Implementing Extensive Reading through Xreading.com for Mongolian EFL Learners

Nandintsesteg Shurentsetseg and Ariunaa Nyamsuren

Mandakh University

As technology is developing rapidly, students are increasingly eager to use its advantages in EFL classrooms. Based on their interests and needs, EFL teachers use modern educational technology such as Xreading.com in their teaching. This paper illustrates the ER program implemented using Xreading.com at Mandakh University, a private business university in Mongolia. Within a two-year period, the program has been adapted with 1 and 6-month cycles involving 45 students based on individual reading engagement. Moreover, the program aimed to expose the changes in their attitude toward reading in English extensively, and to improve their reading skills. As a result, the ER program has reached its most important expectation to build up reading skills in English for the students. Moreover, the teachers found that the ER in English should be implemented in the university English classrooms such as General English, ESP, and Business English courses, with properly established foreign language education systems, including the assessment scheme.

Today extensive reading is considered one of the effective reading pedagogies for English as a foreign language (Yoshida, 2018) and ER programs have been successfully implemented in many countries in Asia, including Mongolia. Moreover, new technology can be used in completely different spheres of educational subjects, even in foreign language teaching and learning, creating the most advanced, accessible and popular resources. As technological development finds uses in practical life, many teachers find it as a strong pedagogical tool to motivate their students and the entire society. Contemporary experiences such as using an e-library bring new opportunities in English learning and teaching.

Since digital technologies are so appealing to today's youth, research seems to support the value of e-readers as a factor in motivating young readers to read more (Maynard, 2010). Otherwise, the modern reading experience could be more convenient, efficient and attractive (Cote & Milliner, 2015) in accordance with the mobile devices while supporting the key principles of extensive reading "love for reading" and "read as much as possible" (Day & Bamford, 1998). For this reason, the former paper book reading has been extended to reading digital and electronic versions. In other words, the current situation can bring a new opportunity for developing English language acquisition skills into the tertiary education system through extensive reading in English besides the formerly well-established in-class intensive reading.

The balanced use of intensive and extensive reading in English classrooms can result in better language acquisition, wider exchange of information and more drilled communication skills in English. The Kindle e-book reader introduced by Amazon in 2007 launched a new concept of digital reading using a variety of e-reader devices and e-books for extensive reading. A number of ER studies have shown that it has been used and advocated in language learning since the 20th century. However, extensive reading in English is a completely new approach for Mongolian learners. Until recently, reading was implemented as intensive reading, i.e., slow, careful reading of a small amount of difficult texts in classrooms. There are various reasons why ER was not launched until recently in Mongolian EFL programs. Purchasing paper books was too expensive compared to other countries. In Ulaanbaatar, the capital city of Mongolia, an average literature book is approximately $6-8 which means we have a lack of paper books and graded readers.

Since 2016, Xreading.com, a digital library of graded readers, has been introduced to English teachers of Mongolia as an effective approach for promoting out-of-class reading activity, bringing an alternative version for changing traditional reading activities. Subsequently, ER has begun its new path through Xreading VL (Soyoljin & Amarjargal, 2019). As Renandya (2007) notes "The benefits derived from diverse studies on extensive reading in many diverse contexts are so compelling that it would be inconceivable for teachers not to make it an important feature of their teaching." Many language teachers are currently conducting ER programs to investigate not only their students or learners but also in the education systems of their nations. Even Mongolia is considered as one of the developing nations in the world, it is known for its instant and successful introduction of diverse modern technologies.

According to a survey conducted by Napoleoncat.com, the number of Facebook users in Mongolia increased rapidly between
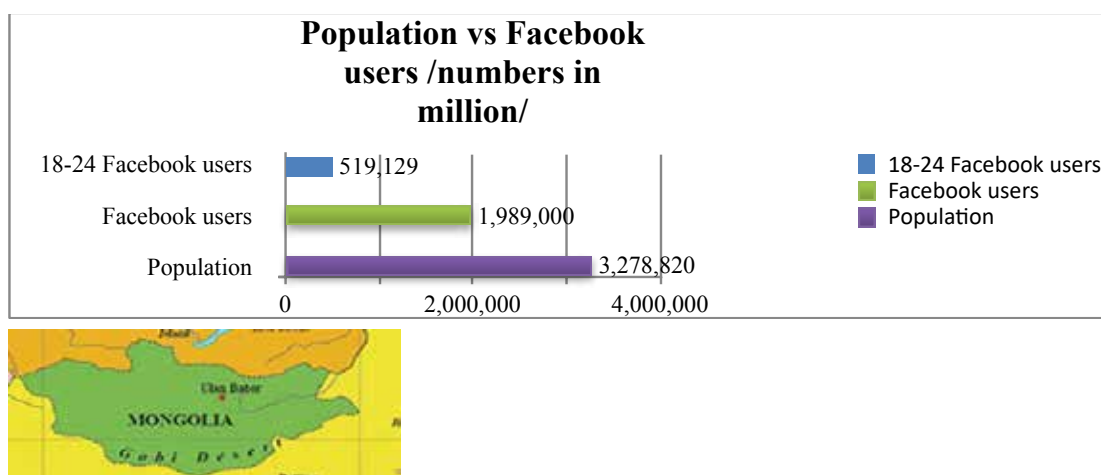

