Analyzing the Extensive Reading Approach: Benefits and Challenges in the Mexican Context

Analizando el enfoque de la lectura extensiva: beneficios y retos en el contexto Mexicano

Aurora Varona Archer
aurovarona@yahoo.com.mx
Universidad de Veracruz, Mexico

Some scholars have highlighted the benefits of using extensive reading as a way to motivate students to learn a second language (L2). This article is derived from a study that aimed at implementing extensive reading in an action research project in a public University in Mexico. Therefore, the following article examines some arguments of different researchers who have carried out extensive reading studies in contexts of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL). The implementation issues of this reading approach are also analyzed by the approach's constraints and educational practices in the Mexican TEFL context. The concluding remarks are an attempt to contribute to the growth of future research in the field of extensive reading in Mexico.

Key words: Action research, extensive reading, second language (L2), teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL)

Algunos expertos han enfatizado los beneficios de utilizar la lectura extensiva como una manera de motivar a sus alumnos a aprender una segunda lengua (L2). Este artículo se deriva de una investigación cuya finalidad fue implementar la lectura extensiva con un proyecto de investigación acción en una universidad pública en México. Por lo tanto, el siguiente artículo examina algunos argumentos de diferentes investigadores quienes han realizado estudios de lectura extensiva en contextos en la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera (TEFL). Los cuestionamientos de la implementación de este enfoque de lectura son también analizados por sus limitaciones y prácticas educativas en el contexto TEFL en México. Los comentarios finales pretenden contribuir al crecimiento de futuras investigaciones en el campo de la lectura extensiva en México.

Palabras clave: enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera (TEFL), investigación acción, lectura extensiva, segunda lengua

Introduction

Teaching a foreign language is a challenging task due to the variety of constraints that English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers face daily. For instance, they have to look for ways to motivate their students to learn a second language (L2) in a meaningful and attractive way and they have to explore appropriate methods to teach it. These are demanding tasks for EFL teachers whose main goal is to achieve effective learning for their students. Bearing in mind these challenges, EFL teachers need to be selective and analytical to choose the suitable methodology that they try to implement in their classrooms. In the last 15 years, ELT methodologists have argued about the importance of developing the reading skill for language learners (Grabe & Stoller, 2001). The benefits of this skill have been widely pointed out by most L2 scholars who have both implemented and studied the effects of reading in the L2 classroom. Consequently, the analysis of the different reading approaches is relevant for L2 teachers to carry them out in their own classrooms appropriately.

Currently, extensive reading (ER) is one reading approach that is being studied by most reading experts. The fact of promoting autonomous and self-selected readings extensively makes this reading approach suitable for both L2 and EFL learners (Renandya & Jacobs, 2002). Thus, the following paper examines the different arguments that support the benefits of ER in formal studies carried out in EFL contexts. The question concerning the feasibility to include this reading approach is also presented so that EFL teachers can relate these issues to their own settings. The final comments are an attempt to promote the development of ER in EFL contexts, mainly in Mexico, where there is a high interest to promote reading through an educational program called "Programa Nacional de Lectura" by the Department of Education in Mexico (Secretaría de Educación Pública, SEP).

Teaching English in Mexico: An EFL Context

Teaching English has been defined by experts in language methodology using different terms. There are mainly two terms: English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as second language (ESL). These terms have been defined based on the different students' reasons to learn a foreign language. Therefore, the knowledge of these reasons become the language teachers' goals in order to teach this language successfully. This section discusses the definition of EFL and the implications of teaching this language in the Mexican educational system.

Brown (2007) highlights the difference between ESL and EFL. In the former, the nonnative speaker learns English inside the culture where this language is spoken; for example, a Mexican speaker learning English in the USA or the UK. In the latter, the nonnative speaker learns English in their own native culture "with few immediate

opportunities to use the language within the environment of that culture" (Brown 2007, p. 205); for example, Mexicans learning English in Mexico. Gebhard (1996) points out another difference between teaching EFL and ESL, which is the goals. For example, there are many countries where students learn English because of educational purposes and so it is mainly used for passing their school examinations, at upper levels. However, there is no external need to use the foreign language as a means of communication in the students' countries. Therefore, as Brown (2001) states, the L2 learning is limited to the classroom with no natural production outside this environment. According to Carrell and Eisterhold (1987), learning English as a foreign language with educational purposes is mainly focused on texts and cultural issues with the use of translation in most situations. Thus, students do not show a real interest in learning English. As Brown (2001, p. 117) points out: "EFL context is clearly a greater challenge for students and teachers." For this reason, EFL contexts have unique characteristics compared to ESL contexts.

