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Incorporating Extensive Reading into the Foreign Language Curriculum

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Abstract

Extensive reading is an approach to language learning that encourages learners to read a large quantity of easy reading material. A substantial body of research confirms the effectiveness of this approach for developing proficiency in both first (L1) and second (L2) languages. This paper explains what extensive reading is, why it is important, and how it can be incorporated as part of a language curriculum. The paper also provides a review of research on the effectiveness of extensive reading in several different languages and recommends many extensive reading resources, including open access materials, to facilitate the implementation of extensive reading for teachers and practitioners.

Keywords: *Extensive reading, intensive reading, reading resources, foreign language learning, language curriculum.*

Introduction

Foreign language (L2) departments have traditionally been founded on the study of literature, yet it is common for foreign language students to dislike reading in another language and therefore avoid reading. This is likely due to the way that reading is traditionally taught in the foreign language classroom, where readings primarily serve the purpose of highlighting grammatical structures or thematic vocabulary. Authentic L2 readings tend to be too difficult for students to read independently without using a dictionary or relying on the support of an instructor. In this article, we will present a different approach to reading, extensive reading, which increases students' language proficiency while promoting positive attitudes toward L2 reading, ultimately leading to long-term reading habits.

1. What is Extensive Reading?

In a nutshell, extensive reading consists of reading quickly large amounts of easy and varied self-selected material to build fluency and consolidate language knowledge. The purpose of reading is to read for pleasure or to get new information, and the reading itself should be its own reward. In their seminal 1998 book *Extensive Reading in the Second Language Classroom*, Day & Bamford present the following 10 tenets of extensive reading:

1. Students read as much as possible.
2. Reading materials are well within the linguistic competence of the students.
3. A variety of materials on a wide range of topics is available.
4. Learners select what they want to read.
5. The purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information, and general understanding.
6. Reading is its own reward.
7. Reading is individual and silent.
8. Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower.
9. Teachers orient students to the goals of the program.
10. The teacher is a role model of a reader.

Engaging in easy reading seems counter-intuitive to both students and language instructors as a strategy for language improvement. How can students' language proficiency improve if they are not challenging themselves and reading something difficult? In fact, by choosing readings that are at or slightly below a learner's proficiency level, a language learner can break out of what Nuttall (2005) describes as the "vicious circle of the weak reader" (p. 127). In this circle, readers do not understand what they are reading, they read slowly, they do not enjoy reading, they do not read much, and the cycle continues. Learners are discouraged from reading, so they read little, and they do not improve their reading skills. If reading material is easy, students can understand, enjoy the reading, read relatively quickly and thereby develop greater reading fluency and a "virtuous circle of the good reader" will start. (This will be discussed further in Section 2.1.3.)

By providing a wide variety of materials, learners can read something that *they* enjoy rather than being obligated to read something chosen by their teacher. The teacher's role, then, is not to select reading materials for learners, but to provide appropriate materials from which the learner can choose, to explain the purpose of reading extensively, and to serve as a model reader who also enjoys reading for pleasure. In fact, when students are engaged in silent sustained reading during class time, the teacher is advised to read too, thereby forming a classroom reading community.

To further understand extensive reading, it can be contrasted with *intensive reading*, which characterizes the way reading is more commonly taught in foreign language classrooms. The two differ in the purpose, focus, material, amount, and speed of reading, as summarized in Table 1, adapted from Day & Bamford (1998) pp. 5-6:

Table 1

Comparison of Intensive and Extensive Reading

Variable	<u>Intensive Reading</u>	<u>Extensive Reading</u>
Class Goal	Read accurately	Read fluently
Reading Purpose	Answer questions Study	Get information Enjoy
Focus	Vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation	Meaning
Material	Teacher chooses Often difficult	Student chooses Easy
Amount	Not much	A lot
Speed	Slower	Faster
Method	Must finish Use a dictionary	Change books if you don't like it No dictionary use

There are many reasons, backed up by research, to incorporate extensive reading as a component of language study. First, it utilizes implicit learning processes that lead to automaticity, and it promotes autonomous learning. Furthermore, students who engage in extensive reading increase their reading speed and fluency, and they develop greater knowledge of vocabulary, text structure, and content. These benefits and others will be further explored in Section 2.