Figure 1 Comparison of Mongolian Population and Facebook Users /source:NapoleonCat.com/

2018-2019, reaching 62,1% of its population (Napoleoncat, n.d.). The second-largest user group falls to the 18-24 aged youth group. This means that almost all of the students of tertiary and vocational education, whose age spectrum belongs to the above-mentioned group, are persistent and regular users of the Internet and modern technology (Figure 1). For this reason, using an e-library as one of the main tools for ER has become a effective and up-to-date pedagogical experiment in a university English program. It can increase students' motivation for using technological advances in their EFL learning. Based on their interests and needs, language educators decided to employ this modern educational technology, Xreading.com, in their teaching as it has a learning management system (LMS), or monitoring system, to measure learners' progress, digital and audio reading materials of a variety of choices and different levels (Xreading, n.d.). Thus, the extensive reading program aimed to disclose attitude and motivation towards reading in English extensively and to improve the reading skills of the students. It was implemented at Mandakh University, a private university in Mongolia, involving freshmen, sophomore and junior students majoring generally in accounting. After two years of implementation, the program has been adapted with 3- and 6-month reading cycles involving students based on student-centered learning principles providing individual involvement that is appropriate for their context.

Research Questions

The study was conducted to investigate the following research questions:

1. How has the attitude towards reading in English changed among the students (before and after entering the university)?

2. What kind of improvement has occurred in reading skills as a result of the ER program?

Expected Results

The study was expected to find positive changes in students' attitudes towards reading in English. Also, it anticipated reading speed increases, reading level upgrades, and an improvement of understanding of books.

Research Method

Data was collected using a pre-pilot questionnaire involving 121 learners ranging from first-year to third-year students at Mandakh University in Mongolia. Secondly, a pedagogical observation based on action research principles with 45 students who had taken part in the extensive reading program for three cycles and completed two different placement tests, including Xreading's and the Cambridge English Placement test (Cambridge English Assessment, n.d.). The research was conducted over two years from January 2017 through three cycles lasting from one to six months of virtual library reading using Xreading.com. The collected data was processed under quantitative analysis.

Procedures

The extensive reading program had several stages of implementation. First, extensive reading guidelines and program, its goal, advantages, expected outcomes, principles, and the user manual of Xreading.com was introduced to the students. The second stage consisted of students' acceptance in the program, training them how to

use Xreading.com, and engaging them in virtual extensive reading. Then, the questionnaire survey and observation were run to reveal their attitude, motivation, and changes towards reading in English. The next stage of the research involved data processing and analysis to reveal changes and progress regarding the research questions. Finally, the data and outcomes of the research were brought into a paper and presented at the 5th World Congress on Extensive Reading.

Outcomes

According to our findings, 64 students or 53% out of all 121 attendants, are active internet users. They spend four or five hours a day online, particularly to enjoy watching Facebook. As teachers, we feel the most crucial thing we can do is keep our students motivated not only in the classroom but also outside of it based on their internet usage. Therefore, it is essential to provide students an opportunity to stimulate and learn English with a smartphone, not just with a traditional textbook.

At the beginning of the program, we conducted a pre-study survey to understand students' attitudes toward reading in English before studying at the university. The resulting data of the questionnaire is discussed here.

Only 28% of all participants had English reading experiences before university, however, the books they read were mostly English textbooks or other books including dictionaries, grammar books recommended in secondary school. It means that school English programs do not include extensive reading materials, moreover, teachers limit reading in English to selections of books given in the textbooks. Then, 72% of the students had not taken care of

reading in English before coming to university. It means that English was not very important for the students in secondary school. They mostly worked with other subjects rather than English as only 28% of them had reading experience in English.

A more fascinating situation was revealed from the second question, which tried to clarify the types of reading materials read by the students in English during their secondary education. The statistics show that the most preferred or recommended reading material in English at school was textbook texts or selections as almost 70% of the respondents claimed. The grammars (14%) and fables or folktales (17%) made up the remainder of reading materials. It means that most school teachers preferred to follow or fulfill the English program with textbook materials, rather than involving students in extensive reading, or introducing other materials for various problems such as large classes (classes usually have 30-50 students in a class), too much workload, fixed English curriculum, or just because of not being interested in bringing more workload to their daily teaching job. This situation reflects students' habits of reading in English, particularly reading extensively. On the other hand, the reading habit might not be formed because of the lack of support from the school library, which usually does not have a variety of English books. Also, the lack of publishers who print books in English locally can also have an impact on English language learning and teaching for the whole education system.

