

Alt, Christine. 2009. *The importance and use of extensive reading by means of language learner literature in Unterstufe – A field study in Hauptschule and Gymnasium in the districts of Wels-Stadt and Wels-Land*. MA Thesis, University of Vienna.

## **Abstract**

Extensive reading, which is also known as pleasure reading, is an important component in the development of second or foreign language learning. Reading a large amount does not only affect reading ability itself but also other areas of language competence, such as vocabulary and writing. In order to practise extensive reading at an elementary and intermediate language level, it is necessary to introduce learners to adapted or simplified texts, which are known as *language learner literature* and may serve as steps towards reading original works. A variety of publishing houses offers a wide range of high quality texts, which are graded regarding vocabulary, grammar and syntax. The problem, however, is that in Austrian School curricula extensive reading is not included as a compulsory activity. Thus, its actual use is – to a large part – dependent on the teacher and the school.

This thesis intends to demonstrate the importance of extensive reading by means of language learner literature. A field study which was carried out amongst EFL teachers by means of a questionnaire in two Upper Austrian districts examined whether and how language learner literature is actually used at lower secondary level.

In *Gymnasium* and *Hauptschule*, extensive reading as well as intensive reading is practised. Teachers in *Gymnasium*, however, use language learner literature more frequently than teachers in *Hauptschule*. Generally, the use of language learner literature increases with increasing language level of the pupils, in terms of years at school as well as in terms of *Leistungsgruppen* in *Hauptschulen*. Interestingly, the most frequently stated reason for not using language learner literature is insufficient language competence. As language learner literature is designed to solve the problem of lack of language competence, it will be interesting to look at other reasons which may contribute to the decision of not using simple texts in *Unterstufe*. Furthermore, the differences in classroom practice between *Gymnasium* and *Hauptschule* will be discussed in the empirical part.

It is necessary to remind teachers about the importance of introducing extensive reading to the pupils, as they do not seem to be fully aware of its benefits. There are definitely materials available for beginning language learners and thus extensive reading could be introduced at a very elementary language level. As extensive reading should be fostered as an out-of-class learning strategy, as a follow-up of the study, a booklet with the results and suggestions for a better implementation of extensive reading will be compiled and sent to the teachers.