2. Why Is Extensive Reading Important?

Extensive reading is important because it provides benefits at three levels: Linguistic, Affective, and Cognitive. In what follows, we will present the most important findings of the impact of extensive reading from the studies that support it.

2.1 Linguistic Benefits

Krashen (2004) in *The Power of Reading* has been influential in promoting the idea that extensive reading should be an integral part of language curricula, both in L1 and L2. In his book, he discusses the linguistic benefits of extensive reading and reviews research on the role of reading in language acquisition. He and other scholars reviewed conclude that reading a wide variety of texts for pleasure is one of the most effective ways to enhance language skills because it leads to significant gains

in language development, including vocabulary and spelling, grammar and writing style, reading comprehension and fluency, and overall language development.

2.1.1 Vocabulary Acquisition and Spelling Improvement

Extensive reading has been widely recognized for its positive impact on vocabulary acquisition and spelling development. By exposing learners to a large amount of words in meaningful, varied and repeated contexts, extensive reading helps learners internalize new vocabulary, enlarge their vocabulary size, and correct spelling (Grabe & Stoller, 1997; Horst, 2005; Krashen, 1989; Nagy, Herman, & Anderson, 1985; Nation, 2014; Pigada & Schmitt, 2006; Rodrigo, 2009). Repeated exposure in various contexts is essential for vocabulary learning (Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020).

Other studies (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1991; Krashen, 2004; Polak & Krashen, 1988; Stanovich & West, 1989) show a strong relationship between extensive reading and spelling improvement. Frequent exposure to correctly spelled words through reading helps learners internalize orthographic patterns, leading to better spelling in their writing as they become more familiar with common spelling rules and exceptions.

2.1.2 Grammar Acquisition and Writing Style

There is also a connection between extensive and pleasure reading and the improvement of grammatical knowledge (Elley & Mangubhai, 1983; Krashen, 1999; Lee & Krashen, 2002). Similarly, extensive reading plays a significant role in improving writing style. Learners who engaged in extensive reading showed significant improvements in their writing skills, including the development of a more sophisticated writing style (Hafiz & Tudor, 1989; Lai, 1993; Sakurai, 2017); better organization, use of varied sentence structures, stronger coherence across the text, and the use of more complex sentence structures (Mermelstein, 2015); use of diverse sentence patterns and idiomatic expressions (Constantino, 1995); and more precise vocabulary and language use (Tsang, 1996) with increased writing fluency (Lai, 1993).

2.1.3 Reading Comprehension and Reading Fluency

Extensive reading has been shown to significantly improve reading comprehension by affording learners regular exposure to reading in a low-stress environment, which facilitates language skill development and allows learners to develop a deeper understanding and interpretation of texts (Elley, 1991; Nuttall, 2005; Suk, 2017; Yamashita, 2008). In terms of fluency, extensive reading significantly improves reading fluency by increasing reading speed and accuracy, by promoting automaticity in word recognition and processing (Grabe, 2009; Taguchi et al., 2004). Moreover, Grabe and Stoller (2019) provided an analysis of how extensive reading contributes to the development of decoding skills and overall reading comprehension in both first (L1) and second (L2) language contexts.

2.1.4 Meta-analysis Studies on Extensive Reading

Meta-analysis studies present findings from multiple studies that compare extensive reading programs with traditional programs without extensive reading. The benefits of extensive reading have been consistently validated in all areas across different contexts and populations through meta-analysis studies (Jeon & Day, 2016; Kim, 2012; Krashen, 2007; Liu & Zhang, 2018; Mol & Bus, 2011; Nakanishi, 2015). These meta-analysis studies consistently show that extensive reading fosters literacy skills regardless of the language acquired (e.g., English, Spanish, French, German, Chinese, and Japanese) and whether it is a first language (L1), second language (L2), or heritage language. These benefits extend across diverse reader demographics, including children, adolescents, adults, and individuals with varying literacy levels. Furthermore, the advantages of ER are shown globally, including regions across North and South America, Asia, Europe, and Africa. These studies emphasize the real power of reading and provide strong evidence supporting the implementation of ER in language education programs. However, one factor is important: the longer the extensive reading program, the greater the benefits observed. That means when implementing an extensive reading program, we must consider the variable of time as a significant factor to show the superiority of extensive reading in the linguistic variables. Bottom line: students must read a lot and understand what they are reading.

