

EXTENSIVE READING (ER) PRACTICES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF LANGUAGE FLUENCY

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed at investigating the Extensive Reading (ER) practices of the students and the development of language fluency. The design of the research was a qualitative study using purposive sampling technique. The data were collected by conducting interview and distributing questionnaire to 20 postgraduate students in Sebelas Maret University, Surakarta, Indonesia. Furthermore, the research revealed some findings on the types of reading materials preferred, reasons and benefits of reading, the effect of the extensive reading practices for the development of language fluency and academic achievement. The results indicate that students prefer the enjoyable reading as their reading sources. Moreover, the books suggested by the teachers to read also become their favorite materials because they obtain some advantages especially in developing language fluency. The finding also implies that extensive reading practices also affect the students' academic achievement.

Keywords: *extensive reading, language fluency, reading practices, academic achievement*

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, students' oriented activity is primarily more emphasized in giving the learners' role in the language learning process considering their needs and interest. For those reasons, the effective language learning should consider the students' need and interest. Students tend to be more motivated when they are able to find their interest in language learning especially when many benefits come along and show the development of language fluency. They have to recognize first the particular topic or subject in language learning which they are interested in and the intended learning outcomes for the students.

One of the essential components of language learning and lifelong learning for all learners is reading. Reading is an important skill in obtaining experience that links people in a way far beyond distance or time. Learners can gain a lot of individual experiences to broaden horizons, identify, extend, and intensify their interest and obtain a deeper understanding of themselves and other human beings in the world. Reading is a substantial lifestyle which must be considered by the learners in order to cope with new knowledge in a changing world. Reading makes way for a better comprehension of one's own experiences, and it can be an exciting voyage to self-contrivance. Panigrahi and Panda (1996) have said, "It is the art of interpreting printed and written words, the most effective process of conscious learning which influences the extent and accuracy of information as well as the attitudes, morals, beliefs, judgment, and action of readers."

Carrell and Carson (1997) have stated that in extensive reading, there are some points which should be considered. They refer to reading a large quantity of books and also practicing rapid reading. The activities focus on how to understand the meaning rather than the language. Extensive Reading (ER) is different from Intensive Reading (IR). In IR, the students usually work with short texts and close guidance from the teacher. The purpose of IR is facilitating the students to obtain detailed meaning from the text, to enhance reading skills, and to develop vocabulary and grammar knowledge. It is essential for the teachers to note that these two approaches are for teaching reading. ER and IR should not be seen as being in opposition, as both serve different but complementary purposes (Carrell & Carson, 1997; Nuttall, 1997).

Moreover, in many language classrooms, IR seems to be the dominant approach to teaching reading. This is despite evidence that the use of IR alone in the classroom will not help the learners develop their reading fluency. However, as an important skill, fluency tends to conceivably be acquired by learners only after the exposure to massive quantities of written text repeatedly. From many definitions about extensive reading, numbers of expert agree that ER involves the independent reading of a large quantity of material for information or pleasure (Renandya, Rajan, Jacobs, 2009). It means that everyone should consider the available resources first before implementing the ER. The resources should be enjoyable and fit the students' level, for example, novel, magazine, comic, newspapers, and other

kinds of literature which meet students' interest and are well-written on the basis of students' current level.

Krashen (1997) has stated that the way of learning the foreign language is by understanding messages. Thus, when someone understands what people say, he/she is able to comprehend what is being read. These conditions happen when he/she repeatedly focuses on the meaning of a large number of messages. This theory has been proposed by a number of theorists. Moreover, Stephen Krashen who formalizes this position into a theory known as the 'input hypothesis,' which he later calls the 'comprehension hypothesis' (Krashen, 2004 as cited in Renandya, 2007). The comprehension hypothesis is basically formulated on the basis of Krashen's conception regarding (n+1) formula. The symbol 'n' refers to students' current level of language proficiency which has been generally active as students use that language proficiency for producing and interpreting meanings. Also, the symbol '1' indicates a little bit higher level of language proficiency which can be reached and acquired by students when they use their 'n' as the schemata.

Therefore, a comprehensible hypothesis refers to the substantial contents of input which comprise a big part of students' current language proficiency and a small part of a new level of language proficiency which is reachable when students exert their big part of language proficiency. The composition of (n+1) should underlie the selected texts or books which become the resources of extensive reading activity. Accordingly, this inserted composition will guarantee that the selected extensive reading resources are comprehensible. Furthermore, to trigger students to be enjoyable in reading massively, the comprehensible extensive reading resources should meet students' interest.