Chepetla, García, González, and Torres (2008) discuss some historical background issues of EFL in Mexico. They say that in 1993 the communicative approach was included in the language teaching methodology of the school program because this approach was suitable for the teaching purposes. In 2005 a change was made in the language programs; an emphasis on reading and writing was relevant due to the lack of positive results of the 1993 program. According to these scholars, the national program designers established ambiguity in EFL teaching goals because of two reasons: First, English is considered an important language but they do not take into account the particular sociolinguistic teaching settings; second, the Common European Framework of Reference has taken on an important role as a basis of the EFL national curriculum. Nevertheless, the real educational needs of the students have not been considered. Thus, these authors suggest that language teachers, educators, linguistics, anthropologists, and experts in language teaching should be the ones responsible for participating actively in the national language curriculum design. Furthermore, it is necessary to take into account the real national settings of every state and community of this country.

Davies (2009) points out that nowadays ELT education is growing in some public primary schools. It is mandatory in secondary schools as well. Thus, students have been taught English until this level for about six years. However, there are several implications for learning this language in this particular context. In his article Davies (2007) claims that learning a foreign language is not an easy matter, especially if this learning has a mandatory status in the curriculum. It is important to consider the educational social context and the particular teaching conditions. He states that the unsuccessful results of EFL in Mexico are related to the teaching conditions of public schools. For instance, EFL teachers have to deal with big classes: an average of 55 students in a classroom, less than 40 students in only a few cases. In addition, most of the EFL teachers who come from the "normal superior" have a

low English language proficiency because either they did not have a formal education in language teaching or they studied English only when they were in secondary and high school.

In order to solve this problem, there have been proposals to establish ALTE A2 (KET Cambridge) to become an English teacher at "normal superior" and ALTE B2 (FCE Cambridge) to get the degree as an EFL teacher from "normal superior". Both proposals have been unsuccessful because of political issues and have not been implemented. However, there have been training programs to professionalize language teaching and update teachers in new programs and methods in L2. However, as Davies (2007) states, it is necessary to evaluate the language programs regularly taking into account negative factors such as class size and students' lack of motivation towards English. Fortunately, nowadays more English teachers graduate from more BA programs in ELT with formal training in language teaching and have a higher level of proficiency. These new generations of English teachers are working in public schools (at secondary and high school levels). This is an advantage in overcoming some of the negative factors in EFL learning.

Mexican EFL educators experience a continuous struggle to become competent teachers. On the one hand, they have to improve their language proficiency and on the other hand, they need to find meaningful teaching methods and strategies in EFL. These two actions help both teachers and students to construct a better EFL learning process. Thus, national educational authorities need to consider these actions in order to develop more realistic programs which may offer successful learning. Regarding this, Mora and Teague (2007, p. 71) say that "teachers and curriculum coordinators restructure current practices in order to more successfully tailor second language instruction to students' desires, interests, and experiences."

To conclude, EFL programs should not obey political goals; they need to be based on students' needs and particular contexts. In this way, the language programs would be based more on academic issues than on political matters. As stated above, there is no doubt of the successful trend to professionalize language teachers in Mexico, but it has not been enough to deal with negative factors such as class size in the majority of public schools and the lack of the students' motivation to learn English. These two factors are also part of teachers' struggle in the Mexican context. Consequently, the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) may be a more realistic and reachable goal in the language programs instead of being a frustrating battle between the language teachers, students, and public schools.

