

University Students' Perceptions of Extensive Reading Intervention: Evidence from Universitas Hasanuddin Non-English Freshmen

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the findings drawn from a six-month survey on first-year students' perception of Extensive Reading intervention in a basic general English course program at *Hasanuddin* University. This survey study aimed to reveal the extent to which the samples agreed on some aspects of language learning's positive impacts from attending a reading intervention semester. Other aspects were also examined to the degree of improvement, such as students' beliefs about eclecticism, self-confidence, and social identity. Data were obtained from questionnaire surveys consisting of 7 close-ended statements and four rating scales from 120 fresh undergraduates. The scaling of "strongly agreement" was tallied from the total samples to obtain the trend. The greater the percentage of the agreement rate, the stronger the perceptions so as the higher the tendency of the positive impact of extensive reading. The findings came up with encouraging results where a greater proportion of the samples reported significant improvement in aspects contributing to language learning. These include improved vocabulary, writing skills, reading rate, comprehension, confidence, and motivation. The study also revealed the perceived gaining of social identity and reduced degree of eclecticism in dealing with English texts. The findings support the previous research that confirms assurance of reading improvement through extensive reading. The survey warrants pedagogical implications for teachers to constantly embark high intensity of reading activities for students to teach reading habits to improve personal study skills and encourage autonomous learning.

1. Introduction

Over the last two decades, extensive or out-of-class reading has interested researchers in the EFL Indonesian context. Day et al. (1998) define extensive reading as a teaching approach that encourages learners to read as much possible to gain fluency in reading in any foreign language. The idea is based on the principle that reading is the best way to learn how to read, and it plays a central role in enhancing comprehension as a receptive skill. Empirical evidence showing the positive effects of ER on L2 students' English proficiency is well documented, and there has been a range of studies cited in the Annotated Bibliography of Works on Extensive Reading in a Second Language (Chang & Renandya, 2017). This statement implies that reading in a foreign language will require additional endeavors to enhance the complex cognitive skills needed during the reading process.

In language education, extensive reading serves as the basis for providing autonomy where learners can choose the genre and volume of materials for reading in their own time to offers them comprehensible input. Extensive reading is commonly believed to be more effective than the traditional instructional approach providing artificial language instructions that restrict the target language exposures. The assumption underlying ER is that learners will be motivated to read consequently. It will develop a positive reading attitude and a reading habit if they are provided with books at their linguistic level, if the reading activity addresses the reader's interest, and if reading is undertaken in a low anxiety situation. Different terms for extensive reading (ER), include pleasure reading, self-selected reading, free voluntary reading, and wide reading (Ng et al., 2019).

An overwhelming number of studies reveal the effectiveness of extensive reading in various contexts. Previous studies have reinforced the belief that extensive reading will positively impact the rate at which learners acquire the target language. Additionally, some studies with relatively comprehensive assessments revealed the positive effects of extensive reading on grammar. Yang (2011), for example, assigned adult EFL learners in Hong Kong to an experimental group that read two English novels for 12 weeks or to a control group that received regular instruction focusing on reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Results indicated that the extensive reading group achieved significantly higher scores than the control group on a test of grammar knowledge. Iwata's (2022) study in Japan claims that extensive reading effectively enhances identification and intrinsic motivation to study English. Changes in students' learning motivation are associated with four motivational regulatory styles and three basic psychological needs, which affected students' complete understanding through extensive reading. Moreover, Huffman (2014) investigated the ER and intensive reading (IR) on fluency improvement in a Japanese nursing college over 15 weeks. This study indicated ER group was leading.

Although many studies on the positive effect of ER on students majoring in English, more is needed to know about the impact of ER on students who are not majoring in English. A researcher from the different contexts of learning believes that ER encourages no restriction to the volume of material that learners can read, and this gives them sufficient broad exposure to a sample of language in use. There needs to be more information on the effect of ER on freshmen students in different disciplines. More investigation needs to be done to verify this view. With a substantial increase of available ER assessment materials as well as teachers using them, a gap has grown between expert opinion and current classroom practice. The research significances are to investigate the students' degree of improvement, such as students' beliefs about eclecticism, self-confidence, and social identity. This research is also to prove freshmen, in this case, agree that ER is more effective than traditional reading methods in improving language proficiency (Ng et al. 2019), also affects reading rate (McLean & Rouault, 2017), has an impact on vocabularies acquisition (Lee, Hsieh, & Wang, 2009; Webb & Chang, 2015), and ER do better in sub-skills of writing (Park, 2016).

