



Extensive Reading: A Pilot Project to Change Students' Perception of Reading

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This study aimed to investigate the effects of an Extensive Reading course on English Education Study Program students in a university in Bandar Lampung, Indonesia. Extensive Reading was set as a compulsory subject for the fifth semester. The aim of this course was to create an English-learning environment in which students are highly motivated to read, especially reading English texts. The program learning objectives are to improve the students' reading fluency, to enable them to read critically, and to change their perception of reading. Two classes participated in this study. Data were collected from weekly reading logs, students' book reports, and student questionnaires. The reading material was taken from students' preferences since they were given the chance to choose some books provided by the librarians. The result after conducting an eight-week Extensive Reading course was the students' reading fluency improved, they were able to read critically, and their perception on reading had changed.

Reading is one of the basic language skills that university students have to master and frequent reading is one of the best ways to attain this skill. However, for various reasons, reading can be challenging or even demotivating if learners do not know what to read, how to read, or why they read. Research shows that Extensive Reading (ER) is highly beneficial for overcoming students' reluctance and motivating them to read (Day & Bamford, 1998). Motivation is necessary because it is one of the main factors that lead to a successful language learning process. Nation (2009) states that the use of ER has been confirmed by some research as useful in boosting students' reading motivation. By reading extensively, they can increase their

general understanding about the content, enrich their knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, and develop a positive attitude towards reading.

This study aimed to investigate the effects of Extensive Reading in an English Education Study Program (EESP) in a state university in Bandar Lampung, Indonesia. Extensive Reading was set as a compulsory subject for the fifth semester, i.e. the first semester of the third year. In the first four semesters, students took a required general English course in the first two semesters, followed by a Reading for General Purposes (RGP) course in semester three, and Reading for Academic Purposes (RAP) in semester four, both of which take an Intensive reading approach.

RGP covers some basic reading skills for reading texts of various topics, e.g., scanning, previewing and predicting, finding topics and main ideas, skimming,

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making inferences, and summarizing. Practice using the skills is explored in the exercises that follow the texts. This course also encourages students to develop their own reading habits by asking them to choose their favorite reading material and share them with the rest of the class. Meanwhile RAP covers comprehension of academic texts such as essays, opinion papers, journal articles, and reviews. The students are expected to become familiar with reading strategies that include summarizing, paraphrasing and synthesizing, and to apply those strategies in their reading. Finally, in the ER course in this university, students are expected to be more independent readers. They are responsible for choosing their own books. In ER, the aim of the course is to create an English-learning environment in which students are highly motivated to read, especially reading English texts. One objective of Extensive Reading is reading for pleasure. This builds confidence and motivation which makes the learner a more effective user of language.

Background to the Project

Of the seven classes in semester five of the 2016/2017 academic year, two classes participated in this pilot study. The other five classes were taught only by lectures and students were asked to do weekly presentations discussing chapters in Day and Bamford's *Extensive Reading in the Second Language Classroom* (1998). In their discussions, students talked about the theories in the book without applying them in real life. For example, the students were not asked to read the books in the library nor were they given assignments to read a number of books or for a specific length of time. The reason for adopting this lecture approach to learning about ER rather than actual practice of doing ER was due to the insufficiency of English book collections and the unavailability of a library that can

facilitate the students in doing their extensive reading. In the 16-week semester, only eight weeks were permitted for conducting this project, since the head of department was concerned that doing Extensive Reading activities would affect the students' routines in the class.

The ER Pilot Project

The project was called a Pilot Project because this was a new project that aimed to renew the syllabus and to test whether using a new approach could lead to different results at the end of the semester. The two classes would be taught by giving lectures and asking the students to do weekly presentations, in the same way as the other ER classes, but they would also be assigned some activities that were adapted from Bamford and Day's *Extensive Reading Activities for Teaching Language* (2004) in the class. In addition, the learners were assigned to write a weekly reading log and book report, which they were asked to submit every weekend. As a result, mostly students read three or four graded books (level one and two) in a week, even though there were some students who were still reluctant to read more and only able to finish one book weekly.