The Role of Reading in TEFL

As Anderson (1999, p. 1) states "second language reading teachers face many challenges in the classroom" because teaching L2 reading is not a matter of just assigning reading activities and making students answer them in their textbooks. There is also the challenge to

help students find reading useful in their L2 learning. Anderson (1999) also argues that students' learning background, including their L1 reading skills and knowledge level, affect their reading performance. He suggests that EFL teachers should encourage students to develop their vocabulary skills, to improve their reading comprehension and reading rate, their use of reading strategies and finally to be able to evaluate their learning. These suggestions are part of the challenges that teachers need to foster in the EFL classroom.

Another challenge in the way of developing reading is the culture of the country where students have grown up and live. As Anderson (2008, p. 4) states "in many places of the world, reading is not an integral part of people's lives." Thus, the students' reading habits and attitudes towards reading are poor compared to people who are enthusiastic readers. For example, according to Gutiérrez and Montes de Oca (2004), two important international organizations such as UNESCO and OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) showed in statistical studies of 2000 and 2002 respectively that Mexico was placed in low reading levels compared to developed countries. Consequently, Mexican EFL teachers have to deal with this context in their classes. For this reason, Anderson (2008) points out that teaching reading with enthusiasm may encourage students to read and raise awareness of the effect that reading has to obtain information and knowledge in their lives. Regarding this, Harmer (2008) states that two reasons make students read in English: for academic purposes and for pleasure. These two reasons can help teachers to exploit L2 reading in their classes.

Once teachers realize the challenges they face in the EFL classroom, they need to become aware of the effect developing reading has. As Harmer (2008) mentions, some of the benefits of using reading in class are: reading is good for language acquisition (the more students read, the better they become at reading), reading improves students' vocabulary knowledge in their spelling and writing, reading texts show examples of models for students' own writing (the way sentences are structured, paragraphs and whole texts), and finally, "good reading texts can introduce interesting topics, stimulate discussion, excite imaginative responses and provide the springboard for well-rounded, fascinating lessons" (Harmer, 2008, p. 99).

Thus, including reading activities in class helps EFL teachers to integrate speaking, listening, and writing in students' L2 learning. Nonetheless, Hedge (2000) says that Rivers and Temperley pointed out that the criteria to select reading texts should include the following: a purpose such as to get information, respond to curiosity about a topic, follow instructions to perform a task, pleasure and amusement, keeping in touch with friends or colleagues, know what is happening in the world, and find out when and where things are. These purposes focus students' attention on reading the texts, especially if there is a strong motivational need for students to read those texts for professional studies mainly or individual needs. Hedge (2000) suggests that a variety of texts needs to be provided for students so that they can

enhance their reading purposes as well. For instance, brochures, articles, schedules, poems, short stories, maps, and diagrams can be used as a way to provide students different genres to read.

Hence, reading plays an important role in developing students' L2 learning. The previous actions and suggestions to promote reading in the EFL classroom should encourage EFL teachers to include more reading activities in class. The practice of providing students with a variety of activities and materials in L2 helps students to enrich their language knowledge in a meaningful way.

ER: Background and Theory

Day and Bamford (1998) mention that Palmer (1921/1964), who contributed with L2 terminology, selected the term "extensive" to refer to it as "abundant reading." Palmer explained that extensive reading is a quick form to read "book after book" in his own words. He said that language is not the goal of the text, but its meaning. Consequently with this issue he defined intensive reading. He pointed out that in intensive reading the goal is the meaning. For instance, students use their dictionaries constantly as a way to learn new vocabulary and focus on grammar. Moreover, there is an emphasis on developing strategies such as analyzing and translating among others, whereas in extensive reading, learners focus on the content, and not on the language.

Day and Bamford (1998) mention that the ER concept was introduced by Michael West who was an ELT methodologist. West (and New York City Board of Education in its 1931 Syllabus of Minima in Modern Foreign Languages) called extensive reading "supplementary reading." In this syllabus, this kind of reading promoted the development of enjoyment and the ability to read in the foreign language. Moreover, it was relevant to consider students' individual differences and encourage the reading skill.

