

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE, READING, AND TECHNOLOGY – CONTRIBUTION FOR LITERACY

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to reflect on Literacy and reading skills especially extensive reading in order to encourage English language learners to read more freely, naturally, and fluently while learning the language. It also focuses on language and technology usage in order to encourage language learning which consequently results in linguistic, social and political empowering contributing for literacy. Based on developing extensive reading and achieving literacy, the present paper proposes that students select their own on-line readings and read a great deal at their own pace and available time to acquire the competence to read and write proficiently in English.

**Keywords:** English Language. Extensive Reading. Literacy. Competence.

## LÍNGUA INGLESA, LEITURA, E TECNOLOGIA: CONTRIBUIÇÃO AO LETRAMENTO

**Resumo:** Este artigo objetiva refletir sobre leitura, especialmente a leitura extensiva, e letramento, a fim de incentivar os alunos de língua Inglesa a lerem mais livre, natural e fluentemente enquanto aprendem o idioma. Ele enfoca também a língua e o uso da tecnologia, a fim de estimular a aprendizagem da mesma que, conseqüentemente, resulta em capacitação linguística, social e política contribuindo para o letramento. Com base no desenvolvimento de leitura extensiva e letramento, o presente artigo propõe que os alunos selecionem suas próprias leituras eletrônicas e leiam mais no seu próprio ritmo e tempo disponível para adquirirem competência leitora e assim lerem e escreverem proficientemente em inglês.

**Palavras-chave:** Língua Inglesa. Leitura Extensiva. Letramento. Competência.

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Communication among people enables much more than just the ability to understand one-another, but it helps to develop relationship and allow them to share problems, suggestions and plans. Consequently, language is an essential component of everyday people's life due to interaction, relation, and connection (LYNCH, 2001). Additionally, using technological tools to enlarge or even enrich such communicative approaches sounds fundamental since mastering technological tools seems to be the knowledge or ability to nearly solve problems or train skills.

Technology has recently and increasingly been part of current civilization. At the present time, children are educated manipulating different media devices; therefore, they tend to be active, critical, and creative since they face an amazingly large amount of information. Some of them are developing their own learning, interacting, and structuring their knowledge from researching according their own curiosity. As they are gradually being exposed to on-time information, education has to develop approaches that improve critical sense and in which teachers play an important role as being the stimulator of the learning process (LIED; HAMMES, 2009).

Due to the emergence of new technological resources as well as an increasing number of users, the opportunity of introducing internet tools as didactic and pedagogical resources plays an important role for the development of teaching and learning process as well as it enables multiple ways of producing and generating dynamic environments for learning (RICHARDS; RODGERS, 2005). Therefore, schools may reconsider the perspectives offered by computational resources, since the increasing volume and access means of communication require a new attitude of teachers and educational institutions for a constant seeking of improvement.

Teachers often face challenges which are not always taken into action by the limitations of course training curriculum, by the impossibility of assimilation due to curriculum inflexibility, or even by technological advancement and methodological trends in teaching languages (IRWIN, 2011). Such tendency seems to be part of a dynamic and developing society which demands students to be able to develop specific skills and abilities to be used alongside. Then teachers do not feel capable of developing more meaningful activities through the usage of computing resources that schools and students have at their disposal.

Teaching and learning process discussion in a foreign language must be permanent, contextualized, and within contemporary manifestations in everyday practice in the classroom, using new technologies with which students and teachers live, and from which, directly or indirectly, participate (RODGERS, 2003). The establishment of new neuronal connections occurs through discoveries, interaction, problem resolution, making and re-making attempts, regarding to continuous processing of input and output focused by encoding information (LIED, 2000). So it may be a complementary tool of learning, since it enhances the range of proposed objectives through computing and language learning resources.

Language and technology have become increasingly linked to each other especially in the current interconnected contemporary world. Learning the English

language has gradually become a goal to be reached in the individual's perspective, not just for the search of a better job in the future but for the interaction with the world that has become intensively closer. Surpassing the concept that English language learning is not a demand anymore but part of a regular routine of any individual, the necessity to match such concept with the use of technology seems primary. Technology is indeed an up-to-date tool which everyone may not detach from language studying anymore.

Learners might wonder about the effect of the internet and the broad range of uses of it on language handling and learning process. Contemporary technologies are far more interactive than earlier media, and some of them – such as Twitter or instant messaging – impose some linguistic constraints. On-line English language use reflects users' existing language habits so they may get used to it in the same proportion they use technological tools. What online language use does often affects what users know about language.

Young people nowadays are much more aware of the social and stylistic uses and meanings of different genres and language types (HERK, 2014), so they feel confident to discuss them. In addition such opportunity to reflect and discuss real language with real language users has become a reality. Then users are able to control language building up their own knowledge of it even compared to other language users. Such language control may perhaps be still more interactive than their parents' generation, suggesting that they are engaged in conscious identity creation practices through English language.