2.2 Affective Benefits

The affective variables such as attitude and motivation, reading habits, interest, anxiety and frustration, and overall enjoyment and self-confidence in their language skills are related to how the learner's reading experience is when facing a text. Extensive reading provides positive affective benefits for learners. Researchers agree that providing engaging and enjoyable reading experiences helps learners develop a positive attitude towards reading, fosters a love for books, satisfaction, and intrinsic motivation (Hafiz & Tudor, 1989; Hardy, 2016; Mori, 2002; Tsang, 2010; Yamashita, 2013). This, in turn, boosts learners' motivation to read, which may promote the development of lifelong reading habits through the practice of regular and voluntary reading (Day & Bamford, 1998; Elley, 1991; Krashen, 2004; Yamashita, 2013).

We can promote interest in reading for our students, which is also important in promoting a positive attitude towards reading, by allowing them to choose books that match their preferences and interests, and by promoting a sense of accomplishment and success for finishing and understanding the reading (Rodrigo, 2024). Additionally, when providing learners with enjoyable and manageable reading experiences with texts that are appropriate for their proficiency level and interests, it reduces reading anxiety and frustration, and their comprehension, enjoyment, and interest increase, as well as confidence in their reading abilities (Liburd & Rodrigo, 2012; Rodrigo, 2011; Yamashita 2013). On the contrary, when students find the text difficult and their level of comprehension is low, their anxiety increases (Mardianti et al., 2021).

It is evident that extensive reading has a positive effect on affective factors, enhancing learners' overall reading experience and supporting their success in language acquisition. Affective variables play a crucial role in promoting the linguistic benefits of extensive reading because if students do not enjoy reading, they will be less likely to engage in reading regularly and, therefore, miss the opportunity to acquire language through reading. Therefore, it is essential to pay attention and prioritize these affective variables from the start.

2.3 Cognitive Benefits

Research has also shown that extensive reading offers significant cognitive benefits, including the potential to delay cognitive decline, enhance general knowledge, and support overall cognitive health. It is clear now that engaging in mentally stimulating activities like reading for pleasure will help us preserve cognitive functions and delay the onset of dementia-related symptoms later in life (Valenzuela & Sachdev, 2009; Wilson et al., 2013). Additionally, reading contributes to an increase in general knowledge by exposing us to diverse information from diverse perspectives (Mason & Krashen, 1997; Stern, 2009).

3. How Can I Implement Extensive Reading?

There are different ways that extensive reading can be incorporated into language programs. In a school with a rigid curriculum or where there is not support for extensive reading, teachers can organize extracurricular reading clubs. Learners can find motivation and encouragement by reading as part of a community of readers. On the other hand, if extensive reading is extra-curricular and voluntary, it is likely to be successful only for those learners who are highly self-motivated and already committed to reading.

3.1 Extensive Reading as a Stand-alone Class

Another option is to offer a stand-alone class focused entirely on extensive reading. Given the documented benefits of extensive reading, this is a model in which students can make noticeable improvements in their proficiency relatively quickly (Hardy, 2014). In this model, class time is devoted to in-class silent sustained reading, and the instructor also reads for pleasure while the students read, providing a positive model. Occasional class time can also be used for students to tell each other about the books they have read, forming a sense of community and providing recommendations to each other for books to read in the future. The teacher or the students themselves can set reading goals. Progress can be tracked by documenting the amount of time spent reading, the number of pages read, or the number of books read. Students can be held accountable by recording the amount read or the time spent reading in a reading log; by writing reflections or reactions to their readings; or by telling the instructor about the books they have read.

Hardy (2014) offers an excerpt from a college Spanish syllabus that provides a model for setting up a stand-alone extensive reading course in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Extensive Reading Course Syllabus Example

Requirements and Evaluation

Attendance and Participation: Attendance is required. Students are expected to read silently in class and participate in occasional oral activities. Students who miss class or sleep during class may be penalized up to 10% of their final grade.

Reading logs: You will be asked to keep a record of all of your reading in Spanish. This information will be reported on a form provided by the professor that will be collected once per week.

Reading journals: Once per week you will be asked to write a reflection about the reading you have done during that week. Your reflections may contain information about the specific books that you have read, your interest in those books, the relative ease or difficulty of your reading, and any changes that you might notice in your reading ability or habits.