Subsequently, Krashen (2004, p. 74) distinguishes three kinds of in-school free reading programs: (1) sustained silent reading (SSR), (2) self-selected reading, and (3) ER. With these reading approaches, Krashen pointed out his theory on second language acquisition. In his theory, he claims that learners acquire language in only one form: "by understanding messages, or 'obtaining comprehensible input' in a low-anxiety situation" (p. 37). Krashen introduces his own term in a reading approach called "free voluntary reading" (FVR). In this approach, learners read because they want to; there are no book reports and no questions at the end of the chapter. It is expected that students will obtain a high language proficiency level with this approach. Therefore, learning occurs in a low-anxiety situation because there is no pressure related to taking an exam as part of homework or other academic tasks. On the contrary, this reading approach occurs because students really want to read.

These perspectives in developing L2 reading have made a change in teaching reading, compared with other traditional approaches in L2 reading such as intensive reading because there are two particular characteristics in ER: enjoyment and freedom to promote L2 reading. Regarding enjoyment, Nuttall (2005) claims that enjoyment is an important factor in reading. Students need to read books which they enjoy and are easy to read. Hence, the reading habit will be developed. She suggests that a good way to enhance the knowledge of L2 is by reading extensively in the target language because students who read will develop speed and reading habits compared to those students who do not read. Nevertheless, the books need to be enjoyable for students to read. About freedom, Aebersold and Field (1997) mention that in ER students choose from some self-selected readings what they will read and, if necessary, with the guidance of their teachers.

The Educational Practice of ER

Day and Bamford (1998, pp. 7-8) present in Figure 1 some characteristics in order to fulfill a successful extensive reading program.

Students	Teacher	Reading
• Read as much as possible. This reading may be in the classroom, but mainly out of it. • Have the freedom to choose what they want to read. • The goals of reading are based on pleasure, information and general understanding. Students will determine those goals.	• A variety of materials need to be provided with different topics to be chosen. • Reading material are according to students' language level both in grammar and vocabulary. • Guides students to the goals of the course, explains the methodology, monitors what each student reads, and leads students to exploit their reading as much as possible. • The teacher is a role model of a reader for students. Teacher has to demonstrate his knowledge and practice in reading to encourage reading.	• Reading is its own reward. There are few or no follow-up exercises after reading. • Reading is individual and silent. Students have their own pace to read. • The speed in reading is usually faster than slower due to the easiness of the reading materials.

Figure 1. Characteristics of ER (According to Day & Bamford, 1998)

After the goals have been established, Day and Bamford (1998, pp. 84-89) suggest the following principles to set up a program:

1) The amount of material to be read needs to be appropriate for the time available students have to read. So, teachers have to take into account if students are able to read once or twice a week depending on other activities that they have to do.

2) Students' pace depends on their language level. Beginners do not read at the same pace as advanced students do. For example, tiredness can interfere to make beginner students stop their reading.

3) Established reading targets can be expressed in terms of the material (number of books or pages read) or time (number of hours spent reading). This aspect will depend on the length of the program.

4) The evaluation in an ER program can be carried out in two ways: first, by assessing students individually to check their progress and doubts and second, by using the reading targets as a way to use an objective evaluation form.

5) The following methods can be used to monitor and evaluate students' progress: (a) A reading notebook: In this notebook students will report in detail the books they have read, other materials they have read, correlative activities. Dates can be included, how long they took to read a book and their opinions about their readings. Obviously, teachers have to check these notebooks in order to evaluate their students. (b) A weekly reading diary: Instead of using a notebook, especially if there is not plenty of time, students will note their reading reports daily. They will write what they read that day and for how long. (c) Book reports: Students will summarize the books they have read and express their opinions of the books. Teachers can collect those reports and give them back to students in order to create a portfolio for the end of the course. (d) Negotiated evaluation: Students may be given the responsibility for their evaluation by suggesting ideas for getting a grade at the end of the course.

6) After considering some reading experts' opinions about the appropriate place to read for students, the authors agreed that reading should be carried out mainly outside the classroom because this contributes to building the reading habit and students decide the right moment to read, as well as their own place to read (a library, on the bus, at a coffee shop, at home, etc.) which promotes students' autonomy.