Some researchers have conducted numerous previous related studies. Huynh (2022) researched to explore students' perceptions of ER and its benefits on reading comprehension. The participants were 36 students who were master's candidates at a University in Southern Vietnam; a questionnaire and a semi-interview. The findings claimed that students applied ER to their reading processes through free reading, free topics, and non-pressure on reading tasks. They

believe that ER activities help improve reading competence and unconsciously build up reading habits. ER proves its advantages by what students gain, such as the ability to comprehend reading passages and to make inferences or predictions. Additionally, a study by Lindawati (2021) aimed to find out the students' perception of ER in EFL contexts. The researcher chose twelve senior students of English language education who had already received the ER subject in their previous semesters and conducted semi-structured interviews as data collection. The study's outcome exhibited that the students had positive perceptions toward ER practices and considered if ER is a reading activity for pleasure and information search where they can read material without any restraint. The subsequent study is from Wang & Ho (2019), who investigated the relationship of ER to overall English language competence both teachers' and students' views about its implementation. The participants were 190 Taiwanese university freshman and three English instructors. By applying pre- and post-tests measuring students' listening, reading, and writing as well as questionnaire responses and interviews, this study's findings indicate the ER's effectiveness is partially supported and hence, have implication for English teaching and learning in EFL contexts. Another survey from Meniado (2018) investigated the appropriateness and effectiveness of ER in a context where there is no strong culture for reading; this research surveyed students' attitudes towards ER, their perceptions of the benefits they gain from ER, and the challenges they encountered during its implementation. There were 365 randomly selected male Saudi college-level EFL students who participated in answering the questionnaire. The results revealed that students have positive attitudes toward ER. They believe that ER is beneficial, engaging, enriching, and empowering, and it can lead them to be better readers and learners.

However, only some studies that raise similar research topics focus on non-English primary first-year students, especially those majoring in social science. The English language can significantly influence on students studying social science, as it is the primary language used for academic research and communication in many fields. Proficiency in English can give students access to a broader range of literature and resources, which can deepen their understanding of the subject matter. Additionally, communicating effectively in English can help students collaborate and network with other scholars and professionals in the field, both domestically and internationally.

Nevertheless, it is pivotal to note that using as the dominant language in social science research can also create potential biases and limitations. For example, non-native English speakers may need help accessing and participating in important discussions and debates, and research conducted in languages other than

English may be underrepresented or overlooked. Therefore, it is essential to be aware of these potential limitations and to make efforts to include diverse perspectives and voices in the field. Consequently, it is necessary to evaluate how far this extensive reading intervention can positively impact them in mastering English intensively. Considering the rationale above, this study aims to explore the effect of extensive reading on freshmen's students who are not majoring in English. This study addresses the rate of effectiveness of the extensive reading in the three different faculties and compares the extent to which the group was rated in terms of significance after the intervention. Again, the description of the research conducted from eastern Indonesia can provide a holistic picture regarding the impact of implementing ER on students. So, that it can be applied globally with the positive impact.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Current Demand for Reading at the Tertiary Level in Indonesia

Currently, the Indonesian government demands its people acquire a high standard of reading ability due to the necessity for bilateral cooperation. The government is constantly well aware of the need for literacy skills to strengthen the national, academic, social and cultural identity. More recently, the Department of Education and Culture has urged learners all over the country to improve their literacy skills to be able to challenge the dynamic development of the globalization era. Meanwhile, Whitehead (2008) confirms that this mission is relevant to the need for language proficiency as an essential condition for its people to gain resistant survival in this fast-changing society. It was also confirmed that in large part of the world, the use of English creates a space that enables communication and debates. Reading for academic professionalism and success has been agreed to play a central role for learners regardless of their disciplines because most knowledge transfer occurs through reading printed materials. Reading skills have been considered an academic weapon not only for tertiary learners at Hasanuddin University but also for most EFL learners in Indonesia. Understanding core English textbooks will empower the learners to become autonomous learners and bridge them for social recognition. In 2017, a survey conducted at 12 faculties within Universitas Hasanuddin revealed that most surveyed students favored reading skills as their primary goal for learning English at the university. The survey enabled revision of the reading textbook entitled "Study Skills for Internal Use Only". The revision gained acclaim from the rector, who later recommended constant revision in content due to the dynamic development of pedagogy. The content needed correction concerning its suitability for pure sciences, such as for the Faculty of Mathematics and

