



The Impacts of Extensive Reading on EFL Learners' Writing Performance and Motivation

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Vietnamese students tend to be less interested in learning to write than reading, speaking and listening as they consider it difficult and tiring. Though extensive reading (ER) is enjoying widespread popularity in EFL teaching and learning practices thanks to its proven benefits for learners, it remains quite a novel concept in Vietnam. This case study aimed at seeking out the effects of ER on an EFL learner's writing performance in the Vietnamese context. Also, this research was intended to ascertain the relationship between ER and the learners' motivation for writing. The participant of this case study had no contaminating English exposure except for the ER treatment during the experiment. Pre-test and post-tests, together with interviews, observation and the participant's reading record sheet, were deployed. The ESL Composition Profile by Jacobs et al. (1981) served as a tool to measure the writing tests.

Key words: Writing, Motivation, Extensive Reading, Vietnam

Under the heavy influence of the grammar-translation method, many Vietnamese students find the productive skills of speaking and writing extremely challenging. According to Tran (2001), Vietnamese students tend to be more interested in learning to speak, read and listen than write which is regarded as a burden due to the fact that writing always becomes homework after each writing lesson. It is a difficult task for Vietnamese teachers to motivate their students to write.

Extensive reading is increasingly gaining popularity as an effective means to boost the English proficiency of learners in the world. According to Waring and McLean (2015), extensive reading "requires the subjects to focus on developing sustained, fluent comprehension of large volumes of

text at the discourse and ideas level over an extended period of time". It is proven in numerous studies that extensive reading exerts beneficial impacts on learners' vocabulary, grammar, listening, reading, test scores, and motivation (Krashen, 2004; Day & Bamford, 1998). Also, the positive correlation between extensive reading and better writing skills has been advocated by a number of scholars such as Applebee, Langer, & Mullis, 1986; Lee, 1995, 2001, 2005; Lee & Krashen, 1996, 2002; Gradman & Hanania, 1991; Janopoulos, 1986; Kaplan & Palhinda, 1981; Mason, 2004.

Despite the aforementioned advantages, little or no attention is devoted to extensive reading in Vietnam. (Le, 2005) There has also been limited research on this topic in the Vietnamese context so far especially on the relationship between ER and writing. For this reason, this study was intended to explore the impact of extensive reading on Vietnamese students' writing skills.

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Purpose and Significance of the study

Notwithstanding the benefits of extensive reading being shown globally, it has not assumed its worthy significance in EFL teaching and learning in Vietnam. Insubstantial empirical evidence on the efficacy of extensive reading has been found in this context. This research was conducted to answer the following research questions:

1. Does extensive reading impact the participant's writing performance?
2. Can extensive reading motivate the participant to write?

Literature Review

Extensive Reading and Writing

Several studies have been conducted to identify the relationship between ER and writing performance. Lee (2005) investigated elements that were considered to promote or impede writing, and recognized ER as a significant predictor for improved writing performance. Six studies (Hafiz & Tudor, 1989, 1990; Lai, 1993; Lee & Hsu, 2009; Tsan, 1996; Mermelstein, 2015) examined the effects of ER programs on the writing abilities of ESL learners of similar educational backgrounds. All these studies deployed descriptive writing as a method of evaluation of the participant's writing ability. The duration of the treatment ranged from four to thirty weeks. They all reported similar positive impacts of ER on the subjects' writing performances. However, none of these studies could single out the ER treatment for examination. The researchers could not control the subjects' learning environment to make sure that ER was the only factor that gave rise to the positive improvements in the subjects' writing abilities. Numerous studies have been made to investigate the effects of extensive reading on the students'

writing skills. However, contaminating additional exposure to English of these participants was often an uncontrolled variable meaning, other factors might have led to their results rather than extensive reading. In this case study, the participant only had exposure to English through extensive reading, so extensive reading was singled out for examination. Besides, this study was planned to present a detailed account of individual experience which has been in absence in other research targeting groups of learners.

Methodology

Participant

The participant was a 29-year-old learner of English whose pseudonym was Elise. Her mother tongue is Vietnamese. She had had 10 years learning English and stopped it seven years before the experiment. She mainly experienced the grammar-translation method of learning during her years of learning English. There had been little to no training of her writing and speaking. Her TOEIC score was 650 (390 Reading) and she also got IELTS 6.0 Reading (CEFR B2). At work, she did not have to use English to communicate, except for filling brief messages into some ready-made forms. During the experiment, she did not attend any English training courses or learn or use English except for the prescribed ER input.