7) The students' linguistic level will determine the kind of reading they will engage in. Day and Bamford (1998) suggest that the i minus 1 level helps students to feel confident about their reading. It is very discouraging for students to read a text full of unknown words with grammatical structures not appropriate to their level. As they become familiar and used to reading by building their reading and language

competence, it is suggested that students move to a higher level, as long as they feel confident with that change. Teachers have to clarify ER course goals to students because the goal is to read easy materials which will invite them to read more than choosing difficult texts which lead them to get bored or demotivated to read. Therefore a close monitoring by the teacher of the students' development and the students' choices of reading are both important. As a final suggestion, students have to read material where there are no more than five unknown words per page. If they find more than this amount, the text is probably very difficult to read. Thus, they have to choose something easier.

8) The use of a dictionary while reading, in most cases, should be banned for beginner students because the objective is to get a general idea of the text and not to stop every time an unknown word appears to the reader. However, these scholars also suggest a technique when using a dictionary in an ER activity. In this technique students have to mark with a light pencil the unknown words without stopping their reading. Afterwards, once they have finished reading the chapter, they can go back and look up the marked words. The authors mention that from three to four words are a sensible number of them to check. Students will repeat the same technique in the following chapter they read.

ER Materials

Relating to the materials used in ER, there are several aspects to take into account. Firstly, Day and Bamford (2000, p. 13) explain that the reading materials considered should contain vocabulary and grammar corresponding to the students' linguistic competence: "When students find no more than one or two difficult words on a page, the text is appropriately easy." According to them there are two factors that affect reading fluency. One, when students do not concentrate their attention on checking word-by-word, it promotes understanding the general meaning of the text. And second, by getting familiar with words and sentence patterns students start to read more accurately and quickly with practice. These two factors lead to building students' self-confidence because they are not worried about the meaning of the words; on the contrary, they are concentrating on the general meaning of the text.

Secondly, Hedge (2000) states that the use of authentic texts makes students read authentically. As mentioned above reading materials need to be graded according to students' level for the following reasons: students will build their vocabulary little by little, students will not overuse their dictionaries, and they will practice their inference skills.

Thirdly, Nuttall (2005) points out that ER materials need to be appealing, short, and varied. These characteristics will invite students to read more in L2. Once teachers have their

books, it is important to classify them. They can either be classified by content (fiction/classical) or according to their linguistic level.

Thus, following these particular recommendations to implement an ER program may enable ELT teachers to avoid misunderstandings about how an ER reading should be carried out. The ER approach may be a good way to change the perspective in L2 reading due to the variety of elements involved such as the principles and the materials.

Motivation in ER

Learning about any EFL methodology or approach invites EFL teachers to apply it and look for appropriate techniques to achieve a successful implementation. However, once teachers face their own contexts and reality, things may be different. For instance, EFL teachers have to struggle with students' resistance to learn English, especially if they have to take it as a compulsory subject. Thus, negative attitudes such as apathy, rejection, anger, and fear among other negative feelings appear and establish a wall between the student and the teacher.

Brown (2001) mentions that L2 students with negative attitudes are not willing to interact and participate. This reaction decreases their language input, so they will not achieve high language proficiency. Thus, EFL teachers have to be sensitive to their students' attitudes in the classroom in order to avoid negative reactions towards learning L2. Brown also claims that these negative attitudes can be modified when students face real situations such as establishing a conversation with native speakers. This is one of the issues which may strengthen the use of the ER approach in the EFL classroom because through reading a book in a foreign language students start to communicate with the author.

This "communication" is established between the writer (author) and the reader (student). The student has the freedom and interest to choose what to read just for the pleasure of discovering the writer's message (Varona, 2012). Furthermore, the writer leads the reader to know about the L2 culture which may also be a motivating factor. Therefore, extensive reading may be a suitable approach for L2 teachers who deal with negative student attitudes in the classroom. In addition, students may feel more self-confident, and a more relaxed classroom atmosphere may be built.