Pure Sciences (MIPA), Medicines, Forestry, Animal Husbandry, and engineering. In short, these learners need to be able to read different text genres and texts of other disciplines with the strengthening of Extensive Reading and reading intervention to enable academic literacy.

Although reading intervention has already gained wider recognition among Universitas Hasanuddin EFL learners, it has yet to be widely practiced for at least two main reasons. Firstly, the university has a very tight curriculum implementation that only allow additional reading activities for students. Secondly, despite an emerging and essential English subject within the university curriculum, there needs to be more emphasis on the practice of reading in almost all the faculties. This survey on reading is expected to positively impact the students' reading habits to foster their reading skills. Research interests in looking at the power of reading intervention have shown tremendous evidence in the last couple of years. Findings from reading research and of different contexts have also been prevalent as recorded in the literature review. The National Center for Education Statistics (2022), for example, noted the efficacy of supplemental, multicomponent adolescent reading interventions improved vocabulary and promoted reading comprehension. Engagement defined as greater involvement in the form of commitment to reading activities appeared to contribute to developing students' reading skills (Guthrie et al., 2014).

Several reading problems that appeared in the literature of reading have gained resolution through the intensification of reading culture. According to Yildirim (2014), teachers are partly to blame for the negative attitudes held by students toward reading. It is because they preferred intensive reading, which essentially entails subjecting learners to study short texts while requiring them to examine the content of such texts closely. The research confirmed that intensive reading exposes learners to excessive new vocabularies and has emerged as a practical solution to the above problem from several perspectives. First, extensive reading ensures that students are given easy reading material. Teachers using the ER approach can choose texts that match the reading competence of individual students, or allow the students to choose the texts they want to read. Improvement in specific linguistic features has also been addressed as important research finding in the two particular context of reading. Bamford & Day (2008) found that extensive reading helps to improve students' proficiency in spelling. Based on findings from an investigation conducted among ESL learners in the United States, they found that students who read more tend to be better spellers. Similar findings were made among Japanese students studying English: reading for pleasure exposes students to various target words that help boost one's spelling ability. From these findings, it is accurate to conclude that extensive

reading is an approach through which individuals can improve their spelling skills. Another result from a similar study is that it improves learners' linguistic competence. According to Bamford & Day (2008), all studies that have been conducted to identify the impact of extensive reading on learners reveal a common theme: an increase in overall proficiency in the language. In the US, for instance, research has shown that adult students who read novels for fun become more competent in terms of listening and speaking abilities. Similar results have been obtained in England and Hong Kong, with learners who read extensively demonstrating a notable improvement in linguistic proficiency.

Another intriguing research finding that concerns Extensive Reading is related to an enhanced reading rate that takes important account for reading fluency. In this study, Day et al. (1998) found that students who read more can read faster than those who read less. It has a positive impact on language acquisition because of the reality that one can only become a fluent reader if he or she can read at a fast rate. Similarly, research has shown that people who can read fluently are also better readers than slow readers. In language learning, reading fluency is the capability of reading and processing words rapidly and correctly. Concerning to this definition, it can be said that extensive reading produces fluent readers from several perspectives, the key being individuals with a good command of sight and general vocabulary.

3. Method

The study samples were fresh EFL undergraduate students from three faculties of social sciences. In the first semester, these students were required to go through English 1 as a required subject set up at the university. In terms of English exposure, they had a similar amount of English instruction before admission to the tertiary level of education. In other words, they have almost had identical reading exposures during secondary school so that subject homogeneity could be ensured. Three assigned

instructors performed a four-month reading intervention for the pursuit of the research on the three different classes of the three faculties. A set of expository reading texts consisting of 16 meetings used for regular basis in a timely scheduled semester class and another set of 16 additional reading for pleasure outside regular basis was prepared for each of the assigned instructors.

