

STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EXTENSIVE READING

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Abstract: For more than three decades, there have been plenty studies suggested the benefits of Extensive Reading (ER). However, the inclusion of ER in classes in Indonesia is not widely implemented. Moreover, most of the research on ER scrutinized the impact of ER in improving students' vocabulary, language proficiency, motivation and so forth. There are few studies that explored the students' voices regarding the implementation of ER. Therefore, this study investigated students' personal reflection towards the ER in a 4 months reading class. Through a questionnaire and and the follow-up interview, this study examined 52 undergraduate students' perspectives on (1) the influential factors in ER program, and (2) the students' preferences regarding the classroom activities for ER. The result of the data analysis revealed that materials selection, text difficulty and teachers' role are the most influential factors in the success of ER program. This study also found that teacher-student conference, questions-answers and personal reflection are students' favorite activities during ER. The difficulties the students found during the ER are also discussed in this paper. Thus, the findings of this study would give pedagogical implications on the implementation of ER program in the future.

Keywords : *Extensive Reading, Students' Perspectives*

It is commonly believed that reading activity is crucial in someone's learning journey, particularly in his second language learning. There have been impressive number of studies investigating the positive effects of reading on learners' proficiency, both in general proficiency and other particular skills. A number of researchers have proven that reading has significant effects on improving all four language learning skills and also on language knowledge (grammar and vocabulary). The most agreed concept that explains the importance of reading in language learning is that it provides the learners with the major input required in language acquisition process. In second language acquisition research, input is said to provide opportunities for both incidental intentional learning (Ellis and Shintani, 2014). Language acquisition will not happen if the learners are not exposed with sufficient input.

Having this in mind, teachers in EFL classes exploit the reading activities in the classroom with various instructions that can boost students' language proficiency. Consequently, in most of reading classes, reading is taught in careful selection of materials and activities which is focused on teaching of a particular language area or reading skills. In this situation, students are demanded to have complete understanding of the text. Moreover, students often have limited time to read and some tasks to accomplish. Therefore, it is not surprising if you find many students dislike reading course and think that reading is such a drudgery.

In Indonesia, reading is imperatively taught at schools and universities. Reading is one of the skills being tested at national final examination. At universities, English classes are mostly focused on developing students reading skills, particularly in comprehending academic texts. Even though reading has been taught since primary school, the reading ability of the students is still considered low. Based on my observations and reflections, one of the reasons is that because the students do not really comprehend what they read. They only read in order to fulfil a task after reading. Hence, reading is viewed as one of the tasks they must complete during the class, not as an activity that is enjoyable and useful for their own development. The reading activities in the classrooms do not develop students' motivation to read for their own pleasure or satisfaction for gaining information. This type of reading class may not help students to find pleasure in reading which later makes students feel less motivated to read and do not have positive attitude toward reading. However

learners' interest and motivation are very important in developing reading comprehension skill (Dennis, 2008).

One of the approaches to overcome this problem is extensive reading (ER). Many researchers have suggested some definitions of ER. One of the most well-known definitions is by Day and Bamford (1998) which referred extensive reading as a large amount of reading with a focus on the meaning of the text. Day and Bamford (2002) then presented 10 principles of ER: The reading material is easy; a variety of reading material on a wide range of topics must be available; learners choose what they want to read; learners read as much as possible; the purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information, and general understanding; reading is its own reward; reading speed is usually faster rather than slower; reading is individual and silent; teachers orient and guide their students; and the teacher is a role model of a reader.

Another way to understand ER is by contrasting it to traditionally used intensive reading. In intensive reading class, the passage is usually short and difficult. Consequently, the learners read slowly and they cannot meet a lot of language. In addition, the instruction is focused on carefully checking comprehension, studying the grammar and/or vocabulary, or developing a reading skill. Moreover, the learners read the same material and at the same pace. This is the typically reading class we find in EFL context, particularly Indonesia.