Day and Bamford (1998) explain, firstly, that students with positive attitudes toward L1 reading will have a more positive attitude toward L2 reading. Secondly, they mention that students' previous experiences in reading affect either positively or negatively their attitude to L2 reading. For example, students who have had positive experiences do not reject L2 texts, whereas unsuccessful learners in reading start rejecting reading from the very beginning of a reading course. Finally, Day and Bamford (1998) describe that positive feelings for the teacher, classmates, materials, activities, tasks, and procedures can be important factors in the

promotion of L2 reading. On the other hand, negative feelings toward these factors lead to the development of negative attitudes in L2 reading.

Grabe (2009) mentions that in a study carried out by Guthrie and Cox, they found a close link between positive attitudes and motivation for reading. Likewise, Day and Bamford (1998) claim that in an ER program students experience positive attitudes toward L2 reading because they read material appropriate to their linguistic level, so they do not feel frustrated to read. They also had the choice to read what they wanted, it was not imposed. Grabe (1991) and Tibbetts (1998) agree that to implement an ER program, pleasure to read has to be promoted because high self-esteem is built up in L2 students who feel proud to achieve learning goals by reading. They are not forced to explain or "translate" paragraphs while they read. They report what they find interesting to talk about, and the parts of the text which made students feel happy, angry, or sad. To conclude, EFL teachers should consider the affective factors in their teaching. As was described in this section, motivation and learners' attitudes are important to achieve L2 learning. Developing knowledge should not be the main goal in learning a foreign language. Students also need to feel self-confident, interested, and satisfied to see their learning progress. Including ER in class might be an opportunity for EFL teachers to create a positive environment in the classroom because students can express their opinions, feelings, and experiences based on their readings. This is also a good opportunity for teachers to get to know their students (Varona, 2012).

Studies in ER

An EFL teacher also needs to take into account the research studies which have been carried out by ER experts. These studies can contribute to the fulfillment of this reading approach in our own settings. Some areas where researchers have found the effect of L2 reading are the following: vocabulary learning, grammar knowledge, writing, reading comprehension, and reading speed. Some important studies will be mentioned in these areas.

Saragi et al. (as cited in Robb & Susser, 1989) carried out a vocabulary learning study. They found out that extensive reading was an important method to learn new words. Robb (2001) reports on an exploratory study with Japanese freshmen. He observed some benefits such as their increase in reading comprehension level, speed, reading vocabulary, and grammatical structure. These students also obtained better reading habits and reduced their consultation in dictionaries. There was also an improvement in writing as a result of written ER activities.

Bell (1998) and Grabe and Stoller (2002) mention that Elley and Manghuba carried out a two-year project in Fiji called "The book flood project" and found that after the first year of providing high-interest storybooks to Fijian school children, these children improved their word recognition and reading comprehension. In the second year, they improved their

writing and oral skills as well. Bell (2001) reports a study carried out with two groups of adult learners in the Yemen Arab Republic. This study measured reading speed and reading comprehension by using intensive and extensive reading programs. In this study, the results showed that those students who were exposed to extensive reading activities achieved higher scores in reading comprehension and reading speed in contrast to the students who worked with the intensive reading program.

In an experiment reported by Lituanas, Jacobs, and Renandya (as cited in Renandya, Sundara Rajan, & Jacobs, 1999), it was shown how a group of secondary school students in the Philippines improved their reading skills after a six-month extensive reading program in a remedial reading course. This group significantly improved their reading skills compared to another group which used the traditional way of teaching reading. Renandya et al. (1999) in an ER study also not only discovered the improvement that a group of Vietnamese adult students experienced in their English knowledge, but also discovered an effect on motivational factors. Arnold (2007) also carried out an experimental study about an online ER program where a group of students worked with online materials instead of using printed materials. She discovered a variety of linguistic and affective benefits in her study.

Krashen (2004) reports a well-known study in ER implemented by Mason and Krashen. In this study, there were two groups of Japanese students who had failed an English course. In one semester, the experimental group started to read graded readers in class and at home. This group had to report their readings by keeping a diary, writing summaries, reporting their feelings, opinions, and advancement. The other group continued with the traditional way of reading using translation and grammar. It was found that the extensive reading group experienced more progress than the traditional group did. Moreover, the significant finding of this study was the gain in their attitude. Those students who had rejected reading became avid readers. This was a significant study in this field.

