23 Guided Self-Selected Reading: A Steady Path to Independent Reading

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Abstract This paper begins by reminding readers that Guided Self-Selected Reading (GSSR) is grounded to the Comprehension (Input) Hypothesis. It continues by providing the fundamental characteristics of GSSR for teachers and researchers who wish to use the method in either their research or classroom. After reviewing the history of Extensive Reading (ER), it concludes that GSSR and ER should not be considered the same as they are based on different theories. It touches on the potential for narrow reading within a GSSR program and the Affective Filter Hypothesis by mentioning ways to reduce anxiety when introducing GSSR to students. The paper concludes by tying the Reading Hypothesis to GSSR and the role of the teacher in a GSSR program.

Keywords: Guided Self-Selected Reading (GSSR), Extensive Reading, Intensive Reading, Input Hypothesis, Graded Readers, Narrow Reading, GSSR Application, Affective Filter Hypothesis.

CURRENT THEORY

The Comprehension (Input) Hypothesis states that we acquire language in only one way: when we understand what we hear and read, i. e., when we receive comprehensible input (Krashen, 2003). Input is the cause of language acquisition. In other words, the vocabulary, grammar, spelling, speaking, writing fluency and accuracy are all acquired because of comprehensible input. and learning these skills consciously does not lead to acquisition. Interesting, rich, and comprehensible input automatically includes language that students are ready to acquire. With acquisition, there is a feel for correctness. When someone asks or you are presented with a grammatical function or a word choice, it is easy to access, produce, and understand. This is not the case, with consciously

learned language. With consciously learned language, like what is often done in school, i. e., grammar classes for an EFL student, that "feel" is not there, and often disappears after the test.

Guided Self-Selected Reading (GSSR) is based on theory (Krashen, 1981a, 1982, 1985, 2003). In a GSSR course, students are only asked to read books that they select, and they don't have to finish a book if they find it incomprehensible or boring. It is the teacher's job to help students find books that they can read and enjoy. Students are NOT required to do any conscious output activities

INPUT ALONE IS SUFFICIENT FOR ACQUISITION

The strong version of the Input Hypothesis is that input is the cause of language acquisition, and it alone is sufficient. It requires no conscious learning activities before, during and after reading. The strong version of the Input Hypothesis only suggests that students read what they are interested in and can understand.

The Input Hypothesis does not have a weak version, because the weak version would be, "Input alone is not sufficient, therefore, we need supplementary conscious learning activities to compensate for what input cannot do." This would contradict the hypothesis that input alone is sufficient.

So, if a teacher claims to be using a comprehensible input-based method based on Second Language Acquisition Theory and uses output activities to compensate for what he thinks is lacking in the comprehensible input method, he is using the weak version, which contradicts the Input Hypothesis.

Some studies that reported the positive effects and efficiency of the input-alone approach are the following:

* College students who were in a GSSR course improved twice as much as students who were in a grammar translation course on a general proficiency test as well as on tests of reading speed and writing (Mason & Krashen, 1997).

* Students who read and wrote a summary in Japanese for each book they read improved as much on a general competency test, the reading section of the TOEIC, and writing accuracy as students in two other classes who read but also wrote summaries in English and received corrective feedback (Mason, 2004).

*Fourteen and fifteen-year-old 1st year junior college students of English as a foreign language in Taiwan who participated in a "pure" extensive reading program, i.e., GSSR, made greater gains in vocabulary and reading comprehension (cloze tests) than two comparison groups: (1) intensive reading, and (2) extensive reading supplemented with activities including summarizing what they read. (Smith, 2006).

*When Japanese college students read books, their average gain on the TOEFL test was as much as the gains made by international students at an Intensive English Program on a US university campus (Mason, 2006).

* Senior citizens who read about 100 to 150 pages per week without vocabulary and grammar study made significant gains on the TOEFL test (Mason, 2011, 2013a, 2013b).

* Non-English majors who attended a GSSR course with Story-Listening once a week did better on several tests than English majors who attended 6 audio-lingual classes a week in addition to a GSSR/ SL class (Mason, 2018).

* Story-Listening alone was more time efficient for vocabulary acquisition than Story-Listening combined with form-focused activities (Mason & Krashen 2004; Clarke, 2019, 2020).