Another useful definition of extensive reading is offered by Davis (1995) from a classroom implementation perspective. He states that an extensive reading program is a supplementary class library scheme, attached to an English course, in which pupils are given the time, encouragement, and materials to read pleasurably, at their own level, as many books as they can, without the pressures of testing or marks. Thus, students are competing against themselves, and the teachers are asked to provide the motivation and monitoring ascertains that they read the maximum number of books and proper books with the time given. The key words are quantity and variety, rather than quality, so that books are selected for their attractiveness and relevance to the students' lives, rather than for literary merit. It can be inferred from the explanation above that the teachers need to facilitate the students to find out their interest and to guide them finding out the suitable reading materials in order to develop their fluency.

In order to get lots of benefit from extensive reading, students must read regularly and abundantly. Research shows that, while variables such as variety and availability of reading materials are important, it is the quantity of reading that correlates most highly with students' reading enhancement and general language learning gains (Renandya, Rajan, & Jacobs, 2009; Renandya, 2017). Thus, the amount of reading is a key aim of an extensive reading program. Also, since sustained motivation is needed for students to read regularly over a period of time, increasing students' motivation is also an important aim. Students who are motivated are likely to read more and students who read more tend to be more motivated too. There is a reciprocal relationship between motivation and extensive reading (Day & Bamford, 1998).

Previous research related to extensive reading is

conducted by Chun, Choi, and Kim (2012) about the effects of extensive reading and paired-associate learning on long-term vocabulary retention. Based on converging evidence from behavioral and electrophysiological measures, the research reports the first evidence that ER and PAL (Phase Alternating Line) are effective in promoting short-term vocabulary retention. The findings indicate that repetition without the aid of context (i.e., PAL) may lead to short-term retention, but not too long-term retention. The findings of this research are parallel with the consensus from L1 vocabulary research and some L2 research in that extensive reading is a significant contributor to vocabulary acquisition. The findings of this research challenge the claims and findings of many L2 researchers who support the L2 vocabulary acquisition over ER. From the research, it can be understood that the ER gives a big contribution to the vocabulary acquisition. Thus, it is known that vocabulary is one of the important aspects that influence the development of language fluency.

Quantitative research has the same orientation to extensive reading is conducted by Kirin, Poolsap, and Plongthong (2012), the result of their research shows that students who read more pages perform better in their reading comprehension and speed. The research enacted by Kirin, Poolsap, and Plongthong (2012) engages the selected 44 Chinese students who register for a Thai reading course at a university in Thailand. The reading task is integrated into the reading course. The reading strategies and practice using a traditional approach are the main focus of this activity. Regarding the result of reading comprehension, the analysis has revealed that both of groups perceived themselves as having a high level of comprehension. It shows that those who read more rated their comprehension at the same level, while those who read less rated at a lower level. The finding has revealed that quantity and the speed of reading can affect the reading comprehension. The more the students practice reading, the more they will improve their comprehension and strategy in reading skill.

This research aims to investigate the ER practices among postgraduate students and explore their interest. It also finds out the benefits derived from the ER practices toward the academic purposes and the other possible benefits in daily life.

METHODS

The research aims to investigate the students' perception of extensive reading practices. The design of the research is a qualitative descriptive study using purposive sampling technique. 20 postgraduate students from a university in Indonesia are selected to participate in this research based on their experience through extensive reading practices. There are four males and 16 females. They have a good reading habit and good skills in English. Most of the participants also have a TOEFL score of more than 500. Those reasons are taken into consideration by involving the 20 postgraduate students from Sebelas Maret University, Surakarta, Indonesia in this research.

The researcher conducts the interview in this research as a method to collect the data and distribute an open-ended questionnaire that consists of several questions. Furthermore, the researcher does a descriptive qualitative method. The researcher analyzes the data based on Creswell theory. The analysis of the data is done in the following steps; collecting the data from 20 participants, classifying the data by coding to generate the setting and people,

selecting/displaying the data to make it easier in analysis and interpreting data which is involved interpretation or meaning of the data. In addition, the researcher has interpreted it by adopting the qualitative narrative inquiry framework. It is used to examine and extract information from the open-ended questionnaire and interview.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Students' motivation is much influenced by the environment since the participants of the research are the postgraduate students. They tend to have a good reading habit. As mentioned, this research aims to explore the ER practices and their interest in reading. The researcher also wants to find out the types of reading materials chosen. The benefits derived from the ER practices toward the academic purposes and the other possible benefits in the daily life also become the attention in this research.

The research finding indicates that 80% of the participants are women and they outnumber the men by a percentage of 20%. Women are dominated in the target population since most of the students which the researcher takes the data are women. All the respondents are Indonesian citizens who come from various places.