Instruments

A writing pre-test was used to measure the participant's writing ability before she started the ER treatment. The writing was marked using the ESL Composition Profile by Jacobs et al. (1981). No comment or feedback was given. The writing pre-test was followed by a semi-structured interview in Vietnamese to learn about the participant's difficulties in writing and her

motivation to write. During the ER treatment, the participant kept a reading record sheet where she noted what graded readers she read, when she read them, and what her ratings of how she liked the books were. Also, two observations were made to collect data about the participant's reading behaviors and feelings. The researcher sat with her and read another book, silently observed and took notes of her reading behaviors and feelings. After a 14-week ER treatment, a writing post-test was given to measure the participant's writing ability to see if she made any improvements. The second interview was also delivered after the post-test to get her opinions about ER, challenges when writing, and her motivation for writing.

Procedures

As the participant had not had any training in writing skills previously, a short writing course (about 10 hours) was delivered to support her prior to the ER treatment. She was taught about sentence types, typical sentence level errors Vietnamese often make, and paragraph writing by the researcher. After the training, she was given a one-hour writing pre-test which required her to write a composition to describe one of her past holidays. Immediately after the test, a semi-structured interview was conducted. Firstly, she was asked about her feelings about writing, then other questions were given based on her responses. Before the ER treatment, the participant was instructed about ER and how to choose her graded readers. Then, she chose the books she wanted to read which were at B1 or B2 levels. During the ER treatment, she agreed to keep track her reading by noting down the titles of the books she read, the dates and time of reading, the number of pages and her ratings of how she liked the books on a Google Form. Two observations were conducted in Week 3 and Week 13. The purpose of the observations was to assess

the participant's reading behavior. After 14 weeks, a one-hour writing post-test was administered. The participant was required to describe a future holiday she expected to have. The topic was very similar to the one in the writing pre-test. Another semi-structured interview was carried out to collect information about the participant's difficulties in writing and her motivation in writing. Both writing samples are in the appendix.

Results and Discussion

During the 14 weeks from April 26 to July 23, the participant spent about 2,500 minutes reading 16 graded readers. The total number of pages was 828 and the total number of words was 183,790. She read for 30 minutes almost every day and read more at the weekend.

Research Question 1: Does ER impact the participant's writing performance?

The ESL Composition Profile by Jacobs et al. (1981) was deployed to evaluate the participant's writings. Originally, five elements are considered in the profile: content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics. There are four levels in each element: very poor, fair to poor, good to average and excellent to very good. The two writings were marked by a native English teacher and the researcher. Both raters worked independently then finalized the scores if there were differences. In the writing pre-test, about one of her past holidays, her writing only contained two parts: the introduction and the body. In the introduction, she introduced the time, her companion and the general atmosphere. Then she continued to elaborate the activities in each day in the body, including the details about where to go, what to eat, what to do, what to see, how the people were like and how she felt. By comparison, in her writing post-test about a future holiday she expects to

have, there were three parts: introduction, body and conclusion. In the introduction, she gave some general comments about her ideal holiday and answered the question directly. In the body, there was one paragraph giving information about where the place is, what it is like, what she can eat, what the weather here is like and what she can do there. In conclusion, she included her final thoughts about her ideal holiday.

It can be seen from her writings that both of them presented some knowledge of the subject with relevant ideas but there was a lack of details. The writing pre-test, which contained more details, seemed a bit better in terms of content (scored at 24) than the writing post-test (scored at 23). Regarding the organization, the writing post-test was given a better score (16) than the writing pre-test (14) as she could organize her writing into three paragraphs: introduction, body and conclusion. Concerning vocabulary, even though there was not much significant improvement after the ER treatment, the use of vocabulary in the writing post-test (scored at 15) was more varied. She could add more adjectives to modify the nouns in her writing (such as well-known place, ancient houses, special foods) and made it more descriptive. In her writing pre-test (scored at 14), she could hardly use them. Despite a slight improvement in vocabulary use, there was no change in the use of grammar (language use). Both writings were given 18 for language use as they both contained effective but simple constructions. There were some minor problems in complex constructions such as relative clauses together with several errors in articles and pronouns. These mistakes did not obscure her meaning. The mechanics in both writings were given band 4 as they contained occasional errors of spelling, punctuation and capitalization (e.g. recently, breath deeply). However, they did not obscure the meaning of the

expressions. The total score for the writing pre-test was 74 and that for the post-test was 76. Although the ESL Composition Profile does not mention fluency, it was taken into consideration. It took the participant 54 minutes to finish the writing pre-test which contained 260 words. The writing post-test had fewer words (245 words) but it took the participant longer to write (60 minutes).

Based on the two writing tests, it can be concluded that after 2500 minutes (approximately 47 hours) of doing ER (183,790 words) in 14 weeks, there was a slight improvement in the participant's writing skills in terms of organization and vocabulary.

Research Question 2: Can extensive reading motivate the participant to write?

In order to investigate the participant's motivation to write, the data collected from the two interviews were analyzed.