THE GOAL OF GUIDED SELF-SELECTED READING

Our goal in English as a foreign language education is not limited to conversational language. It is also to help our EFL students become independent readers in English, that is, capable of not only selecting interesting and comprehensible books on their own for pleasure reading, but also capable of seeking and finding information that is necessary for better understanding of what is happening in the world.

Our immediate job is to help students reach the level where they can enjoy reading authentic books for young adults. Once we help students reach this level before they leave school, they can go on to read what interests them and what is necessary for them to thrive in their profession.

Before further explaining the nature and characteristics of Guided Self-Selected Reading (GSSR), we think it is important to look at the origins and re-emergence of Extensive Reading as we look to both make

clear our beliefs that GSSR and Extensive Reading are in fact different and should NOT be considered by researchers and classroom teachers to be the same.

We will also look at how teachers and researchers who advocate for what some call "Skill Building" think students process language.

GSSR AND EXTENSIVE READING

Extensive reading and GSSR look like the same approach because GSSR and Extensive Reading both use "graded readers" published by major companies. Here is some history of "extensive reading."

Extensive and intensive reading

The idea of "extensive reading" has existed in our field for at least one hundred years. Extensive reading (ER) was thought to develop fluency, while intensive reading (IR) was to develop accuracy. Intensive reading was considered the core of instruction and extensive reading was supplementary. Day and Bamford (1998) provide details:

> "Louis Kelly … credits Harold Palmer with first applying the term extensive reading in foreign language pedagogy (1969, p. 131). … For Palmer, extensive reading meant "rapid reading" (1921/1964, p. 111), reading 'book after book'(1991/1968, p. 137). … Palmer contrasted this with what he termed intensive reading, by which he meant to 'take a text, study it line by line, referring at every moment to our dictionary and our grammar, comparing, analyzing, translating, and retaining every expression that it contains.' (1921/1964, p. 111).
>
> Michael West, a teacher … who more than anyone else established the methodology of extensive reading, called it 'supplementary' reading (1926/1955, p. 26). This was also the term used by the New York City Board of Education for its 1931 Syllabus of Minima in Modern Foreign Languages. According to the Board, the goal of supplementary extensive reading was 'the development of the point of enjoyment of ability to read the foreign language (1931/1948, p. 301), … and encouraging the reading habit' (p. 302).… " (Day & Bamford, 1998, pp. 5-6).

As explained above, when ER was first introduced, it was treated as "rapid reading" and "a supplementary activity." The advocates of ER thought that it would be a good addition to Intensive Reading for developing fluency. They recommended that Intensive Reading be

done in class and required students to read extensively at home, requiring only 300 pages per year to develop fluency (Matsumura, 1990).

In addition to Intensive Reading, students in traditional classes studied the grammar rules and new vocabulary and then attempted to apply the knowledge of the language to their output and were corrected in the belief that this would improve accuracy, consistent with the Grammar-Translation method.

In intensive reading students deciphered messages using their consciously learned knowledge of the rules of the language. Their errors were corrected to improve decoding skills. Skill-building proponents believed that applying rules to output and decoding practice would lead to language acquisition.

During the last forty years, many professors at graduate schools and language teachers have shared the same view about Extensive Reading (ER). For instance, Carrell and Carson (1997) stated that it was necessary to integrate intensive and extensive reading to help prepare learners for academic work. Waring (1997) also suggested "a balanced approach" and stated that learners need large amounts of intensive reading. Bell (1998) also combined oral presentations and written work with reading.

Recent extensive reading proponents have taken the approach suggested by Palmer and West, accepting the importance of both types of reading, with extensive reading as supplementary.

GSSR is not a revival of the former Extensive Reading idea

The two methods are superficially similar, as both use graded readers, but are based on very different and incompatible theories. GSSR is based on current second language acquisition theory and is not a remnant of the traditional approach.

FUNDAMENTALS OF GSSR PRACTICE: APPLICATION

GSSR is preceded by Story-Listening

It is our experience that listening to interesting comprehensible stories in class is good preparation for reading. We have found it to be helpful not only for total beginners in English, but also helpful for those more advanced. Listening to stories is a bridge to reading (Cho & Choi, 2008; Wang & Lee, 2007).

