Akshara: An International Refereed Research Journal of English Literature and Language
ISSN: 0975-5373; E-ISSN: 2583-4738
Vol. 16, May 2024, pp. 18-30
Guest editor: Ram Sebak Thakur
Editor-in-chief: Vijay Kumar Roy
https://www.waoar.org/akshara/

Received: 20 February 2025
Accepted: 30 March 2025
Published: 30 May 2025

Extensive Reading and Writing (ERW) in Low-Resource Classrooms: Applicability and Effectiveness

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Abstract

Extensive reading and writing (ERW) have been widely recognised as effective strategies for improving literacy skills in various educational contexts. However, their effectiveness in low-resource classrooms remains underexplored. This research paper investigates the impact of ERW on literacy development in low-resource settings, focusing on the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing these strategies. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data from standardised literacy tests with qualitative insights from teacher interviews and classroom observations. The findings suggest that ERW can significantly enhance literacy skills, even in resource-constrained environments, provided appropriate support and adaptations are made. The paper concludes with recommendations for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to promote the effective integration of ERW in low-resource classrooms.

Keywords: Extensive reading and writing (ERW), literacy skills, low-resource classrooms, educational achievement, socioeconomic development

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

Literacy is a fundamental skill that underpins educational achievement and socioeconomic development (Oghenekohwo and Frank-Oputu 126-31). Despite global efforts to improve literacy rates, many low-resource classrooms face significant challenges in delivering quality education. Limited access to books, inadequate teacher training, and overcrowded classrooms are just a few barriers that hinder effective literacy instruction in these settings. Extensive reading and writing (ERW) have emerged as promising strategies for enhancing literacy skills in response to these challenges.

Extensive reading (ER) involves reading large quantities of materials within the learner's linguistic competence, while extensive writing (EW) encourages learners to write frequently and for various purposes. Both strategies emphasise the importance of volume, variety, and autonomy in literacy development (Mermelstein 182-98). While ERW has been extensively studied in well-resourced contexts, its applicability and effectiveness in low-resource classrooms remain under-researched.

1.2 Research Objectives

This study aims to:

- investigate the impact of ERW on literacy development in low-resource classrooms;
- identify challenges and opportunities associated with implementing ERW in these settings, and
- provide evidence-based recommendations for integrating ERW into low-resource classrooms.

1.3 Research Questions

To explore the impact and practical application of the Extensive Reading and Writing (ERW) programme in under-resourced educational settings, this study was guided by three core research questions.

1. How does ERW influence literacy skills in low-resource classrooms?
2. What are the key challenges and facilitators of ERW implementation in low-resource settings?
3. What strategies can be employed to enhance the effectiveness of ERW in low-resource classrooms?

These questions were designed to examine the outcomes of ERW on students' literacy development of the contextual factors that affect its implementation. By focusing on how ERW influences literacy skills, identifying the key challenges and facilitators encountered by educators, and investigating strategies to improve its effectiveness, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how ERW can be successfully adapted and sustained in low-resource classrooms.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is rooted in the Input Hypothesis (Krashen 409-31) and the Output Hypothesis (Swain 495-508). The Input Hypothesis posits that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input slightly above their current proficiency level. Extensive reading aligns this hypothesis by providing learners with ample opportunities to encounter new vocabulary and grammatical structures.

On the other hand, the Output Hypothesis emphasises the importance of language production in the learning process. Extensive writing allows learners to practise and internalise new language forms, reinforcing their literacy skills. Together, these theories provide a robust framework for understanding the potential benefits of ERW in literacy development.

2.2 Empirical Evidence

Extensive empirical research over the past two decades has explored the effectiveness of literacy interventions in low-resource educational settings, demonstrating promising results and the complexities involved in implementation. The central theme emerging from this body of work is that, while structural limitations persist, well-designed literacy programmes—particularly those integrating extensive reading and writing (ERW)—can significantly enhance student learning outcomes.