Furthermore, the answers of students who read grammar textbooks and fables can bring the awareness of the readers with graded readers. It shows that only 17% of the students had encounters with graded books or readers, even many of them did

Table 1: A Comparison of Three Cycles

	Cycle 1 (1 month)	Cycle 2 (4 months)	Cycle 3 (6 months)
Reading level	2.5	4.1	3.6
Quiz average	56.5	81.7	70
Reading speed	104.3	69.8	62
Book average	8.6	18	19.3
Total readers	10	12	23

not recognize or were explained about the types of reading material. So, the situation revealed by the first two questions clarify that most students do not have a proper reading habit in ER through their school English program. The next question sought to clarify the difficulties faced during their reading in English. According to the responses, a lack of graded readers and poor language skills were highly influential factors leading students not to read extensively. It is related to the government policy to teach Russian in schools until 1990 and it was a widely spoken second language. After the ER program, 45 students have read 7459 books in total. It means each student read 16.5 books on average. It may be considered as an insufficient figure during the whole implementation period. According to the Extensive Reading Foundation Guide (Extensive Reading Foundation, n.d.), it is suggested that students read one book per week. However, according to the authors' observation, students' attitudes regarding reading extensively in English has completely changed compared to the students' attitude before university. They found reading in English can be a quite fun, beneficial activity to improve their language skills. The features of Xreading which they were particularly attracted to include the possibilities to read everywhere and anytime using their cellphones, and not experiencing any difficulties to carry paper books.

Table 2: Pre and Post Reading Results

Assessment Test	Xreading.com (L3 - 315 words)		Cambridge English Placement Test	
	WPM	Quiz avg	Vocabulary, Grammar (25)	Average
Pre Reading	79.0	87%	8.25	11.5 (KET)
Post Reading	86	89.1	23	20.5 (PET)

Table 1 shows the main reading process over the whole implementation period with some expected outcomes that we would like to highlight here. Students were encouraged to read at levels lower than their actual level so that they would be more motivated to discover their reading interests. The most significant outcome is the number of students interested in ER in English has risen steadily, proven by payments which is considered one of the main difficulties we have encountered during the time. Now they pay the subscription fees at their own expense. The increasing average for quiz scores indicates that students are understanding the books more. To sum up, the authors' main expectation to expose students to digital ER with Xreading has reached its main goal. Another objective of this study was to establish whether there was any reading progress. To obtain the anticipated data, students were evaluated in two different ways: the same book and Cambridge English Placement Test. At the beginning of the second cycle, all 45 readers were asked to read the same Xreading book called *Meet the Mummy* and they repeated the same activity at the end of the third cycle. The final result had some signs of progress: their reading speed increased by 7% and quiz average by 2.1% which means students' reading skills may have improved slightly.

On the Cambridge English Placement Test (CEPT), ER participants could achieve an increase from Key English Test (KET) to Preliminary English test (PET) scores after ten months. The main concern we have recognized is that the ER program will be more valuable and beneficial if it can last for a longer period of time to help develop fluent readers. Moreover, promoting ER in English at the tertiary level is more worthwhile to correlate with General English, ESP, and Business English courses including the assessment scheme.

Conclusion

To summarize, the students' attitude toward reading extensively has changed positively according to the pre-pilot survey as 68% of all attendants do not have any experience regarding reading graded readers in English before university, a lack of resources and poor language skills are highly influential factors leading them not to read extensively. After the ER program, the number of students reading in English through Xreading.com has risen steadily and it can be proven by subscription payments which means they now willingly pay at their own expense. The most significant outcomes are the reading process of all participants attending the ER program has brought progressive changes including reading level, the number of students attended in the ER program, quiz average based on the pre and post reading results. Finally, the aim of the study has reached its most important expectation not only to change their attitude about reading in English extensively but also to build up reading skills for the students.

References

Cambridge English Assessment. (n.d.). https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/

Cote, T., & Milliner, B. (2015). Implementing and managing online extensive reading: Student performance and perceptions. *IALLT, Journal of Language Learning Technologies, 45*(1), 70-90. https://doi.org/10.17161/iallt.v45i1.8550

Day, R. R., & Bamford, J. (1998). *Extensive reading in the second language classroom*.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Extensive Reading Foundation. (n.d.). *Guide to extensive reading*. Retrieved from https://erfoundation.org/wordpress/guides/

Maynard, S. (2010). The impact of e-books on young children's reading habits. *Publishers Research Quarterly, 26*(4), 236-248. doi: 10.1007/s12109-010-9180-5

Napoleoncat. (n.d.). https://napoleoncat.com/stats/facebook-users-in-mongolia/2019/06

Renandya, W. A. (2007). The power of extensive reading. *RELC 38*(2), 133-149. https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688207079578

Soyoljin, S., Amarjargal, Z. (2019). Extensive reading in university: Experiment and methodology. *Proceeding of the conference "Open Education 2019".* (pp.

57-64). Ulaanbaatar. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NGvZqcjNcFGDoGUCKsDGAsVEVQbMeD1b/view.

Xreading. (n.d.). https://xreading.com/

Yoshida, M. (2018). Are individual attention and modeling more effective than whipping? In M. Brierley, and T. E. Bieri (Eds.),. *Proceedings of the Fourth Extensive Reading World Congress* (pp. 23-32). Tokyo, Japan: Extensive Reading Foundation. http://jalt-publications.org/content/index.php/jer/article/view/123