Grades: Final grades will be calculated as follows:

- Attendance and participation: 10%
- Reading logs/pages read: 70%
- Reading journals: 20%

Note: The students enrolled in this class differ in their reading speed and ability. Therefore, each student will establish an individual reading goal with the professor by the end of the second week of classes.

Reading outside of class: You should expect to read a minimum of seven hours per week outside of class. This does not include reading done in Spanish for another class. (In other words, you cannot “double count” reading for this class and another Spanish class.)

Another sample syllabus statement with instructions for students can be found in Hardy (2016, p. 18) in Figure 2.

One drawback of this and other approaches to implementing extensive reading is that they rely heavily on an honor system. One of the tenets of extensive reading (see Section 1) is that reading should be its own reward. Therefore, it is recommended that instructors not test their students over what they read extensively. Once students know that they will be tested, their focus shifts to understanding a reading to answer questions about it rather than reading for the sheer pleasure of it. At the same time, most instructors are required to assign grades to their students' work, so extensive reading can be “evaluated” based on student self-reports. Of course, this provides a potential opportunity for students to lie or exaggerate reports of how much they have read. However, we believe that the benefits of extensive reading are so great that it is worth the risk that an occasional student will attempt to game the system. In the end, it is the students themselves who miss out if they decide to not actually engage in reading.

Figure 2

Extensive Reading Instructions in Syllabus

- Choose **easy** books that **interest** you from the Department of Modern Languages collection or from the [local public library].
- Sign out books in the notebook that I bring to class. Please return each book as soon as you are finished with it so that other students might have a chance to read it. When you return a book, be sure to sign it back in.
- Do **not** use a dictionary while you are reading! If a book is too hard and there are too many unknown words, put it back and choose a different book.
- If a book is too easy or just not interesting to you, return it and choose a different one. Read only what you enjoy.
- Please handle the books with care and respect, as many other students will read them. Please do **not** write in them and use a bookmark rather than turning down the pages. They are expensive to replace, so I hope that they will last a long time.
- You will never be tested over the books that you read as part of Extensive Reading. However, I do ask you to complete a weekly reading log (*registro de lectura*) to document the amount of time, the number of pages, and the books that you read. These logs will also help me to determine the relative popularity and difficulty of the books in the collection, and they will enable me to recommend books for other students in the future. I will collect your reading logs once per week.
- We will have an occasional “book chat” (*conversatorio*) in class during which you and your classmates will tell each other about the books you have read.
- Most of our class time will be spent in “silent sustained reading” (SSR). You will also be expected to read a substantial amount outside of class.
- **Reading is silent and individual.** Please find a **quiet place to read without distractions**. Remove yourself physically from distractions such as the television, e-mail, social networking, phone calls and texting.
- You may **not** use class time to complete readings assigned for other classes.

3.2 Extensive Reading as an Additional Component of an Existing Class.

Another option for including extensive reading in the foreign language curriculum is by adding it as a component to an existing course or curriculum. This does not require changing a pre-existing curriculum in contexts where an instructor needs to follow a common syllabus. Instructors can require extensive reading as an additional assignment that can be done partly in class, as time allows, or as homework. Although instructors are often reluctant to give up class time for silent sustained reading, we believe that it is worth sacrificing some active instructional time for this purpose, especially when extensive reading is first introduced. Students today are regularly distracted by the dinging of their cell phones, incoming messages, and social media posts. For some, it can be difficult to sit quietly, separated from electronics, with nothing more than a book in hand. Allowing students some quiet time for this purpose can help them get “in the zone” and focus all their attention on a written text.

Students engaging in extensive reading as part of an existing course can document the amount of time they spend reading, the number of pages they read,

the number of books they have read, or by telling their classmates or their instructor about what they have read. Another alternative is to ask students to complete a simple book report, such as the one presented by Rodrigo & Hardy (2023) in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Extensive Reading Book Report Assignment

Today's Date: _____

Book Report: Fill this out even if you only read one page of the book.

Your name: _____ Class: _____

Title of book: _____

Author: _____

Publisher: _____

Time spent reading in class: _____ Time spent reading at home: _____

I read all/ _____ pages of the book (Circle "all" or indicate the number of pages read.)

How did you like the book? (circle one)

Great! (I loved it.)