In the first question, the participants are asked to mention the TOEFL score they have obtained in the latest test. From 20 participants, there are 16 students (80%) who have an adequate TOEFL score for academic purposes. As a description, the participants have the various score from 510 – 587. There are four participants (15%) obtain TOEFL score below 500; their score ranged from 470 – 475. The data are described in Table 1.

Table 1 Participants' TOEFL Score Distribution

TOEFL Score	Number of Participants
<500	4
500 – 510	4
511 – 520	1
521 – 530	3
531 – 540	3
541 – 550	-
551 – 560	2
561 – 570	1
571 – 580	1
581 – 590	1
591 – 600	-
>601	-
Total	20

Table 1 indicates that most of the participants (80%) of the research obtain a good score in TOEFL test. It implies that they have good proficiency in English skill. The data also show that some of the participants obtain a TOEFL score below 500; the researcher then conducts a deep interview with four of the participants. Most of the reason is that it is the first time they take the TOEFL test, and they do not have adequate experience in doing the particular test. Another reason is they do not have adequate preparation before taking the test because of the academic activities so that they cannot obtain the maximum score. From the reasons, it can be concluded that having TOEFL score

below 500 or obtaining the score below the standard score for the academic purposes do not indicate that the test takers do not have good proficiency in English. It can be happened because of the several reasons that have been mentioned.

As stated by Nuttall (1997) that the best way to improve one's knowledge of a foreign language is to go and live among its speakers. The next best way is to read extensively in it. The data indicate that extensive reading is a crucial aspect of language acquisition. 16 participants mentioned obtain the TOEFL score above 500 which is adequate for some academic purposes; most of them turn out to be avid readers of English. It is shown by the results of the findings which describe the other section of this research. In a number of correlational researches in ESL (English as a Second Language) or EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context, the amount of reading has been shown to be positively correlated with various aspects of second and foreign language competence. ER gives a significant effect in TOEFL test scores and in the ability to judge the grammatically complex English structure.

The next question, participants are asked to choose what kind of reading materials that they like to read to develop their language fluency. There are three choices; novel or comic, academic books, and newspaper or magazine. The participants can also give other options. The findings are eight participants (40%) choose novel or comic as their reading materials. Academic books are chosen by seven participants (35%) as their reading materials. Four participants (20%) choose the newspaper or magazine as reading materials that they like to read. One participant (5%) chooses other and mentions Islamic books as the reading material. It can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2 Types of Reading Materials Preferred

Kinds of reading materials	Number of participants
Novel or comic	8
Academic books	7
Newspaper or magazine	4
Other (Islamic books)	1
Total	20

Another question asked of the participant is, "What are the reading materials you preferred?" Table 2 indicates that most of the participants prefer to read non-academic reading materials compared to academic materials. Among the non-academic materials, they prefer novel or comics, newspaper or magazines, and Islamic books. Those reading materials do not relate to their academic background implicitly. The result of novel and comics as the highest rank of the reading materials is expected as the most of the postgraduate students love to read enjoying reading materials. This interesting finding expresses a positive association attitude toward reading of enjoyment establish a positive attitude toward reading where despite the academic needs placed upon the postgraduate learners, they still make the time to read types of reading materials such as fiction or other enjoyment sources. One of the indicators of reading achievement is reading for pleasure or enjoyment reading. It can be seen as a motivating factor toward building their love for books and reading in general (Dent & Yannotta, 2005). Reading this kind of materials can give many advantages to the students in many aspects, such as, learn about other places or times, stimulate their imagination, and

gain insight into human nature, able to follow their specific hobby or interest as well as acts as a form of escapism from ‘unpleasant’ world (Tella & Akande, 2007). In addition, reading these types of materials increases reading ability as students apply more reading skills and strategies often.

However, in the academic context, students are expected to focus more on their textbooks or academic books. Nevertheless, the data reveal that the academic books are in the second rank of the type of reading materials preferred by the participants. This evidence can imply that the students now have a wide range of materials to select to read as they have many accesses to the wide variety of reading materials. According to Calkins (1996), as cited in Noor (2011), learners who do a varied amount of voluntary reading demonstrate positive attitudes toward reading and that these readers are considered the best readers.

Another aspect that the researcher focused on is the number of books read by the participants. Thus, another question asked of the participants is, “How many books do you read in a month?” It is crucial to know since one of the principles of ER practices is reading a large quantity of books. As stated by Davis (1995) that an extensive reading program is a supplementary class library scheme, attached to an English course, in which pupils are given the time, encouragement, and materials to read pleurably, at their own level, as many books as they can, without the pressures of testing or marks. The sentence ‘as many books as they can’ explains that the numbers of books read play important role in developing language fluency.