Numerous large-scale studies have shown that early reading interventions when effectively implemented, yield measurable improvements in foundational literacy skills. For instance, Piper et al. documented significant gains in reading fluency and comprehension among Grade 1 and 2 students in Kenya under the Tusome Early Grade Reading Activity, a nationwide programme emphasising daily reading routines and structured pedagogy (293-321). Similarly, the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) has been used across multiple countries to assess literacy outcomes, showing

that targeted instructional reforms and teaching materials lead to improved reading scores (Dubeck and Gove 315-22).

In India, Integrated reading and writing programmes significantly improved children's decoding and writing fluency, particularly when local language texts were used. These findings align with studies by Banerji et al., whose ASER reports showed that even simple, cost-effective interventions, such as community-based reading camps, led to noticeable gains in reading levels among rural children (387-96).

The empirical evidence also highlights the importance of teacher support. A study by Cilliers et al. in South Africa demonstrated that combining structured lesson plans with in-class coaching substantially affected students' reading comprehension, compared to training alone (926-62). Likewise, Dubeck and Gove stress that the success of literacy interventions often depends on equipping teachers with pedagogical content knowledge and ongoing mentorship (315-22).

Parental and community engagement has emerged as another strong predictor of intervention success. Community participation also helped sustain literacy practices outside the classroom, especially where students had limited access to books at home.

Importantly, the long-term benefits of ERW-focused programmes have also been documented. For example, Elley and Mangubhai conducted a landmark study in Fiji that showed that students who engaged in sustained silent reading outperformed their peers in vocabulary and writing tasks (53–67). More recently, Krashen synthesised findings from multiple contexts to assert that free voluntary reading is one of the most powerful tools for improving literacy outcomes across socioeconomic groups ("Free Reading" 42-45).

2.3 Challenges in Low-Resource Classrooms

Low-resource classrooms face a multitude of challenges that can significantly hinder the effective implementation of literacy programmes like Extensive Reading and Writing (ERW). These challenges are often rooted in systemic inequalities and are exacerbated by socioeconomic, political, and infrastructural constraints. One of the most pressing issues is the lack of adequate teaching and learning materials, particularly books and reading resources. Studies have consistently shown that access to quality and age-appropriate texts is fundamental to literacy development, yet many low-income schools struggle with shortages or outdated materials (Neuman

and Celano 176-201). This scarcity directly affects students' exposure to print, a key predictor of literacy success (Mol & Bus 267-96).

Teacher preparedness is another significant concern. Many educators in under-resourced schools have limited access to ongoing professional development or training in student-centred pedagogy. Pressley et al. highlight that teachers often show dedication, frequently lack the skills to implement effective literacy instruction (363-84).

The physical learning environment in many low-resource classrooms is also suboptimal. Inadequate infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, and insufficient furniture or lighting can create environments that are not conducive to learning. These factors can negatively impact student concentration and teacher morale, compounding instruction difficulties (Barrett et al. 24-34).

Language barriers present another layer of complexity. In many low-resource settings, the language of instruction differs from students' home languages, making it harder for learners to engage with reading and writing tasks (Tyrosvoutis et al. 274-297). This mismatch can slow literacy development and widen achievement gaps.

Socioeconomic challenges also affect student engagement, challenges, including food insecurity, absenteeism, and household responsibilities. As a result, many students struggle to focus on academic work, particularly extensive reading and writing tasks that require sustained attention and motivation (Margolis et al. 162-69).

Furthermore, limited community involvement and parental support can affect the sustainability of school-based literacy initiatives. Trudell and Schroeder argue that community engagement is vital for creating a supportive literacy environment. Yet, in many low-resource contexts, schools and families operate in silos due to lack of resources or mutual understanding (165-80).

Systemic and policy-level constraints, such as insufficient funding and fragmented curriculum design, hinder progress (Ismail et al. 221-39). Despite these barriers, some researchers argue that contextually adapted interventions—leveraging local resources and community involvement—can still achieve meaningful impact (Spires et al. 277-287). However, this requires a flexible, bottom-up approach that empowers educators and communities to co-construct solutions.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of ERW in low-resource classrooms. The quantitative component involves pre- and post-intervention literacy assessments, while the qualitative component includes teachers' interviews and classroom observations.