Overall, these students had 68 to 90 hours of readings set for the intervention compared with 16 to 20 hours during the regular semester. In obtaining the data regarding their perception of improved reading performance after the intervention, delivered a set of a close-ended questionnaire consisting of 7 close-ended statements with four rating scales (disagree-disagree strongly, agree, and agree strongly) the end of the semester. The 120 returned questionnaires were tallied the "agree strongly" only, which were analyzed through descriptive quantitative statistics. In-depth interviews were also performed with the selected samples to determine their level of gaining social identity and reduced degree of eclecticism resulting from the reading intervention.

4. Result

The overall analysis of the survey came up with positive findings where a greater proportion of the samples reported significant improvement in aspects contributing to language learning. These include the acquisition of vocabulary, improved reading rate, writing skills, confidence, motivation, and comprehension. The perceived gaining of social identity and reduced degree of eclecticism in dealing with English texts were two aspects that emerged from in-depth interviews with the elected samples from the surveyed students. Extensive reading is seen as the most effective single approach in second language acquisition which has been largely largely neglected in many EFL classroom interactions. The following table illustrates the findings from the returned questionnaire.

Table 1. Adherence of Perceived Item in the Strongly Agreement Category of Three Faculties

Questionnaire Item	Faculty of Social & Political Sciences N=40	Faculty of Economics N=40	Faculty of Law N=40	Total N=120
Vocabulary	32 (80%)	28(70%)	26(65%)	86(71.66)
Reading Rate	33(82.5%)	31(77.5%)	24 (60%)	88(73.33%)
Writing Skills	22(55%)	27 (67.5%)	23(57.5%)	72(60)
Confidence	18(45%)	22(55%)	21(52.5%)	72(60)
Motivation	16(40)	24(60%)	26(65%)	66(55%)
Comprehension	31(77.5)	28(70%)	24(60%)	83(69.16)

The findings of the present survey demonstrate the vitality of reading intervention in generating the students' linguistic features to a greater extent. In a broader sense, the intervention generates aspects that concern reading and generate social and psychological aspects that led to the improvement of students' attitudes to language learning and acquisition. In other words, these could strengthen and promote self-awareness that ultimately improves the belief of such intervention's emerging advantages. This positive perception falls into several categories that concern linguistic features, such as improved vocabulary and reading rate, comprehension, and social aspect that concerns identity and confidence. Also, a psychological part that involves improved motivation and acquisition and reduced eclecticism were evident from the study.

Responses obtained from the samples demonstrated positive and significant gains that rated highly in the three surveyed groups (32 (80%), 28 (70%), and 26 (65%)). It implies that the intervention serves as a tool for the acquisition of vocabulary. The finding confirms the importance of reading intensity that may be regulated over time for students regardless of their disciplines.

The second important finding that emerged from the study concerns reading rate and writing skills. Reading rate also takes account of successful reading comprehension when dealing with text that requires quick responses, such as in the TOEFL test. High intensity and reading frequency appeared to gear improvement in reading rate in the surveyed groups (33 (82,5%), 31 (77, 5%), and 24 (60%).

The third piece of evidence regarding the study concerns improved confidence as strongly perceived by the three groups of samples. This aspect has been largely ignored in the literature of reading research, but proponent and educators around the EFL context regard this as a crucial aspect in language learning. Extensive Reading contributes to this social aspect where three groups gained moderate level of responses (18 (45%), 22 (55%), 21 (52%). The finding confirms an important implication for the EFL context to empower the students by means of intensified reading constantly.

The fourth piece of evidence that emerged from the study is about comprehension. The responses gained from the three groups indicated relatively strong positive perceptions as a result of the reading intervention. As confidence and motivation improve, it will provide an avenue for the acquisition process that links to recognition of the surface structure of the text to improve comprehension. This aspect gained a relatively stronger positive perception by the three groups of samples (31 (77.5%), 28 (70%), and 24 (60%)).

An increase in motivation was important evidence from the study, which links to the psychological

aspect of learning. Responses gained from questionnaire analysis exhibited a perception of improved motivation after the intervention (16 (40%), 24 (60%), 26 (65%)). The finding has confirmed an important basis of reading intervention for generating learners' motivation essential for language learning. It was learned that motivation is a powerful tool for triggering the learning process, especially learning a second language.