The amount of reading is a key aim of an extensive reading program. Also, since sustained motivation is needed for students to read regularly over a period of time, increasing students’ motivation is also an important aim. Students who are motivated are likely to read more, and students who read more tend to be more motivated too. There is a reciprocal relationship between motivation and extensive reading (Day & Bamford, 1998). The data are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Amount of Books Read in a Month

Amount of books	Number of participants
1 book	3
2 – 3 books	9
4 – 6 books	7
7 – 9 books	0
≥ 10	1
Total	20

Table 3 indicates that nine participants (45%) read 2 – 3 books in a month as the first rank of the amount of reading books. On the other hand, seven participants (35%) read 4 – 6 books in a month. In the third rank, there are three participants (15%) read one book in a month. The last one is one participant mentions 10 books to be read in a month.

From the data in Table 3, it can be inferred that the participants have the various amount of reading books. It is related to the reading frequency which can enhance their reading skills and strategies. According to Brown (2009), reading frequency is an imperative aspect of related reading. When students read frequently, they expand their vocabulary and world knowledge while simultaneously enhancing their reading skills and strategies. On the other hand, if they do not practice their reading, then the ability to refine their skills and strategies is lost. In addition, a positive

attitude toward reading has a positive correlation with the reading frequency and reading attitude of the students. Unfortunately, the measurement of reading frequency focuses on the amount of time spent on reading. Research in investigating the number or the length of the books read in a particular time has been minimal and inconclusive. Thus, the attention of investigating the correlation between reading frequency and reading fluency can be conducted in the further research.

In this research, the participants are also asked a question, “Please mention the reasons why you read.” According to overall descriptions of reasons to read mentioned by the participants, the researcher classifies into three main reasons. It can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4 Reasons to Read

Reasons to read	Number of participants
Gaining information	10
Academic purposes	10
Reading for pleasure	13

From the data in Table 4, it shows that the participants have mostly three reasons for reading. They are reading for gaining information, reading for academic purposes, and reading for pleasure. The participants are asked to explain their reasons in detail. Most of the participants mention more than one reason. Student 1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 16, and 17 argue that reading is for gaining information. They need reading to enrich their knowledge and acquire new information in the several fields of study. This is encouraging to note that many respondents want to educate themselves by reading. Thus, they are not only read the materials which relate to the academic background but also try to find out other new knowledge for supporting their academic and personal life. Student 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, and 19 argue that reason for reading is for academic purposes. It is to develop comprehension in some particular subjects and do some assignments. Reading academic books enables them to do their schoolwork and to obtain grades.

In a similar line, such purposes are relevant in their daily lives as students who are required to read in college as parts of lessons or to prepare for the exam. This finding has confirmed the observation by Harmer (2004) as cited in Johari et al. (2013) that reading for the utilitarian or instrumental purpose is viewed as the main reason on why people actually read. Students 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 13, 14, 15, 17, 19, and 20 argue that the reason for reading is for pleasure. Most of them read for enjoyment. They tend to choose the topic which they are interested in to entertain them. It is also called as ‘reading as a hobby’. It is probably due to the existence of other fun or interesting activities.

In line with the reasons for reading, the participants are asked to answer the question about, “According to you, what is the benefit of reading?” There are some benefits explained by the participants. Some of the benefits are mentioned in the different ways, but it is the same in concept. They are gaining knowledge, enjoyment, improving English skill, and developing language fluency. The participants explain that by reading a lot, they can gain knowledge for their academic purposes in doing assignments and also conducting research. Reading is an enjoyable activity for them, especially storybooks such as a novel or other kinds of fictions they can be more imaginative. Reading for

pleasure also kills the boredom; they will not feel stressed when reading particular reading materials such as novels or others which can make them feel relaxed and entertained. The prominent aspects that occur in the benefits of reading are reading a lot can develop English skills and language fluency.

One of the participants explains in very detail description of the benefits he gains from reading a lot. He feels more sensitive to catch communicative meanings from the text he reads although sometimes he loses some lexical meanings of few words in the text due to the limited vocabularies. Moreover, he can still guess and predict to find his own convenient meaning from those words. He also explains that it improves his natural sensitivity toward grammar because the more he reads, the more he psychologically deals with the challenging grammar. Reading naturally improves grammar ability even in higher level ones like grammars in TOEFL. Reading also provides opportunities to improve vocabularies. Uniquely, it can lead to deal with comprehending words functionally and contextually with other parts which commonly preceded or follow those words. By reading, the readers can more understand contextual collocation. Reading also improves the ability to write a lot because reading can lead to understand about the organization, the ideas of writing and naturally gets the same sense as the reflection from reading. It also can help to be more creative and gives many chances to be critical thinking and have lots of supporting ideas to talk.