An open-ended questionnaire was filled out by 210 students of the fifth semester in EESP. The authors tried to understand the students' problems by interviewing them. However, since the time was limited to ask them individually, the oral interview process was disregarded in favor of an open-ended questionnaire. It saved time and the participants did not feel intimidated when it came to answer the questions. It was administered in the first meeting before any learning activities started and prior to the lecturer's explanation or students' discussion time about ER. This was done so to avoid the lecturer's influence on the

students' response. The questions related to whether they had a reading habit or not, genre of books that they usually read, and the frequency of reading. The same questionnaire was also administered in the last meeting to all those who participated in this project. Questions about the students' reading habits determined how long they spent reading in English each week. The authors gained information about the kinds of materials read and the preferences of genres. This information will be useful when preparing the next project.

There was a huge difference between the pre and post project for the time spent reading in a week. Before participating in ER classes, 88% spent no time reading, either in Indonesian (*Bahasa Indonesia*) or English, 4% read for between one and two hours per week, and the remaining 8% read for more than two hours a week. In addition, this was not reading for pleasure, but for finishing assignments. While participating in this project, students were required to read minimally for 2 hours per week, therefore, the amount of students who read for between one and two hours per week increased rapidly to 25%. Those who read for more than two hours a week began rising, but more moderately, up to 10%.

Some changes were found in the data from pre to post about student preference in reading English materials. Before taking part in this project, they read only comics and short stories, but by the end of the project their preferences went widely into novels, newspapers, magazines, non-fiction, and academic journals. This happened because the author did not limit the genre of their reading. They were allowed to read the books that the librarian provided or they could find the books from other sources, such as online reading sites for academic

journals. They wrote they read them simply because they took an Academic Writing class and Research Methodology class in that semester. In the questionnaires, there was a list of 10 genres provided along with a place for an open answer. There was an increase in the number of students who chose some genres. Romance, comedy, adventure, and mystery were the most popular among them. This showed that they were reading new types of books.

Why students do not read a lot in English was also asked in those questionnaires. Sixty percent answered that they had "no time". Ten percent argued that a lack of materials was a reason for not reading in English while 20% said it was too difficult to read in English. It was unexpected that they answered "difficult" since they were in the English Education Department, not to mention they were in the fifth semester at that time. The remaining 10% stated that they had no interest in reading at all. The amount of ER students who answered "no time" and "lack of materials" remained constant. Those who gave "no interest" as their response increased to 25%. This was because they still could not find materials suited to their interests during eight weeks. In contrast, the percentage answering "too difficult" fell to only 5%. This indicates that ER has a positive influence on individual students' confidence in reading English materials and improving reading ability.

The last part of the questionnaires dealt with the students' perception. All students responded "yes" on both pre and post questionnaires toward the question, "Do you think that reading in English will help you to improve your English ability?" The second question, "Do you think your attitude towards reading has changed as a result of this ER project?" was only provided in the post questionnaires. 100%

of students responded “yes” to the last question. To sum up, it seems everyone had a positive perception towards reading after joining this pilot project.

It was clear that this pilot project had a good impact on students’ perception of reading. An interesting finding was the students’ perception of which language skills they thought would improve compared with how they felt they actually did improve during the program. Before joining the program, 40% predicted an improvement in vocabulary knowledge. After the program ended, the percentage rose sharply to 80%. Previously, 30% anticipated increased reading speed as a result, and this grew to 50%. While 60% thought their reading comprehension would increase before joining this project, after doing ER, 90% thought they had improved dramatically in this area. Finally, 30% wrote it felt like they got a bonus when they understood the content of the English materials, which enabled them to do critical reading.

Conclusion

There was no doubt that those who joined this ER pilot project found that they no longer viewed reading as difficult. In addition, they now had a purpose to read. They also shared the belief that reading could be fun if they knew what to read, how to read, and why they read. To sum up, this study was intended to identify students’ perception of reading. Data were collected from weekly reading logs, students’ book reports, and student questionnaires. The

reading material was taken from students’ preferences. The result after conducting an eight-week Extensive Reading course was the students’ perception about reading had changed: they felt their reading fluency had improved and they were able to read critically

As a suggestion for future study, following the response to the pilot project, I will recommend that the EESP in UIN Raden Intan Lampung could make this program into a 16-week rather than “only” an eight-week Extensive Reading course. Moreover for other lecturers whose subject is not English reading, the implementation of this study can be used as an alternative activity during English classes, or in different subjects. Finally, hopefully the results of this study give some insight to anyone who is interested in implementing ER in their own class.

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