The method used is called Story-Listening (Mason & Krashen, 2020a). It is designed to provide comprehensible, interesting, rich and abundant input from a teacher telling a story using a variety of ways of making input comprehensible, termed "comprehension aiding supplementation"

(Krashen, Mason, & Smith, 2018). The comprehension-aiding-supplementation (CAS) helps make language input rich and abundant with plenty of "i" and "i+1." "i" is the language that students have already acquired and "i+1" is the language that students are ready to acquire. Examples of CAS include drawings, explanations in the second language that add context, and occasional brief translations. CAS can help input not only be comprehensible and compelling but also rich and abundant.

Bridge to reading

When students are still at the high beginning level or at the elementary level when they start GSSR, and are not experienced with reading graded readers in English, as noted earlier, the transition to reading is less laborious when they first hear stories in class. I (BM) have found that hearing fifty stories can make a substantial difference.

When first beginning Story-Listening, the first five to ten stories can be told in ten to fifteen minutes each. This can be increased gradually as stories get longer, twenty to thirty minutes for the next fifteen to twenty stories, and then forty minutes for the next fifteen to twenty stories.

After students finish hearing a story in class, the teacher can read the text of the story aloud. GSSR can begin while students are still listening to the first fifty stories.

Graded Readers as reading material

In a GSSR program, students are introduced to books called graded readers. Graded readers are designed for those interested in improving in the language, but who are not yet advanced enough to understand "authentic" books. The grammar and vocabulary are simplified depending on the level of graded reader. While we understand that some in the ELT (English Language Teaching) field find this term "authentic" to be demeaning towards second and foreign language students and have offered the term "Language Learner Literature" as an alternative (Day and Bamford, 1998, 2002), we don't see "authentic" as demeaning to language learners, but as a goal for second and foreign language readers. We use the term "authentic" that is, books written by native speakers for native speakers, as a potential goal for second and foreign language readers.

In the traditional approach, reading passages contain only words and structures that students have studied, that they have attempted to consciously *learn*. In GSSR, readers *acquire* new vocabulary and grammar by reading stories.

For this to happen, the language in the stories need to be comprehensible, interesting, rich, and abundant and with enough language to supply context to help comprehension. In fact, one of the teacher roles in a GSSR program is to suggest books for students to read that are so interesting that readers actually forget that they are reading in another language.

For those interested in this mental state of the reader we encourage Victor Nell's 1988 "Lost in a Book: The Psychology of Reading for Pleasure," and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's 1990 book "Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience."

No targeting specific vocabulary or grammar

Unlike traditional methods, stories used in Story-Listening and stories in graded readers do not "target" specific vocabulary or grammar. The assumption is that given large quantities of comprehensible and interesting text, the vocabulary and grammar that students are ready to acquire will be present in the input.

Students are not required to understand every word perfectly. Even the most basic graded reader may contain some language that students will not fully understand. But each time the student encounters a new word in a meaningful context, a small amount of it will be acquired, and if enough reading and listening are done, eventually all or nearly all of the meaning and form will be acquired.

Thus, when students understand the flow of the story and enjoy the message, this is good enough (Krashen & Mason, 2019a). When the story is interesting, an unfamiliar word does not hinder students from keeping reading, because they will want to know what happens next (Krashen & Mason, 2019b).

No expectation of mastery of vocabulary and grammar

Acquisition is gradual. The acquisition approach trusts that optimal input (input that is comprehensible, interesting, rich, and in large quantities) will result in the natural development of language. Gradual does not mean slow. It means steady progress according to each student's individual readiness.

Insisting that readers know every word or grammatical structure perfectly actually discourages further reading and flow. Rather than stopping to look up every unknown encountered word, students are much better off letting the unknown word go and continuing to read. The unknown word and grammar will appear and re-appear in future

reading and will be gradually acquired if students read and hear many stories.

No exercises, summaries, or required discussion in the target language

These output activities are thought to strengthen the memory of consciously learned language in the learning approach, but studies done over the last few decades (e.g., Krashen, 2003, 2004, 2011; Mason, 2004; Smith, 2006) show that they make no direct contribution to language acquisition.

Forcing students to consciously learn language, in our opinion, very rarely works. Time and effort in acquiring a language could be much better spent, as language that we learn through study is hard to use in communication and is easily forgotten. For language acquisition, production is not required. Language acquisition is possible without output. Output has no direct effect on acquisition, and forced output escalates anxiety and this of course has a negative effect on language development (Krashen, 2018). However, when students wish to write and speak in a target language, that is certainly allowed.

For language acquisition to take place, there is no need to produce language.