Davis (1995) describes two programs: one in Singapore and the second in Cameroon. In Singapore, it was a project to assess selected schools in English skills. Forty of the weakest secondary schools in the Singapore educational system participated. It was considered a successful project for the following reasons:

a) The extensive reading program was completely sustained by the school authorities and administration.

b) There was economical support obtained by a grant from the Ministry of Education which monitored the development of the library.

c) There was a collaborative guidance among teachers in the process of implementing the extensive reading program and uninterrupted sustained silent reading. Teachers followed carefully the way students used their books.

d)   Students were tested in order to check their progress in reading.

e)   Questionnaires and pictorial charts were used as a way to avoid students' cheating and to help weak readers.

f)   Teachers used a range of motivational strategies to stimulate more reading. For instance, developing the competitive spirit of showing the amount of books read by the students.

The second program in Cameroon showed the same characteristics that Singapore did. It is important to mention that the key in this project to achieve a successful program was the criteria to select and grade the books.

These studies show the benefits of using the ER approach. The results invite ELT teachers to use ER in their classrooms as a way to motivate students to read and learn English in a meaningful way. Nevertheless, it is also important to consider those studies which have reported a lack of success in the implementation of this approach. Some of these studies are the following:

Green (2005) argues that unsatisfactory results in the Hong Kong Extensive Reading Scheme were found because it was not appropriately incorporated in the language curriculum; instead, it was seen as not being a part of the curriculum. There was an important obstacle to implement this approach: it was the teachers' resistance. First, teachers were tired of implementing several government programs during the previous five years and secondly, lack of training in ER methodology. Thus, these reasons led to conceptualize reading as a "stand-alone" component which originated a lack of success in implementing this ER program. Williams (2007) mentions that in an evaluation carried out in a Malawian primary school the deficiencies of implementing an ER program were discovered. These deficiencies were about the socio-economic status of the country, the lack of training for teachers in the ER approach and the lack of using the books.

All these studies have been carried out in some East countries where the cultural, educational and economical contexts are different from those of Latin American countries. The only similarity these countries share is the EFL context where there are things which can be compared and learnt from the ER practices. For instance, Ruíz and Arias (2009) carried out an ER study at the university level in Colombia to describe the effects of ER on a group of students. Three main findings can be identified: Firstly, students' motivation increased because they were involved in their self-selected readings. Secondly, their readings habits changed due to the amount of readings they did. They also had to make written reports of their readings. Thus, the writing skill was included in their learning process. Lastly, as a result of reading, they increased their vocabulary level through their writing and oral reports.

Therefore, more formal research in the Latin American contexts needs to be carried out so that the ELT community may evaluate the benefits and limitations of this reading approach in EFL settings.

Conclusion

To conclude, the ER approach offers an interesting way to teach L2 reading compared to the traditional approaches in reading. The emphases on encouraging enjoyment and freedom are significant features to consider as a suitable approach to be developed in the L2 classroom. As an EFL teacher, I am convinced that the fact of providing students with practical ways to learn L2 helps them to change their learning attitude. ER may be a suitable option in EFL contexts to make learning more meaningful to students taking into consideration the fact that most students learn this language as part of their curricula, not of their own choice. The more ER programs are promoted in the EFL classrooms, the more knowledge will be generated about the advantages and disadvantages of this method in Latin American contexts.

There is a strong concern voiced by the Mexican government to develop L1 reading programs which can lead Mexican students to become more enthusiastic readers (Varona, 2012). For example, the University of Veracruz has sponsored several book events such as book fairs to promote reading. So, this growing interest in promoting L1 in Mexico can also obtain benefits from developing ER in English in order to encourage university students to learn English in a more meaningful and cultural way.

Thus, learning a foreign language can be enriched by developing extensive reading in the classroom. The act of including readings which can contribute not only to learn L2, but also support the L1 reading programs in Mexico, is another good reason to consider this reading approach.

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The Author

Aurora Varona works at the University of Veracruz in Mexico. She holds an MA in TEFL and is currently studying for her PhD in ELT at Southampton University. She is also member of the Editorial Board of Mextesol Journal.