The next question asked of the participants is, "Do you think that reading habit will affect to your academic achievement? Please explain it." 90% of the participants definitely agree that reading habit and those two aspects have the strong correlation. Reading habit can give a chance to learn more in deep the collegial subjects. Sometimes with reading can gain some inspiration to read a subject in more detail than learning topics furnished by the lecturers in the syllabus, especially when there is an interesting in the particular subject. In addition, 75% of the participants also stated that, by reading regularly, they could get a lot of input in mind. It is proven when doing assignments, the students have a good reading habit will efficiently to deal with many kinds of assignment, and it will help them acquire a good achievement in the academic. Nonetheless, there is a participant who states that reading habit sometimes cannot give many benefits for the academic achievement because sometimes what she has read does not have any correlation with the particular academic purposes. Moreover, she emphasizes that reading can help her in building language skills.

Language fluency becomes one of the prominent issues dealing with extensive reading practices. Day and Bamford (1998) have stated that extensive reading is also good for learning a second or foreign language. Extensive reading works with both young and older learners of English in both ESL and EFL settings. Many of the research report a large gain in reading and other aspects of language proficiency. The results are also claimed by Krashen (1997) who has stated that the longer the length of the reading program, the bigger and more robust the impact of extensive reading is.

The last question asked to the participants is, "Do you think that reading habit will affect to your language fluency? Please explain it." 90% of the participants strongly agree that extensive reading practices can develop their language fluency. The reasons are various. Some of them

have stated that by reading, they can learn the words, sentences, collocations, and also the culture. Thus, it can develop their language fluency as a learner. Another reason is the more they read, the more they can get natural or contextual uses of phrases or vocabularies, and more direct effect on the language fluency in speaking, reading, and writing. It is mentioned by some participants that for reaching a higher level of linguistics ability along with maintaining and improving the fluency, reading is the best natural input. Other participants state that they have to use background knowledge such as linguistics and non-linguistics knowledge, thus automatically the skill will also enhance. However, not all of the participants agree that reading can develop language fluency. He states that to develop it, people have to practice it by speaking. However, he agrees that in order to be able to speak fluently, people have to read a lot to enrich vocabularies, collocations, and others that can support in speaking skill.

CONCLUSIONS

This research reveals that 90% of the respondents have experience in implementing extensive reading and have strong beliefs regarding its effects on language development. The findings of the research reveal that postgraduate students who practice extensive reading mostly have a good score on TOEFL test for the academic purposes. It ranges from 470 – 587. They also have various types of reading materials, and the number of books read in a month. Mostly read 2 – 10 books a month. This research also explains several reasons why they love reading, and the benefits come up after doing the extensive reading practices.

12 out of 20 participants (60%) tend to read some enjoyable reading materials. They choose to read novel, comic, magazine, newspaper, and other kinds of reading materials with some particularly interesting topics which are easy to understand and make them enjoyable while reading. Another principle of extensive reading which is fulfilled by the students is that they read a number of books in a month, even though there are still three participants (15%) who read only one book in a month, but at least they read, and it can help them to develop their language fluency or gain information. It is in line with Carrell and Carson who state that extensive reading generally involves the rapid reading of large quantities of material or longer readings (e.g., whole books) for general understanding, with the focus generally on the meaning of what is being read than on the language.

Other interesting findings are the reason why they read, and the benefits occur which come after that. The result shows that they read for gaining information, reading for academic purposes, and reading for pleasure. Furthermore, the participants mention some of the benefits in the different ways, but it is the same in concept. They are gaining knowledge, enjoyment, improving English skill, and developing language fluency. The development of language fluency becomes a prominent issue for EFL. They try to utilize many ways to develop it. Extensive reading practice is one of the activities which recently implemented by the EFL. Extensive reading works with both young and older learners of English in both ESL and EFL settings.

On a final note, 75% of the participants state that sometimes they do not have adequate time to read several kinds of enjoyable reading materials that they like due to the full schedule of classes and assignments. Most of the time they spend to read the course books or other academic

materials to support their knowledge and achievement during the study. This research also suggests another researcher to conduct wider research due to the limited time and participants. However, it is expected that another relevant research will be conducted in the school which has already implemented the extensive reading program with adequate resources

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