Book selection is guided/aided by the teacher

When students experience pleasure from finishing reading a book in a foreign language, they will want to read more. The teacher's job is to help them feel success and satisfaction on the first day of the course and help students to continue experiencing pleasure with each book.

With GSSR, teachers pre-select appropriate titles from different publishers that are both interesting and comprehensible. For both students and teachers, it is important to note that when selecting books for GSSR, publishers use different terms and headwords when identifying their various levels of graded readers. Books labelled "beginning level," even from the same publisher, are not always at the same difficulty level.

A mixture of different titles from different publishers with several copies of each book is assembled from the starter level to the advanced level and are gradually introduced to students. These books should be brought to the classroom and distributed around the room for students to select. When students are ready and willing to go on to more difficult graded readers, the teacher presents another collection of titles at a slightly higher level.

The language of the books selected gradually becomes more complex, but because students select books based on their interest, their competence in vocabulary and grammar will have increased and their background knowledge will also have expanded. Thus, these more advanced books will be comprehensible.

Students are not required to finish reading every book they start. In fact, not continuing to read a book that the reader finds uninteresting or too difficult is the sign of a good reader.

It is a good idea to have a large selection of books in addition to the teacher's selection of recommended books for students to browse. How this is to be done is variable. One of the authors of this paper (KS) uses a collection of books in his office, office library, where students can come to visit, chat, and browse for books outside of class, and a classroom library where he either leaves those books in a cabinet or more typically carries the books to class in book bags. Of course, ideally, the school library sometimes also called the central library, is where the teacher should convince the students to find their books (Smith, 2010). Encouraging students to visit frequently and make good connections with the librarians in the central library probably is the best place for students to find books.

Narrow Reading

GSSR recommends narrow reading, staying with one genre and even one author that the reader likes (Krashen, 1981b). Narrow reading is more comprehensible than wide reading, in that the reader repeatedly encounters familiar topics and words (Krashen, 2004b) decreasing the lexical burden for the reader (Hwang and Nation, 1989).

With narrow reading, reading choices are suggested, not assigned. Students don't have to complete every book they started. Teachers should be aware that narrow reading can result in a significant increase in voluntary reading. For example, if a student starts reading books in Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot Series, he or she may want to read more in that series, e.g., on to Miss Marple. There are 33 novels in Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot series alone. Once a reader gets hooked on an author, the student often wants all of them, not just a few in one series (Mason, 2017).

Contrary to popular opinion, narrow reading can result in substantial growth in language. For example, see Cho and Krashen (1993, 1995a, 1995b) in which acquirers of English as a second language read novels from the Sweet Valley series, progressing from Sweet Valley Kids

(second grade level) to Sweet Valley Twins (fourth grade level), and eventually to Sweet Valley High novels (sixth grade level). Subjects in these studies were Korean adults living in the United States, who reported significant improvement in their English.

While earlier studies from the 1980s and 1990s provide the foundation for narrow reading to emerge, Kang (2015) is an experimental study which compared 61 high intermediate L2 senior high school students taking an English class. The duration of the study was one month. Participants were divided into two separate groups. One group read related articles about the dangers of second-hand smoke (narrow reading), while the other read unrelated texts. Results showed that the narrow reading group outperformed the unrelated reading text group on both receptive and productive vocabulary tests.

Can reading take students all the way?

McQuillan (2016) showed it is quite possible for reading alone to take students from less challenging texts using only the most frequent words to more challenging texts with less frequent words. This path can prepare students to academic study abroad where English is the Medium for Instruction. Preparation for study abroad can be done not only through study and test preparation, but through access to a well-stocked library of appropriate books (Constantino, 1995; Constantino, Lee, Cho, & Krashen, 1997; Mason, 2006).

Amount of reading

We suggest that all students, regardless of their reading ability or score on a placement test such as a cloze test, start reading 50 to 70 pages per week from very easy readers at the beginning of a GSSR program. If students maintain this pace for one year (52 weeks), they should be able to read 2,500 pages or 500,000 words in one year. However, as the program continues, during the first and second year, and students start to realize they can read more quickly and the amount of reading that can be done increases, so too, should reading goals be increased to 100 to 150 pages per week. If this new pace of 100 to 150 pages per week is maintained over one year, students should be able to read about 6500 pages which is equivalent to 2,000,000 words.

Of course, there will be variation among students as to the amount read. This is because GSSR does not strictly assign what or how much to read.