Reading intervention generated reading generosity, where students become less eclectic in choosing a text for reading. Eclecticism has been perceived as a non-beneficial personal style either to the teacher in preparing their teaching materials or to the students who only favor a particular genre of reading text. The finding encourages pressures for ELT practitioners to constantly embark on both intensive and extensive reading for students at all tertiary levels.

5. Discussion

Extensive reading is a language learning method where students read large quantities of simplified, high-interest materials in the target language. This approach helps students improve their vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension skills, and gain exposure to different cultures and ways of thinking. For non-English students, it is important to find materials that are at the appropriate level of difficulty and interest. It could include graded readers, comics, and online articles. Additionally, it may be helpful for students to use language learning tools, such as dictionaries and translation apps, to help them understand the materials they are reading.

The first important finding in conformity with the table provided is that the current research is concerned with the acquisition of linguistic features, such as vocabulary, that take important account for the comprehension process. The finding also supports previous studies confirming sustainable vocabulary acquisition development resulting from intensified reading activities. Several studies have strengthened the evidence of extensive reading engagement to contribute to several aspects of second language learning, such as reading comprehension and reading rates (Belgar & Hun, 2014), and vocabulary and spelling (Pigada & Schmit 2006; Liu & Zhang, 2018; Sun, 2020; Ateek, 2021; Puspa & Ragawanti, 2022). Other experts, such as (Renandya, 2016), have exaggerated extensive reading to have attracted increasing attention from second language and foreign language researchers and educators over recent decades. It can be a beneficial strategy for first-year students in a language course. For first-year language learners, using this technique can be advantageous since it helps them expand their vocabulary and comprehend grammar and conversational phrases in context. Instead of concentrating primarily on comprehension exercises, it is advised to pick reading material that the students will find fascinating and

read for enjoyment. They may be exposed to various vocabulary, grammatical rules, and idiomatic expressions in context, which may aid in their more natural language learning.

Based on the table, the improvement in reading rate was most probably due to increased recognition of vocabulary and idiomatic expression so as to foster vigilance in grasping the group of sentences in a single glance. The finding supports the previous study by Day et al. (1998), who found that students who read more can read faster than those who read less. Tran (2018) found that ER courses helped Vietnamese EFL learners to increase their reading rate and facilitated their reading comprehension. In the different regions, Davis et al. (2020) conducted a study with Taiwanese students, where the results showed that ER program affected the reading rates of lower and intermediate students. Additionally, Ateek (2021) research also indicated that the ER approach's impact was positive on the learners' reading fluency and vocabulary knowledge. Iwata (2022) has a similar outcome from the research which investigated the effects of ER on foreign language learners' acquisition of sight vocabulary, particularly for partially known high-frequency words and reading fluency development. The results exhibited that only the ER groups significantly improved their reading rates. This has a positive impact on language acquisition because one cannot become a fluent reader unless they can read at a faster rate. Therefore, extensive reading is the practice of reading a large amount of material at or slightly above one language level to improve overall comprehension and fluency.

Apart from linguistic features, the present study also recorded an important avenue to bridging positive language learning that concerns social identity. Responses gained from the surveyed samples demonstrated the emergence of confidence among the learners concerning their answers in the interview. Recognition of social identity was one of the measured aspects in the reading intervention program that showed a significance increase among the samples. A greater proportion of learners from different parts of the world have made social recognition their reason for learning a second language. The findings of this study along with previous studies such as Wang & Ho (2019) which revealed that learners tended to hold a favorable attitude toward extensive reading and perceive it to be important and effective learning, having confidence in its effect. Similar findings from Yılmaz et al. (2020) also indicated that ER increased their self-confidence in learning English as they overcame fear of making mistakes. Fatimah et al. (2020) research results also agree with the current study, which revealed that a blog as a platform for ER becomes beneficial for promoting students' confidence. It was learned that students tended to increase their willingness to learn the language for social recognition. The finding

implies a positive contribution of reading intervention for generating a sense of social distinction among the learners.