3.2 Participants

The study was conducted in 10 low-resource primary schools in Khagaria district of Bihar. 100 students (aged 8-12) and 20 teachers participated in the study. The schools were selected based on limited access to educational resources, including books, technology, and trained teachers.

3.3 Intervention

The ERW intervention was implemented over a period of six months. Each school received 100 age-appropriate books in English and Hindi, the two primary languages of instruction in the locality. Teachers were provided with a two-day training workshop on extensive reading and writing principles and practices. During the intervention period, students were encouraged to read at least one book per week and to write short stories based on their reading.

3.4 Data Collection

- **Quantitative Data:** Literacy skills were assessed using standardised tests administered before and after the intervention. The tests measured reading comprehension, vocabulary, and writing skills to determine the impact of the ERW intervention on literacy development.
- **Qualitative Data:** Teachers' interviews were conducted at the end of the intervention to gather insights into the challenges and facilitators of ERW implementation. Classroom observations were also carried out to document actual practices and behaviours during the intervention.

4. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using Pre- and Post-Intervention Mean and Simple Percentage Method, while qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis involved coding the interview transcripts and observation notes

to identify recurring themes and patterns related to the implementation and effectiveness of ERW.

5. Results

- **Quantitative Findings:** The results of the pre- and post-intervention literacy assessments indicate a substantial improvement in students' literacy skills following the implementation of the ERW programme. Reading comprehension scores increased by approximately 30%, rising from a mean of 45.2 to 58.7. Vocabulary scores showed a slightly higher improvement of about 31%, increasing from 40.1 to 52.4. Writing skills also demonstrated notable growth, with scores improving by roughly 29%, from 38.5 to 49.8. These consistent gains across all three areas suggest that the ERW intervention positively and meaningfully impacted students' overall literacy development in low-resource classrooms.

Skill Area	Pre-Intervention Mean	Post-Intervention Mean	Score Increase	Percentage Improvement
Reading Comprehension	45.2	58.7	13.5	29.9%
Vocabulary	40.1	52.4	12.3	30.7%
Writing Skills	38.5	49.8	11.3	29.4%

- **Qualitative Findings:** A thematic analysis was conducted based on teacher interviews and classroom observations to better understand the practical realities of implementing the Extensive Reading and Writing (ERW) approach in low-resource educational settings a thematic analysis was conducted based on teacher interviews and classroom observations. This analysis explored how ERW was received, adapted, and practised by educators working in resource-constrained schools. Through firsthand accounts and direct observation, the study sought to uncover the opportunities and obstacles encountered during the implementation process. The findings revealed several key themes that shed light on the multifaceted challenges teachers faced, particularly about limited access to books, the adequacy of training, and the varying levels of student engagement.

6. Challenges

Implementing the Extensive Reading and Writing (ERW) programme in low-resource classrooms presents unique challenges that can significantly impact its effectiveness. While the initiative aims to enhance students' literacy skills through increased reading and writing opportunities, several systemic and contextual barriers often hinder its smooth execution. Insights gathered from teachers' interviews and classroom observations revealed recurring difficulties educators face in such settings. These challenges include inadequate access to reading materials, limited and insufficiently practical teacher training, and initial student resistance to engaging in ERW activities. Understanding these obstacles is essential for refining the programme and ensuring its long-term success in resource-constrained environments.

- **Limited Access to Books**: Despite the provision of books, many teachers reported that the number of books was insufficient to meet the needs of all students. Some schools also lacked proper storage facilities, leading to damage and loss of books.
- **Teacher Training**: While the training workshop was well-received, some teachers felt it was too brief and did not provide enough practical guidance on integrating ERW into their daily teaching.
- **Student Engagement**: Teachers noted that some students were initially reluctant to engage in extensive reading and writing, particularly those who struggled with basic literacy skills. However, over time, most students became more enthusiastic and motivated.