It is often said that students don't read. One reason is that they are not yet ready to read. Another reason is little access to comprehensible

and interesting books (Krashen, Mason, & McQuillan, 2021; Smith & Krashen, 2009; Cho & Krashen, 2016).

GSSR attempts to remove these barriers to reading.

Semester Goals

Presenting the goal of each semester is helpful for many students. For example, starting with books at the 600-headword level (beginning level), the goal of the 1st semester can be to reach the 1,100- headword level (elementary level), the goal of the second semester to reach the 1,600-headword level (intermediate level), 3rd semester to reach the 2,200-headword level (upper level), and the 4th semester to reach the authentic book level. It may also help some students to know the approximate number of pages of reading per week needed to reach the goal. With truly interesting reading, however, students will have no trouble meeting goals of reading quantity.

Reducing anxiety

All the efforts of providing optimal input will come to nothing if students sit in class full of anxiety. In addition to no targeting, no exercises, and no expectation of mastery, there are additional ways to help reduce anxiety in a GSSR course:

1. <u>Understanding Language Acquisition Theory and Evidence Supporting it</u>

   As the pedagogy (teaching practices) associated with the Optimal Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982; Krashen & Mason, 2020) will be new to students, an orientation at the very beginning of a course is highly recommended. When (adult) students, parents, and administrators are given an explanation of the theory and can read the evidence showing the effect of the pedagogy, cooperation with students and their parents will become much more likely.

2. <u>Confirmation of Student Progress</u>

   Language acquisition is a subconscious process, and we are not always aware that we have acquired language after it has occurred. As a result, students may not realize that they are acquiring the language and improving. Students may subjectively feel that they are improving because they can read and understand longer and more complex books at higher-level reading levels, but they may need more confirmation than this feeling of getting better. For this reason, it is helpful that they

> experience success with valid, reliable objective measures, i.e., tests. Positive results on these objective measures assures students that what they are experiencing is real and encourages them to continue.

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Research thus far consistently confirms that more reading is associated with better reading, writing, spelling, more vocabulary, and grammar. (Cho & Krashen, 1993, 1995a, 1995b; Cho and Krashen, 2019; Cho & Kim, 2004, 2014; Elley, 1989, 1991, 1998; Elley & Mangubhai, 1983; Hsu & Lee, 2005, 2007; Krashen, 1981, 1982, 1984, 1985, 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2011; Krashen and Mason, 2020; Krashen, Lee, & Lao, 2017; Lao & Krashen, 2000; Lee, SY, 2007; Liu, 2007; Mason, 2004, 2013c, 2018; Mason & Krashen, 1997; 2004; Mason, Vanata, Jander, Borsch, & Krashen, 2009; Mason, Smith, & Krashen, 2020; Mason & Pendergast, 1991, 1997; McQuillan, 2016, 2019, 2020; McQuillan & Krashen, 2008; Nagy, et. al., 1985; Smith, 2006, 2011, 2012; Smith & Krashen, 2009; Smith, Mason, & Krashen, 2021).

Of course, according to Karl Popper's view of science (1959), we can never prove any hypothesis is correct. No matter how much supporting evidence, the next study may disprove our hypothesis. But it is far preferable to rely on a hypothesis that has been confirmed many times than on one that has not done well in the research.

IN SUMMARY

The GSSR program is based on the Reading Hypothesis, a sub-hypothesis of the Comprehension (Input) Hypothesis. The Reading Hypothesis claims that vocabulary and other aspects of language are acquired through the comprehension of texts, made possible due to context. GSSR neither deliberately teaches vocabulary nor the rules of the language via direct instruction. Instead, it relies on compelling, comprehensible, rich input through the reading of many stories.

A major role of a GSSR teacher is to help students find reading that is compelling; material usually in the form of books, that are, as mentioned earlier, so interesting that the reader, in a sense, "forgets" that he or she is reading in another language. The best way to make sure that this happens is to encourage self-selected reading.

Some additional explanation of self-selected reading is helpful. The teacher does not simply turn the students loose in the library but helps them develop the competence to select their own reading material

(Mason, 2019). It involves the collection of suitable books for each level, Story-Listening instruction done in class that provides aural input, and individual guidance to match students with suitable books for maintaining interest in reading. Substantial gains have been observed from input (reading) alone when students receive abundant, optimal input. GSSR attempts to facilitate the journey on the path to independent reading.

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