The finding confirmed an important basis of reinforcement of reading intervention for eliciting motivation. Some claims have been raised in the literature on reason stating the significant roles of this motivation in the achievement of learning. The finding supports previous studies that warrant the importance of motivation in second language learning. The influence of RI on the student's basis has previously become research evidence (for example, Judge, 2011). In line with a study from Puspa & Ragawanti (2022), they conducted research by implementing ER principles in an extensive reading class and revealed that the appropriate level of graded readers could lead them to a relaxing atmosphere and promote motivation to read the upper stories of books. The same findings can be found in Gopal et al. (2022), who examined the utilization of ER from the perspective of ESL students' reader responses. Yılmaz et al. (2020) study also found that ER affected the students' Foreign Language Self-Concept (FLSC) and discovered that the project also improved students' motivation. The results showed that the participants developed positive motivation and attitudes towards the ERP and writing of Respons Journals. These proofs infer that extensive reading could be an effective way to boost student motivation in language learning. As a result of comprehending the reading material right away, students may feel more accomplished and motivated to read more. Reading materials at the appropriate difficulty level can also help build motivation in reading and using the language.

The main argument in support of improved comprehension is due to improved vocabulary that takes important account in the comprehension process. Reading extensively exposes students to high-frequency terms in a range of settings, which helps them grasp the language better than solely studying its L1 equivalents (Iwata, 2022). Research conducted by Tran (2018), Endris (2018), Flores-González (2019), Lindawati (2021), and Huynh (2022) showed that ER has positively increased students' reading comprehension. As attested by Shih et al. (2018), it is clear that prior knowledge activation plays a specific role in reading comprehension, and EFL student readers should be encouraged to draw on their previous experience and prior knowledge to form predictions about text's content. Lecturers can also use reading materials as a basis for class discussions and language activities to reinforce further the language used in the text. They can also create activities, to help students reflect on and discuss what they have read, such as reading journals or book reports. It is important to assess students' comprehension of the text and their development throughout the reading comprehension process

(Flores-González, 2019). Students can be given reading comprehension targets by the lecturers, such as comprehending a specific proportion of the material or properly responding to a certain number of questions. They can be rewarded for reaching these goals. This may boost students' desire to read and comprehend the texts they are given.

The questionnaires' responses demonstrated the samples' relatively prevalent eagerness to read any text genres after the intervention. The finding supports the claims by Day et al. (1998), who asserted that extensive reading could be enjoyable for some reasons. First, the students may choose numerous texts from different genres. Second, they can read at levels that are easy for them, and enjoyable activities often follow the reading (e.g., reading fair, group discussion, wall display). In conclusion, extensive reading is a crucial component of any language learning program, and this is especially true for first-year students in their first year of language study. By engaging with a wide variety of texts and building their reading fluency, they build their vocabulary, and gaining a deeper understanding of grammar and idiomatic expression in context.

6. Conclusions

The findings strongly suggest the effectiveness of ER in strengthening the learners' belief in positive learning attitudes without caution. It is because learners share a similar learning context of lacking English exposure outside the classroom. In other words, they live in an identical social context so that improvement in any linguistic properties can be attributed to the influence of intervention. Teachers and researchers need to offer students more help with their use of reading strategies, although they were moderately strategic in reading. Therefore, reading strategy instruction is suggested to be directed towards raising students' awareness of various reading strategies at their disposal in different reading situations. In addition, it is recommended that students be encouraged to use various reading strategies flexibly to enhance their reading comprehension and performance. Although reading intervention encourages high cost in terms of material preparation, it should be regarded as a trigger to embark on new reading programs to fulfil the drawbacks of teaching approaches and students' lack of reading strategies. Another important aspect about the positive effect of extensive reading is that it applies in settings where relevant learning resources are inadequate. It is essential that extensive reading has been found helpful in filling the gaps caused by resource constraints in the context of language acquisition. This study has also postulated that the ER approach may provide a solution to the problems of students being restrained from academic advancement due to failure in traditional language study programs. It is suggested that an avenue for future research

should be the application of ER methods for students repeatedly failing in conventional programs. The adoption of extensive reading for EFL and ESL programs in all educational contexts should be triggered and disseminated to enhance the power of reading intervention in a wider learning context.

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