It is also possible that interactive technologies will eventually have an effect on actual language (HERK, 2014) in order to turn it into a more useful and meaningful language for students or any other users. It is not just conventions of technical accuracy that have to be considered. The new regulations that have come into being for this new code are examples of the users of a language or code developing its functionality according to the contexts in which they use it (IRWIN, 2011). In addition technology has led to a new panorama of language usage in the sense that computers seem to be user friendly; in the same way, English language has become a user friendly language. And that might have a positive effect on teaching and learning process in which teachers' role is very important.

Through the emerge of technology use in the language teaching – herewith conceived as formal and non-formal environment for learning – teachers' approaches have been redirected and teachers are increasingly becoming supervisors, animators, and stimulators for students to investigate adventures of knowledge which may be found in several sites, web platforms, instant messaging, and so on. Therefore technology is an interesting tool for improving language competence specially in order to help people reach the goal of becoming an English literate person – a goal searched for most of English users worldwide in the contemporary world.

Becoming an English literate person does not only mean to deal with a broad range of vocabulary, but to get the message and understand what message is being conveyed. In the same way Shakespeare quoted “you see, but you do not observe

it”; it might be said “you read it, but you do not understand it”. The process of understanding the language is often a very hard task for most language learners since they know the words; however, they scarcely catch the main idea or the message expressed (COSSON, 2007). Literacy is connected with the ability to read and write proficiently (IRWIN, 2011). Therefore, preparing teachers as well as language tutors on the principles of second language and literacy development and effective instructional practices to stimulate learners to be engaged in the process of language learning can favorably impact education of every learner.

There is in fact indication to suggest that texting as well as reading improve literacy (IRWIN, 2011). When using technology – mainly in the most recent technological time – learners often write the whole sentence and confer to the on-line translator the task of translating their language production. Such approach has become a mechanical procedure which prevents learners from thinking or developing mind process or even establishing the synapses – which are essential in order to promote language learning and are reinforced by connectionist researchers and followers. For them, learning encompasses the intensity of connections by activating knowledge in the students’ mind (LIED, 2001).

Becoming a literate person is associated with the power people have to handle language and man produced and produces language – from very basic sentences to more advanced ones; therefore, simple essential things may be useful or beneficial in men’s surroundings (DACANAL, 2012). No matter what the economical standard of the individual is, the good management of the language would make the difference. Such concept has permeated many study years in language teaching approach; however, there was no desirable improvement regarding positive results of empowering learners to be able to express themselves – orally or written.

Language is essentially a social and political event (DACANAL, 2012). While media in the past aimed to reproduce patterns and structure models of language for specific circumstances – most of them for a far and unreal packed environment of language – contemporary times have offered an interactive era where learners have become producers of a language in a more interactive perspective which encourages learners to go on researching preeminent internet tools, techniques, or approaches that best suit them for their own purposes.

If we take the assertion reinforced by Irwin (2011) that having knowledge gives power for any individual, regardless from which country learners are reading, voices speak the standard variety of the official language, dialect and accent, however people may also be a minority. What the powerful individual has to say will be more likely to be taken as knowledge and, by extension legitimacy (IRWIN, 2011). Then language is the vehicle through which information and knowledge flow besides being the simpler way for individuals to own both information and knowledge. Therefore, language is not just a reflex from society arrangement but an instrument of domination and power accomplishment (DACANAL, 2012).

Methodology comprehends a range of activities to be developed in order to reach specific proposals (RODGERS, 2003). Throughout the world history

reading has been an activity which has directed many readers to imaginary worlds even if they are considered for their English language acquisition, some efforts on stimulating reading as a technique used in the same proportion than teaching grammar and vocabulary seem imperative. Reading pleasure requires a broad selection of texts available for students to choose according to their level and will, which often plays an important role to stimulate students to get engaged with language itself (UR, 2002).

Every student is a reader in the proportion that his/her world becomes part of the reading. From such perception, reading keeps distance from a mechanical activity. In most native language class context reading becomes a routine activity understood as opening the book in a specific page, reading the text, answering the text comprehension questions, and doing a writing activity (FRONCKOWIAK; SCHRAMMEL, 2004). In the English language teaching context, it is not different; students are required to follow the book section, read texts of different sizes and context, and answer pattern questions which often are from an unfamiliar context and environment.

Looking at words in dictionaries while reading seems to be a technique often avoided by language students. This study suggests that dictionaries might be used in order to encourage students to learn the words they come across even by writing them down in a vocabulary notebook so they can look them up after they have finished reading. Accessing the on-line dictionary, such as <[www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)>, may sound a very interesting tool. Students may not miss the opportunity to study the new vocabulary or confirm some specific grammar feature which is better understood when it is in context. The barely concern with grammar is to remember that its aim is for the learner gain functional control over the rules of grammar (DILLER, 1978). In such a way, teaching may contribute to make the rules psychologically real and useful in a more sensible way.