Before the ER treatment, the participant confessed that "I don't like writing in both English and Vietnamese. When I was a high school student, I couldn't study Literature well because I often couldn't think of anything to write. And the same thing happens when I write in English [...] I don't have any motivation to write and I'm not confident about it at all [...] I don't care about it." However, after the ER treatment, her feelings about writing became more positive. "I feel more positive with writing now, maybe 30% (laugh) [...] I pay more attention to the writings of others, know more about how to write and sometimes want to try writing something in English." It can be said that ER motivated her to learn from the writings of other people and she could naturally acquire new ideas, expressions and organization. With improved knowledge of the language, she was more

confident to write and apply what she had learnt to produce her own writings.

Because the participant hardly needed to use English at work as she stated in the pre-test interview, "I only need to copy the forms available in the database at work and don't need to think of anything new to write or change them", she did not really have any motivation to learn English. However, after the ER treatment, she wanted to try to write something new in English at work. She also commented that even though she did not like some graded readers because the plots of the stories have been edited to make them easier for the readers, she would continue reading them as they would be useful for her English and her job.

Regarding expressions, which seemed to be one of the most significant hurdles for her in writing, she said in the pre-test interview that "I couldn't think of the expressions to describe the scenes in my writing [...] it's hard to write without a Collocations Dictionary." In the post-test interview, she was more able to select vocabulary than at the pre-test even though difficulties remained. She said she felt motivated to read more. Similarly, she had not known how to structure her writing before the ER treatment; however, reading and paying attention to the ways the writers organize their ideas helped her know how to organize her composition. The data from the interviews showed that ER can motivate the participant to write.

Conclusion

Limitations

As this is a case study, it would be unwise to make claims for statistical generalizations. However, a single-subject study allows us

to examine the effects of ER in an uncontaminated environment, which can hardly be done with a bigger population. Secondly, the experiment lasted for only 14 weeks and the participant did ER only for about 47 hours; therefore, the improvements she made was insignificant and incomprehensive and implies more ER is likely to lead to better gains. It would have been better if the study had lasted longer. The third limitation was caused by the method in which the writing pre-test and post-test were scored. They were evaluated at two separate times and the raters knew which paper was the pre-test and which one was the post-test. A blind rating system where the raters do not know which writing was the pre-test or post-test is recommended to overcome this limitation.

Improving the students' writing ability and motivating students to write has been a significant concern of EFL teachers, especially in the Vietnamese context where students are generally not interested in writing. Second language writing is a complicated skill, so teachers may need to deploy a range of techniques to help their students improve their writing skills over time. This case study is one example where, ER positively was reported to impact the subject's writing performance. By spending 2,500 minutes in 14 weeks reading 16 graded readers (183,790 words), the participant could slightly improve her writing skills in terms of organization and vocabulary. Due to doing ER, the participant was more motivated to read and write; she noticed the use of language and idea organization in other writings, which then facilitated her own development in writing. ER turned this ESL learner from completely being uninterested in writing to having a want of trying to write something on her own.

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Appendix

1. Writing Pre-test

Write a composition to describe one of your past holidays.

Three years ago, on the day of national holiday 30/4 and international labour day 1/5 I had a trip to Da Nang and Hoi An with my best friend, Hoai. We went to Da Nang by train. This was the first time Hoai had gone by train so she was excited. We saw many beautiful scenes and watched sunrise from the train. It took 16 hours to go to Da Nang from Ha Noi. Da Nang was not as crowd as Hanoi and cleaner than Hanoi.

The first day in DaNang, we walked around the city and enjoyed the foods such as "banh canh", "banh cuon thit heo", etc. The foods were delicious and cheap. We joined the international firework festival, which was organized in Da Nang annually on this holiday. This is the first time for both of us to watch it; it was awesome. The next day, we continued to discover DaNang. We went to Linh Ung temple by motorbike. There are many beautiful scenes across the road from the city to Linh Ung, which made us happy and we had many excellent pictures in there. The atmosphere was great; therefore we really enjoyed and felt relaxing. On the third day, we went to Hoi An by bus, where was 25 kilometers far from Da Nang. Hoi An was really peaceful and beautiful place. People in there were friendly and cute. Hoi An was the old city, which was

very famous in the world. There are many foreign tourisms in Hoi An. We had many great memories together.

Time: 54 minutes; Word count: 260

2. Writing Post-test

Write a composition to describe a future holiday you expect to have.

After having quite a lot of holidays, I realize the holiday, that I expect to have, is a composite of a good company, beautiful scenes, delicious foods and good weather. A visit to Hoi An with my best friend is the exactly holiday that has full of the above-mentioned elements.