Good (I liked it.)

Okay (I didn't mind reading it.)

Boring/Stupid (I wish I hadn't read it.)

How difficult was the book for you to read? (circle one)

Easy

Okay

Difficult

Write your reaction to the book below. Continue on the back if you need more space:

This form does not test students' comprehension, but rather it is open-ended and asks students to reflect on what they have read. It also includes questions about a book's relative difficulty and level of interest. This information can provide useful feedback to instructors so that they can better guide students toward appropriate reading material and make informed decisions about what books to purchase for their classroom collections.

For larger language programs with multiple sections and instructors, assigning grades based on the number of pages or books read has proven effective. This approach is used at the second author's institution at the college level for beginner and low-intermediate learners. Using the free online *Serie Leamos* library (see Section 4.3), students can choose stories that interest them and read at a level where they feel confident. To earn credit, students must complete a general self-evaluation of the book by answering simple True/False questions, which they can do with the book open and up to three attempts. Completion of the task, rather than the accuracy of the comprehension questions, is what counts. We believe this method of accountability is non-threatening and non-frustrating for students, yet it may be necessary for large programs in institutions where course administration requires more traditional proof of commitment in exchange for a grade.

4. Material to Implement Extensive Reading

To promote extensive reading effectively, the reading material should be fun, easy, and frequent, as these elements are crucial for fostering a positive reading experience and developing a reading habit.

Fun reading material plays a crucial role in extensive reading programs because it engages students and makes reading enjoyable. When learners find the content interesting and entertaining, they are more likely to be motivated to read voluntarily. This intrinsic motivation is essential for extensive reading, which relies on learners choosing to read for pleasure rather than obligation. Playful reading material helps build a positive association with reading, turning it into an activity that students look forward to rather than a chore.

Easy reading material is equally important because it ensures that students can understand what they are reading without excessive effort. When texts are at the appropriate level, learners can grasp the majority of the content while still encountering some new vocabulary or grammatical structures. This balance is crucial because it allows learners to experience success and enjoyment in reading, which boosts their confidence and encourages them to continue. If the material is too difficult, students may become frustrated or discouraged, leading to a loss of interest in reading altogether.

Frequent reading is essential to develop a reading habit, which is the cornerstone of extensive reading programs. Regular exposure to reading helps reinforce language skills and makes reading a natural part of the learner's routine. The more frequently students read, the more they develop fluency, comprehension skills, and overall

language proficiency. As we have discussed in the previous section, frequent reading provides continuous exposure to new language input, which is crucial for language acquisition. By incorporating reading into their daily or weekly activities, students can develop a lasting habit that will support long-term language learning.

4.1 Graded Readers

Children's books are one option for extensive reading, particularly for less commonly taught languages for which more appropriate instructional materials are scarce or unavailable. However, children's books are not the best choice. The language in children's books can sound stilted since they are often written to be read aloud by adults, the vocabulary can be obscure, and the stories may appear childish or uninteresting to more mature readers.

The kind of reading material that is best for practicing extensive reading is graded readers (GR), which are simplified books specifically designed for language learners. GR are cataloged by different levels of difficulty, or "grades," which are determined by factors such as vocabulary range, sentence structure, grammar, and content complexity. Most publishers offer books that range from beginner to advanced levels, allowing learners to gradually build their reading skills as they advance. GR are an excellent tool to help readers reach the language competence and confidence needed to read authentic books. The topics covered by graded readers have a wide range of genres to appeal to diverse interests while maintaining linguistic simplicity. Additionally, many graded readers have illustrations, glossaries, comprehension questions, and exercises to aid comprehension and reinforce learning. All these features make graded readers an optimal tool for practicing extensive reading.

In our work on extensive reading, we have encountered educators who are critical of using graded readers for extensive reading because they are not "authentic materials." We strongly disagree. First, there is not a clear definition of what makes a text "authentic," although it is usually understood to mean a text written to communicate to an audience of native speakers. Books written for adult native speakers are authentic, but they are too difficult for all but the most advanced language learners. Even short stories, magazine articles, or short excerpts from novels are too challenging for beginning and intermediate language learners to understand without significant use of a dictionary and substantial support from a teacher. Such an activity becomes a tedious task of decoding rather than reading, and it removes the element of joy that one can experience in following a story or learning something new through fluent reading. Students who struggle to decode a difficult text can become frustrated, turning them away from reading and discouraging them from further reading.