Other studies show that silent reading may sound a very odd approach and it has not been used in the classroom since it has become a very structural and grammatical environment for language learning. Language is generally learned depending on the educational environment and the input that the learners receive (LIED, 2002). Even it may sound incompatible with classroom practice and methodology, providing a regular fifteen to twenty-minute period of silent reading in class may help structural awareness development, vocabulary building, and promoting confidence regarding the target language. Positive input should be mainly provided by teachers in class.

Hedge (2002) suggests a whole chapter on reading and in some extent of it she stresses the role of extensive reading. She mentions that extensive reading may seem a key issue for research studies. Despite there is not a plain agreement on the topic, the present study consents on the perspective that such compromise will depend on the students' motivation since some features characterize the extensive reading contrasting with intensive reading.

Intensive reading activities in the classroom are “intended to train students in the strategies needs for successful reading; such as using connectives for predicting content or guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words using clues in the surrounding text.” (HEDGE, 2002, p. 202). Awareness enables students to get familiarized with features of written English which is something very well enforced by regular classes in Elementary as well as High School or even Higher Education. On the other hand, only through extensive reading, learners can gain substantial practice in operating these strategies more independently on a range of material (HEDGE, 2002).

In Karl Conrad Diller’s book “The Language teaching Controversy” he stresses that “There are two requirements for us if we want to make our language teaching goal the production of bilinguals. First, we must provide adequate time. But more important, we must have high quality instruction with teachers and methods that are adequate to the task.” (DILLER, 1978, p. 137). So, time has clearly showed a great amount of teachers that some methods and approaches are unproductive for contemporary students - who are computer and internet literate; however, teachers are not confident enough to take a step ahead and make a change. They know it is urgent to set new goals and comprehend the students’ needs in order to make them feel more confident in producing language by coding and decoding it.

Reading has become a current topic in many knowledge areas including the necessity to make individuals good readers in all senses. Regarding English language is no different. The present paper proposes that students select their own short stories, tales, books which are available on the web for free and read a great deal at their own pace and available time. Besides they are not requested to answer comprehension questions on their readings but asked to express their insights both in orally and/or written form so that they may achieve more fluency in order to become English language literate.

There is the possibility to develop extensive reading using the internet. For beginner students teachers may, for example, start developing some activities which are available on the link <[www.web-esl.com/advreadings](http://www.web-esl.com/advreadings)> and show them the list of reading/ tales available to be worked out on-line. Take the tale “The Rooster and The Fox” as an example. Firstly, I suggest teachers brain-storm the class about what they might think the story is about from the title. Some students, for example, might have heard or read about the tale in their native language. Then they might be stimulated to know if it is the same story, the same version, or if it has the same final. Time is given for them to read and understand the tale. After that, they do the text comprehension on-line activities, which may be displayed from three to four different activities. Finally, the group may share their comprehension of the story and additional references regarding to the tale moral.

The important aspect of these activities is that both are on-line and may be done according to their language pace since some students will demand more time than others. When the on-line activities are done, teacher may ask students to write down their point of view about the tale, about any specific feature of

different characters, moral of the story – if there is one – or even point out a different narrative ending. In this point, teachers learn a great deal about students' reading and what they have understood. In addition, teachers may provide feedback on grammar, spelling, vocabulary and it results on interaction among everyone involved in the activity.

Recent views in the field of Literature tend to highlight interaction with texts rather than teaching Literature since it provides straight experience with language, implications, context, grammar, winding up with language practice (MIGNANI, 1992) and that is what most students need in order to be English language literate. At last the opportunities extensive reading gives students of all ages and levels of language make it a valuable source since students can build their language competence, become more autonomous in their studies, acquire cultural language, encourage critical thinking and imaginative experience, and develop confidence to continue learning (HEDGE, 2002).

Motivation depends essentially on the students' spontaneous participation in the English learning process which implies a free will to do tasks, a continuing language performance in any abilities, and a positive input management to maintain synapses reinforcement in order to reach their own goals (LIED, 2000). Language learning depends on strategies, appropriated techniques and a wide range of other activities proposed by the teacher. Such techniques and strategies, added to positive motivation regarding to learning process, may produce better results on language learning.

This study suggests that the more learners are involved in the learning process through reading, the more teachers contribute to promote students' independence and personal growth to achieve literacy. Supporters of extensive reading have enlarged since good things happen when English Foreign Language students read extensively. It is visible that students not only become more confident readers, but they also learn new words and enlarge their understanding of words they knew before (DAY, 2004).

In addition extensively reading is considered a source for language practice in reading, vocabulary learning, listening, speaking, and writing – the four skills to be developed when learning and practicing English. In contemporary world – where effective communication has become essential for the interaction and comprehension from the deepest as well as the most superficial of topics, messages, or any piece of writing – extensive reading seems to play an essential role. So any approach may essentially ponder such suggestion in order to minimize the lacking of good language performance and to maximize the developing of English language literacy.

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