Furthermore, the advantages of ER have been extensively discussed. One of the most explored issues in ER is the influence of ER on the development of vocabulary. In recent years, many studies have appeared supporting the positive effect of ER on vocabulary building. A profound body of evidence also strengthen the positive effects of ER on reading comprehension and other language skills. One of the recent studies was conducted by Suk (2017) investigated the impact of an extensive reading approach over a 15-week semester on the reading comprehension, reading rate, and vocabulary acquisition of Korean university students studying English as a foreign language. The result of the study confirmed the positive impacts of extensive reading on all three areas.

Even though there has been a great amount of studies suggested positive effects of ER, the implementation of ER in Indonesia, particularly in Bengkulu is still far from successful. Some previous studies pointed out some factors that contribute to the success of ER. Kwon et.al (2017) investigated factors that could bring about successful implementation of extensive reading using online/offline blended English library system called 'Reading Gate' in primary and secondary schools. The study reported five factors for successful implementation of blended extensive reading programs: online level-up system, teacher intervention, integration with the curriculum, school-level support, and parents' awareness of literacy. Furthermore, Renandya and Jacobs (2016) pointed six principles that could be used to guide successful implementation of ER/EL programs: 1) The objectives of the ER/EL programs should be made clear to everyone involved. 2) The programs should ensure that students read and listen in quantity; 3) The programs should make available reading and listening materials which are within students' linguistic competence; 4) Teachers should provide on-going support to every student, especially those who need help most with their reading and listening; 5) Students' motivation should be kept high throughout the programs. 6) Teacher should encourage students to do simultaneous reading and listening; 7) Teachers should provide interesting and enjoyable post-reading and listening activities.

Amidst all the studies regarding the implementation of ER, there are few studies taking into account students' point of view. Therefore, the present study investigated students' perspective concerning the factors attributed to a successful extensive reading program and their preferences regarding the classroom activities for reading extensively. It was my students' first experience in ER and also my first time teaching ER. This reflective survey is essential in the development of ER program in our department and also for students' autonomous ER in the future. Specifically, the research questions were addressed as follows:

1. What is the EFL readers' perspective concerning the factors attributed to a successful extensive reading program?
2. What are the EFL college readers' preferences regarding the classroom activities for reading extensively?

Method

Participants

The participants were 52 Indonesian students at English Education Department. They were in their third year and in the last reading class. Before enrolling to this ER class, they are required to pass General Reading and Academic Reading class.

Instrument and Data Collection Procedure

The ER program was lasted for 14 meetings in 4 months. During the class, students were required to read a novel and 14 texts.

A survey (Appendix A) used in this study consisted of three parts. Part one probes the students' perspectives on factors attributed to a successful extensive reading program. The identified factors includes text difficulty (i.e. vocabulary, syntactic structure), materials selection (i.e. genres), self-selecting reading materials, peer cooperation (i.e. small group work, discussion, and presentation), teacher's roles (i.e. explanations), and class activities (i.e. summary, Q&A). Part two asks about the learners' preference for the classroom activities. This section contains items of classroom activities the students practiced in class, including summary writing, Q & A, personal reflections, oral presentation, student-student cooperation, teacher-student conference, and on-line sharing. For part one and two, the students were asked to rank the list of factors and activities from the most influential / like to least / like. Part three contains three open-ended questions in which the students described their difficulties (if any) when reading extensively and elaborated more on why they ranked certain item as the top three choices.

The data were analyzed by looking into the frequency of responses on each item. Before analyzing the frequency of the responses, each response (rank) was changed into score: 6 for Rank 1, 5 for Rank 2 and so on. The item with the highest mean was considered as item that received the most positive response.

Results and Discussion

Students' Responses on Factors Influencing an Extensive Reading Program

As shown in Table 1, the results of data analysis showed that the students did not agree on a single item as the most influential factor for a successful reading program. However, Materials Selection was the item with the highest mean (5.04) and 59.6 % of the students put this item at the first rank. The other items in the highest rank were Text Difficulty (3.62) and Teachers' Roles (3.58). Following the initial items, Classroom Activities (2.98), Peer Cooperation (2.90) and Self-selecting Materials were said to be the least influential factors in an ER program (2.88).