Beyond the difficulty of reading "authentic texts," we argue that graded readers are, in fact, authentic as well as appropriate for language learners. As Day & Bamford (1998) point out in their chapter "The cult of authenticity and the myth of simplification," literature written for non-native speakers is authentic in that it is written with a goal of communicating to an audience, in this case an audience of language learners whose proficiency does not match that of native speakers. By

way of analogy, children's and young adult literature is written specifically to provide appropriate material for children and young adults. So, too, are books written at an appropriate level for language learners. As Day and Bamford (1998) state, "Because of its communicative intent, such material would be authentic and appropriately simple in language and concept" (p. 61).

Graded readers are clearly the best choice for extensive reading. The only downfall is the cost. The following publishers offer graded readers in several foreign languages and are divided by readership (children, adolescents and young adults), proficiency level (from below A1-beginning to C2-advanced), and genre. For those interested in learning more about graded readers, Rodrigo (2016) provides a detailed description of Spanish graded readers and their publishers.

- **CIDEB:** <http://www.blackcat-cideb.com>: Cideb has four levels and several languages: Spanish, French, Italian, German.
- **Command Performance Language Institute (CPLI):** [//cpli.net/foreignlanguage](http://cpli.net/foreignlanguage): Spanish, French, German, Japanese, and Chinese.
- **ELI Publishing:** <https://www.eligradedreaders.com/>: Spanish, French, German, Italian, Chinese, and Russian)
- **Lire en Français Facile:** <https://www.hachettefle.com/collections/lff-lire-en-francais-facile>: A wide variety of classic and contemporary French texts adapted for learners, with accompanying audio and comprehension activities.
- **CLE:** <https://www.cle-international.com> offers a comprehensive collection of graded readers, including both simplified classic literature and original stories, suitable for different language proficiency levels.
- **Teach Yourself:** <https://readers.teachyourself.com/> offers short stories in Spanish, French, German, Italian, Chinese, and Russian, Brazilian Portuguese, Irish, Welsh, Japanese, Korean, Arabic, Swedish, Icelandic, Norwegian, Turkish, and Danish.
- **Langenscheidt:** <https://www.langenscheidt.com> is designed to enhance German language learning through engaging stories and comprehension exercises, suitable for learners from beginner to intermediate levels.
- **Scholastic:** <https://www.scholastic.com> has graded readers in Spanish and French, focusing on early literacy for young learners. The stories are engaging, with colorful illustrations and simple language to help children develop reading skills.
- **ANAYA:** www.anaya.es: Spanish

- **DIFUSIÓN:** www.difusion.com/ele: Spanish
- **EDELSA:** www.edelsa.es: Spanish
- **EDINUMEN (Edi):** www.edinumen.es: Spanish
- **EnClave/ELE:** <https://enclave-ele.net/lecturas-graduadas/>: Spanish
- **SGEL:** www.sgel.es/ele: Spanish

4.2 Websites

Below is a list of website resources that can help foreign language instructors implement extensive reading in their classes. Most of them target L1 readers (children and adults), but if selected carefully, they can be used with language learners. Some are free and others have a cost.

<https://booknet.com/es>: Booknet is a platform with more than 40,000 books with free access. It is for high proficiency students who want to polish their Spanish. It contains all the genres: fantasy, science fiction, mystery, suspense, romance novels, thrillers, paranormal, terror, detective, humor, and non-fiction.

<https://leerlibrosespanol.com/>: Leer libros en español is another free Spanish library for high proficiency students which contains the best 100 books in different genres.

<https://www.storyweaver.org.in>: offers a variety of free children's books in many, many languages, levels and topics. The books can be read online or downloaded. The cost is free but after reading several books you will have to register.

<https://www.education.com/stories/>: This is an educational French website with interactive stories to teach kids reading. You have to sign up, but it is free. The site has pedagogical activities about the stories.

<https://cuentosparadormir.com/>: Cuentopia is a website for children to learn to read. To use the site, you have to download an app and sign up. It is not clear if it is free or not.

<https://www.miscositas.com/>: This site contains stories for children and language learners in several languages.