Hoi An is an ancient town in the central of Vietnam. This is a well-known place in the world. In there, we will walk in small lanes, alleys in the early morning when ancient houses still close. We can breath deeply in clear atmosphere and absolutely enjoy the peace of the town. In the evening, the town is full of colorful "đèn lồng". It's very beautiful. The foods in Hoi An are very delicious. We will queue in line to buy "Phượng bread" in the early morning. We will eat special foods in Hoi An, such as, "cao lầu", "bánh canh", chicken rice "Bà Buội", etc. The weather in Hoi An is very good for us to ride bicycle to discover many places around the town. We will ride bicycle to visit Cua Dai beach, Thanh Tra village, and other places where help us to know more about cultural of Hoi An.

Hoi An is the place where we can live a slow motion life and enjoy every moments of the life. After hard working days recently, a holiday in Hoi An will be an occasion to help my feeling better and balance my life.

Time: 60 minutes; Word count: 245

3. Reading Record Sheet

Date	Starting Time	Ending Time	Books	Pages	Ratings
21-04-2019	9:55 pm	10:30 pm	The Speckled Band and Other Stories	pp.1-18	4/5
22-04-2019	9 pm	10 pm		pp. 18-45	
24-04-2019	9:10 pm	10:10 pm		pp. 46-64 (End)	
26-04-2019	9:30 pm	10:30 pm	The Life of a Geisha	Finished	3.5/5
27-04-2019	7 pm	8:20 pm	The Art of Making Silk	Finished	3.5/5
29-04-2019	7 pm	10:30 pm	Rabbit-proof Fence	Finished	3/5
30-04-2019	9am	11am	Capoeira: The Fighting Dance	Finished	3/5
	9am	10:10 pm	Bookworms Club Gold	pp. 1-14	4/5
	11:20 pm	11:50 pm		pp. 15-20	
03-05-2019	9:25 pm	9:50 pm		pp. 23-35	
05-05-2019	9:30 pm	10:10 pm		pp. 36-51	
07-05-2019	9:10 pm	10:45 pm		pp. 53-73	
08-05-2019	10:00 pm	10:45 pm		pp. 74-83	
13-05-2019	9:30 pm	10:15 pm	Crime Story Collection	pp. 1-9	3.5/5
14-05-2019	11:00 pm	11:15 pm		pp. 10-12	
15-05-2019	10:15 pm	11:00 pm		pp. 13-19	
19-05-2019	1 pm	11:30 pm	Slumdog Millionaire	Finished	4/5
20-05-2019	10:00 pm	10:30 pm	Stories of Courage	pp. 1-7	4/5
21-05-2019	10:25 pm	10:50 pm		pp. 8-13	
23-05-2019	10:30 pm	11:00 pm		pp. 14-19	
25-05-2019	5 pm	6:20 pm		Finished	
26-05-2019	10:00 pm	10:40 pm	Three Great Plays of Shakespeare	pp. 1-23	3/5
27-05-2019	10:20 pm	10:40 pm		pp. 24-29	
28-05-2019	10:00 pm	10:50 pm		pp. 30-35	
30-05-2019	10:30 pm	11:00 pm		pp. 36-42	
01-06-2019	10:00 pm	11:00 pm		pp. 43-Finished	
02-06-2019	10:30 pm	11:00 pm	The Breathing Method	pp. 1-8	3.5/5
04-06-2019	10:30 pm	11:00 pm		pp. 9-14	
05-06-2019	10:00 pm	10:35 pm		pp. 15-30	
06-06-2019	10:30 pm	11:00 pm		Finished	
08-06-2019	09:30 pm	10:15 pm	How's the Weather?	Finished	3/5
15-06-2019	09:00 pm	10:00 pm	Dancing with Strangers	pp. 1-20	3/5
	09:00 pm	10:20 pm		pp. 21-55 (Finished)	

16-06-2019	10:00 pm	10:30 pm	Oscar's Journey	pp. 1-16	3.5/5
17-06-2019	10:25 pm	11:00 pm		pp. 17-33	
18-06-2019	10:30 pm	11:00 pm		pp. 34-47	
22-06-2019	09:00 pm	10:15 pm		pp. 48-70	
23-06-2019	02:00 pm	02:35 pm		pp. 71-85	
28-06-2019	10:30 pm	11:10 pm		Finished	
29-06-2019	01:30 pm	02:10 pm	The Long Road to Lucca	pp. 1-14	4/5
	10:00 pm	10:30 pm		pp. 15-27	
03-07-2019	10:30 pm	11:10 pm		pp. 28-41	
04-07-2019	09:00 pm	09:40 pm		pp. 42-60	
06-07-2019	01:00 pm	1:45 pm		Finished	
22-07-2019	09:30 pm	10:00 pm		Danny Dark	
23-07-2019	01:00 pm	02:10 pm	pp. 16-51		