given the difficulty of obtaining ER materials suitable to students' interest and reading levels, it seemed more important to spend time on the two other activities.

Post-reading activities included:

1. Answering higher order thinking questions, as part of a game called "Book Wheels" (Jacobs, 1993).
2. Role play.
3. Retelling.
4. Mock interviews in which one student portrayed a character in the story that other students would then interview.
5. Adding new words encountered while reading to a personalized vocabulary notebook (Kweldju, 1997).

These post-reading activities provided one means of attracting the less-diligent students to ER, because they enjoyed the stories that were related by their classmates who had done the reading and follow-up tasks. Nevertheless, the participation of these few less-diligent students remained unsatisfactory.

Table 1 compares ER program guidelines found in the literature on ER, e.g., Yu (1993) with how ER was implemented with the experimental group in the present study.



**Table 1 Guidelines for ER Programs and How They Were Implemented in the Current Study**

<b>ER PROGRAM GUIDELINES</b>	<b>IMPLEMENTATION</b>
1. Large selection of materials for various reading levels and interests	Materials were obtained by the students and teacher from a variety of sources
2. Time set aside for students to read during school	45% of class time was reserved for silent reading, and pre- and post-reading was designed to encourage students to also read at home
3. Teachers who encourage students to read	The teacher read silently while student read and talked about what she read, read aloud and had students predict what would happen next, asked students to share with classmates about what they read, and students and teachers monitored student progress
4. Engaging post-reading tasks	Games, role play, retelling, mock interviews, vocabulary notebooks were used

## Data Analysis

T-tests were used to compare the pre-test scores of the control and experimental groups on the GSORT and the IRI to establish if they were indeed roughly equivalent on the dependent variable as it was operationalized in this study, i.e., the two measures of reading proficiency, before the study began. T-tests were used again to compare the posttest scores of the two groups on the two instruments to see if the treatment might have been associated with any difference in reading proficiency. A familywise alpha level of .05 was set for all t-tests. With degrees of freedom of 29, the critical value was approximately 2.67. This higher than normal critical value for a .05 alpha level (compared to the normal 2.04) was used to compensate for the fact that four t-tests were done.

## Results

Table 2 shows the pre-test results on both measures of reading proficiency. The t-tests suggest, in answer to the first research question, that there were no significant differences between the control and experimental groups prior to the inception of the six-month experimental period.

**Table 2 t-tests Comparing Control and Experimental Groups on Pre-tests of Reading Proficiency**

Proficiency Test	n	Mean	s.d.	t
IRI				
Control	30	7.89	4.81	

				0.20 (n.s.)
Experimental	30	7.61	5.19	
GSORT				
Control	30	2.55	0.73	0.86 (n.s.)
Experimental	30	2.38	0.83	

n.s. = nonsignificant

Table 3 shows the post-test results on both measures of reading proficiency. The mean post-test IRI score for the control group was 12.28 compared to 32.57 for the experimental group. On the GSORT, mean score for the control group was 3.96 compared to 5.25 for students in the ER group. As mentioned in the Procedure section, GSORT is an indicator of the grade level at which the student is reading. Since students in our study were in Grade 7, they should have scored at least 7 on the GSORT. However, as Table 2 indicates, the ER students were still reading at 5.25 level, somewhat below their expected level.

**Table 3 t-tests Comparing Control and Experimental Groups on Post-tests of Reading Proficiency**

Proficiency Test	n	Mean	s.d.	t
IRI				
Control	30	12.28	5.77	6.72*

Experimental	30	32.57	14.80	
GSORT				
Control	30	3.96	0.88	5.31*
Experimental	30	5.25	1.16	

\* Significant at  $p < .05$

The t-tests suggest, in answer to the second research question, that after the six-month experiment, significant differences existed between the control and experimental groups in terms of reading proficiency. As a follow-up statistical procedure to measure the amount of variance in scores on the two reading tests accounted for by the independent variable (whether students were in the control or experimental group), eta squared tests were run. Results showed that the experimental treatment accounted for 61% of the variance in IRI scores and 49% of the variance in GSORT scores, an average of 55%, a very strong association (Hatch & Lazaraton, 1991).

### Discussion

The results of the current study suggest that a well-conducted ER program may be able to make a significant impact on reading proficiency, even when students are of below average level and where reading materials are scarce. However, it should be noted that despite their impressive gains, students in the experimental group were still reading below grade level, as indicated by their GSORT scores<sup>1)</sup>. Perhaps, continued extensive reading would be part of the necessary elements of a program for overcoming this

deficit. From a research perspective, the two groups would, ideally, have continued the control and experimental treatments for a longer period to see if the effect remained and if the experimental group continued their progress. Also, the research design would have been improved had follow-up been done to investigate whether the ER programme was associated with more out-of-class reading by students after the programme had ended. Constraints on the first author's time, unfortunately, did not permit this. However, the first author continues to use ER and to inform other teachers about it, both at her school and elsewhere.

The relative success of ER with the remedial students in this study may have important implications. Early lack of success in reading often leads students down a slippery slope to failure in other academic areas, low academic self-image, low motivation to study, high likelihood of dropping out of school, high delinquency rates, and poor career prospects after leaving school (Goodlad, 1983). Further, instruction for such students may sometimes be of lower quality, focusing on drills and other lower-order thinking tasks, as teachers may have inappropriately low expectations for what these students can achieve (Oakes, 1985).

Many intervention programs have been implemented to meet the needs of such low achieving students. Successful programs focus on early and intensive intervention, and use well-researched pedagogy (e.g., Clay, 1996; Slavin, Madden, Karweit, Dolan, & Wasik 1992). However, unlike the two early intervention programs referenced in the preceding sentence that are typically used with lower primary school students, the program described in this chapter was carried out with secondary school students. These older students may be more difficult to reach, as they have suffered many years

of reading failure.

ER, for the many reasons reviewed in the introduction to this chapter, certainly appears to belong in intervention programs for students with reading difficulties. In the present study, we saw a significantly greater improvement in proficiency for those students who participated in the ER programme implemented by the first author. This program, we would like to stress, followed the guidelines for effective ER mentioned earlier in this chapter. How this was done was displayed in Table 1 in the Procedures section above.

Teachers will often need support to implement ER, support in the form of teacher development workshops and follow-up coaching, time for teachers to assist each other on ER implementation, administration backing for devoting time to silent reading, funds to purchase reading materials for class and school libraries, and help from students' homes to encourage them to make reading a habit. Lack of such support is a key reason why, despite the apparent success of an ER program with one group of students at their school, many other teachers at the school where the present study was conducted have remained reluctant to initiate ER with their students.

In conclusion, students who are not currently skilled, enthusiastic readers face unnecessary and serious obstacles to realizing their potential contributions to themselves, their families, and to society in general. In this information age, they will be shut off from the power gained through obtaining and providing information and from the splendor and inspiration of good fiction. Thus, educators need to create and implement programs to help students who fall behind in reading. The accumulated wisdom embodied in the current study and the many which came before it strongly suggests that

ER can play an important role in helping students gain in their level of reading skill. Reading skills and the benefits that flow from them are essential if students are to become people who, to paraphrase Friere (1970), use the word to know and change the world.

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