<http://www.childrenslibrary.org/>: The International Children's digital library contains children's books in Spanish and other languages. The books are free to read online and cover a wide range of genres, age groups, and languages.

<https://www.Tadoku.org>: has graded readers in Japanese across different levels.

<https://litterature-jeunesse-libre.fr/>: is a site that provides access to a variety of French children's books, available in digital format. The collection includes classic tales and contemporary stories.

<https://www.iletaitunehistoire.com>: contains a large selection of interactive stories and audiobooks for children in French. The site targets younger children and early readers.

<https://leiturinha.com.br/>: is a Brazilian site that offers a subscription service for children's books in Portuguese, with both digital and physical books. They also provide some free online content.

4.3 Serie Leamos – a Free Spanish Digital Library to Practice Pleasure Reading from the Beginning

Serie Leamos (SL) is a free digital Spanish library of engaging stories written and illustrated by students for students (www.serieleamos.gsu.edu). It was created for the purpose and need of providing comprehensible and interesting reading material that could allow language learners to practice pleasure reading from the beginning. In this interdisciplinary project between the Spanish program in the World Languages and Cultures department and the School of Art and Design at Georgia State University, intermediate Spanish students individually write a story that is later illustrated by art students creating a final product: a book for language learners. The stories in SL are short, can be read quickly, and are highly engaging. Although they look like children's books, they have powerful messages in simple language. The main features of SL are the following:

4.3.1. A Different Library and Reading Experience

SL is a different library and a different reading experience because writers, illustrators, and readers belong to the same community: language learners. Moreover, this reading project serves three purposes: (1) it is a creative writing activity for authors, (2) it is a real-world task for illustrators to include on their resumé, and (3) it is reading material for L2 readers.

4.3.2. Diverse Genres and Topics

SL has original stories that writers want to share with their audience. These stories are categorized and can be filtered by genre and topic. Together with fiction and non-fiction, there is now a third category, fictionalized experience, to point out stories that are based on a personal experience, but presented in a fictional way. For example, animals are the characters or the context of the story is not real. Also, each story is tagged with relevant themes or topics and a brief description of the plot (in Spanish and English) to help readers find stories that align with their interests

4.3.3. Language Levels

The language levels of SL stories are naturally determined by the writers, who use language that reflects their own proficiency. Stories are classified into four levels based on lexical and grammatical complexity, simplicity and linearity of the story and plot, length of the story, and how clearly the illustrations support the text. Some titles are available in multiple levels, offering both simplified and more advanced versions of the same story to target different learner needs. SL works well with beginners to intermediate learners.

4.3.4. Readership Options

SL reaches a broad audience, including young adults and children. The site allows users to filter stories by audience type, or select “All Ages” to access the entire library. Although SL was created for and by adult language learners for language learners at the college level, it has been a great reading source used by middle school teachers and dual language programs.

4.3.5. Additional Components

To aid comprehension, stories include a vocabulary list of key terms selected by the writers. For those seeking a deeper understanding, there is also a glossary of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs used in the story. After reading, learners can engage in comprehension and production activities to reinforce their understanding and practice new vocabulary. Stories are available in a flipbook format online, as downloadable PDFs for offline reading, and as audiobooks for an engaging storytelling experience.

All of these components and the flexibility of the site ensure that SL meets the diverse needs of its readers. That is why SL has been enthusiastically received by students, who expressed enjoyment, increased interest in reading, and greater confidence in their language skills, appreciating the sense of accomplishment for understanding stories in Spanish (Rodrigo, 2018; Rodrigo, 2024).

Conclusion

A large and growing body of research has demonstrated the effectiveness of extensive reading in improving vocabulary acquisition, spelling, grammar, writing style, reading comprehension, and reading fluency. Extensive reading also promotes positive affect and even helps preserve cognitive functioning. Language instructors have several ways to integrate extensive reading into their teaching: Through a stand-alone course, as a complementary component of an existing curriculum, or even as an extracurricular activity. There are also several sources of appropriate reading material: Graded readers for beginners through advanced learners are available in multiple languages from commercial publishers; and there are many websites that offer free or low-cost online materials, most notably *Serie Leamos*. By implementing extensive reading, educators can use a powerful approach for developing language proficiency that can easily be incorporated into any language curriculum, giving their students a chance to experience the pleasure of reading and develop lifelong reading habits.

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