7. Facilitators

In exploring the factors that supported the successful implementation of the Extensive Reading and Writing (ERW) programme in low-resource classrooms, the thematic analysis of teachers' interviews and classroom observations also highlighted several key facilitators. These facilitators played a crucial role in enhancing the programme's effectiveness and sustainability despite the constraints of limited resources. The findings revealed that active community involvement, strong peer support among students, teachers' adaptability were instrumental in creating an environment conducive to literacy development. These elements enriched the ERW experience and helped foster a sense of ownership and collaboration among all stakeholders involved.

- **Community Involvement**: Several schools reported that involving parents and community members in the ERW programme helped create a supportive literacy development environment for literacy development. For example, some parents volunteered to read with their children at home, while others donated additional books to the school.
- **Peer Support**: Teachers observed that students often encouraged and supported each other in their reading and writing activities. Peer tutoring and group discussions were particularly effective in fostering a collaborative learning environment.
- **Teacher Adaptability**: Despite the challenges, many teachers demonstrated high adaptability and creativity in implementing ERW. For example, some teachers used local stories and folktales as reading materials, while others incorporated writing activities into other subjects such as science and social studies.

8. Discussion

To synthesise the findings of this study and place them within the broader context of literacy education in low-resource classrooms, the following discussion draws upon quantitative and qualitative data to evaluate the impact, challenges, and implications of implementing the Extensive Reading and Writing (ERW) programme. Building on the gains observed in students' reading comprehension, vocabulary, and writing skills, the discussion explores how ERW can serve as a viable and practical approach to literacy development in constrained educational environments. It further considers the factors that contribute to or hinder its success, offering insights into the realities of classroom practice.

- **Impact of ERW on Literacy Skills:** The quantitative findings of this study are consistent with previous research demonstrating the positive impact of ERW on literacy skills (Nakanishi 6-37). The significant improvements in reading comprehension, vocabulary, and writing skills suggest that ERW can be an effective strategy for enhancing literacy development, even in low-resource classrooms.

  The qualitative findings provide further insights into the factors contributing to ERW's success in these settings. Community involvement peer support, and teacher adaptability were identified as key facilitators of ERW implementation. These findings highlight the importance of a holistic approach to literacy development beyond the provision of books and materials.

- **Challenges and Opportunities**: The challenges identified in this study, such as limited access to books and inadequate teacher training, are consistent with the broader literature on literacy education in low-resource settings (Schwartz et al. 160-190). However, the study also identified several opportunities for overcoming these challenges. For example, the involvement of parents and community members can create a supportive environment for literacy development, while peer support and teacher adaptability can enhance the effectiveness of ERW.
- **Implications for Policy and Practice**: The findings of this study have several implications for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders involved in literacy education in low-resource settings. First, there is a need for increased investment in providing books and other reading materials. This could involve partnerships with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), international donors, and local communities to ensure that schools can access a diverse range of age-appropriate books.

  Second, teacher training should be prioritised to ensure educators have the knowledge and skills to implement ERW effectively. This could involve the development of online training modules, peer mentoring programmes, and ongoing professional development opportunities.

  Finally, the involvement of parents and community members should be encouraged to create a supportive environment for literacy development. This could involve community literacy events, parent-teacher associations, and other initiatives that promote collaboration between schools and communities.

  By connecting these findings to existing literature and highlighting opportunities for improvement, this section also outlines key recommendations for policy and practice to strengthen ERW implementation and ensure its sustainability in low-resource settings.

9. Conclusion

This study proves that extensive reading and writing can be effective strategies for enhancing literacy skills in low-resource classrooms. Despite the challenges associated with implementing ERW in these settings, the findings suggest that significant improvements in literacy development can be achieved with appropriate support and adaptations. The study highlights the importance of a holistic approach to literacy

education that involves not only the provision of books and materials the active engagement of providing books and materials and actively engaging teachers, students, parents, and community members.

Future research should explore the long-term impact of ERW on literacy development and investigate the potential of digital technologies to overcome some of the resource constraints in low-income countries. Additionally, further studies are needed to examine the effectiveness of ERW in different cultural and linguistic contexts, and its impact on other aspects of education, such as critical thinking and creativity.

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