Table 1. Factors Influencing an Extensive Reading Program

Rank	Items	Mean
1	Materials Selection	5.04
2	Text Difficulty	3.62
3	Teachers' Roles	3.58
4	Classroom Activities	2.98
5	Peer Cooperation	2.90
6	Self-selecting Materials	2.88

Students considered Materials Selection and Text difficulty as the most influential factors in the success of ER. This fact reveals that for students, it is very crucial to have the teacher controlling the interest level and difficulty level of the text. Particularly, the reading materials should be within their own capability range to prevent students from being frustrated and demotivated. In addition, students will be motivated to read if they find the materials interest them.

In an ideal ER program, students are given autonomy to choose their own reading materials (Day and Bamford, 2002). In contrast, the students in this study consider Self-selecting materials as the least influential factor. It may be due to the lack of access of the students to the sources of materials. In this case, teacher should promote the use of online sources. Another possible reason is that the students were not confidence with their own choice. They were so teacher-dependent that they could not choose and judge their own reading. It also explains why Teacher's Roles was in the third rank.

The implementation of ER program assimilates the elements of learner autonomy. Learners are encouraged to take responsibility for their own reading and language acquisition. A teacher's role in an ER program is comparatively different from the role in traditional reading class. In a traditional class, teacher is the main and most often the only resource for learning. However, a teacher is a guide in an ER program. Mikeladze (2014) suggested the teacher's responsibilities as following: helping students enjoy and value extensive reading; understanding what extensive reading involves; finding out what the students can and cannot do; introduction to library and procedure of selecting books; choosing or devising effective tasks and activities; preparing the students to undertake the tasks; making sure that everyone reads productively; monitoring progress to make sure that everyone in the class improves steadily according to their own capabilities.

Students Responses on Classroom Activities for an Extensive Reading Program

Table 2 shows the frequency of students' responses on preferred classroom activities. As seen on the table, Teacher-Student conference (5.04) received the most positive feedback from the students. It was followed by Questions-Answers (4.40) and Personal Reflections (4.15) on the second and the third place.

Table 2. Classroom Activities for an Extensive Reading Program

Rank	Items	Mean
1	T-S Conference	5.04
2	Questions-Answers	4.40
3	Personal Reflections	4.15
4	Summary Writing	4.08
5	Online Sharing	4.06
6	S-S Cooperation	3.56
7	Oral Presentation	2.73

The students viewed teacher-student conference as a meaningful activity for them. Through this activity, students could consult about their reading progress and problems. Teacher also could monitor students' reading progress and motivate them in the conference. In the second rank, students' preferred Questions-Answers activity because they have done this kind of activity most often. It is surprising that the students put Personal Reflections on the top three. At first, they were reluctant to share their personal opinions about the text. They were more like summarizing the texts. However, after engaging in several discussions, they learned how to show their understanding about the text and how the content of the text connected to their past experiences and background knowledge. Oral Presentation was the least favorably activity. It may due to the fact that most of the students were in medium and low level of proficiency that make presenting orally hard for them.

In the last part of the questionnaire, there was an open ended question about the difficulties the students faced during reading. More than 90% of the students reported that their biggest problems related to vocabulary. They were aware that they have limited vocabulary that they found so many difficult and unfamiliar words.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the students' perspectives on factors influencing successful ER program and students' preferred classroom activities. The results of the study revealed that Materials Selection, Text difficulty and Teacher's Roles are the most influential factors in the success of ER. Teacher-Student conference, Questions-Answers and Personal Reflections are the classroom activities with the most positive feedback from the students. In addition, limited vocabulary still becomes students' biggest problem.

The results of this study suggests that teachers should carefully design ER program for students with low proficiency. The reading materials should be carefully selected. During ER program, teachers should also promote autonomous learning. It is necessary to build students' confidence on their reading and to make them less dependent to the teacher.

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