

When the books and reading friends are up to us: Students' Responses about an Extensive Reading Program

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Abstract. Extensive Reading is one of alternatives that help teachers to motivate the students to read. Regarding that main benefit, in one Indonesian university, a teacher established an extensive reading program for freshmen. In the implementation, the teacher allowed the students to choose books and with whom they read. In practice, they made a group of four and met once a week to share what they read. This qualitative research was conducted to investigate students' responses about the program. By involving six students who joined the program, the data were gained through interviews and reflective essays. The selected participants had different level of English, reading interest, and motives to sign up the program which made the data rich and were able to capture the phenomenon from diverse students' viewpoints. After the data were obtained, they were coded, categorized to find the themes and interpreted. The result showed, all activities in the program namely choosing own books, having weekly reading in groups, having discussion with their group, and sharing their weekly meeting in their social media got both positive and negative responses. The positive responses appeared from benefits that the participants got while the negative responses came up because of the challenges they faced during the program. All in all, an extensive reading program that accommodates students' freedom in reading, becomes a successful alternative to cultivate students' L2 reading motivation if it is implemented by considering some possible encounters.

Keywords: EFL Reading Program, Extensive Reading, EFL Reading, Students' Responses

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INTRODUCTION

As an approach in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) instruction, extensive reading has been discussed due to its great positive impact to students' English ability. In South Korea, Suk (2016) did a quasi-experimental study by dividing 168 students into two groups which showed that the students' vocabulary acquisition significantly improved after the English instruction was mixed with extensive reading. In line with that, in Taiwan, a quantitative study done in twelve weeks by Mermelstein (2014) captured the difference of reading level gained by the university students in a treatment group and a control group. The result shows that students who got an intervention of extensive reading approach obtained a higher score than those who did not.

In an Iranian context, Salehi, Asgari, and Amini (2015) involved 48 pre-university students to be divided into a control group and experimental group. After obtaining an extensive reading treatment for six weeks, a score of pre-test and post-test from those two groups were processed through a statistical analysis. The result showed that the treatment, extensive reading, gave a positive impact to the students' writing ability. From those three studies, it could be said that extensive reading empowers students' language skills both micro (vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation) and macro skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking). In the reviewed studies, macro skills are represented through reading and writing while the micro skill is on vocabulary mastery.

Besides benefits, one point that attracts teaching practitioners and researchers to the approach is how it is implemented. According to Day and Bamford (2002) and supported by Extensive Reading Foundation (2011), extensive reading gives students some space to make decision. This approach allows students to decide what to read and how much they would read which highlights students' independence in learning. In the implementation, the teacher only facilitates the students in providing choices of books, giving tips how to select books to read, and being a role model of reading. Beyond the aforementioned roles, the students did everything themselves.

In an Indonesian context, extensive reading is also applied in English classrooms. Iftanti and Shofiya (2018) implemented the approach through a specific program. From the questionnaire distributed, it was known that extensive reading was able to increase students' love of reading both in students' first language and English. Similar to what Iftanti and Shofiya (2018) did, Husna (2019) applied the approach in a university context. In order to know how extensive reading benefits, the students' critical thinking, a test and survey were conducted. Both data demonstrated that extensive reading was successfully able to advance students' critical thinking. Still focusing extensive reading on a tertiary level of education, another teaching practitioner, Hadiyanto (2019) brought extensive into an English classroom with pre-service English teachers as students. In the implementation, Hadiyanto put the centre on bringing a collaborative writing activity as a follow up activity in extensive reading and the result showed that the students perceived, extensive reading helped them write fiction well. While the previous teachers investigated the positive impacts that extensive reading brought to university

students, in order to support government effort to boost Indonesian students' motivation to read, Anandari and Iswandari (2019) gave a adaptable model of extensive reading activities to high school teachers. Implementing the model, they presented two contributing factors that could bring extensive reading into success are school members and students' family.

Those studies gave clear views about how impactful extensive reading is to students in learning a new language which can inspire other teachers to also implement the approach. In addition, an eye-opening result about factors that could bring the implementation into success is also revealed. It helps other teachers in any contexts who intend to bring the approach into their classroom prepare their plan on effective extensive reading for their students. In order to provide holistic information about extensive reading implementation, students' voices about it need to be explored. However, none of the studies reviewed above shed a light on that discussion. Exploring an extensive reading program from students' standpoint which is not only emphasizing on positive contribution would empirically give thorough view to teachers about how to implement the approach based on their own setting, students' condition, and teaching goals. In addition to that, referring to Extensive Reading Foundation (2011) that highlights the main objective of the extensive reading which is reading for pleasure, students' thought, and opinion are then counted as a major aspect to concern. The need of noticing how students perceive all activities in extensive reading lead the researcher to come up with an exploration on students' voices about an extensive reading program carried on in an undergraduate program of English teacher training.

This program was established as a supplementary activity for the main reading class which followed applied curriculum and was thickened with intensive reading approach. The teacher here brought reading which was recognized as a solitary activity into a communal project. In the program, the students made a group of three or four then they gathered once a week with their team in a decided place to read their self-selected book. The reading session was continued with discussion about the book that each member had read. To end the meeting, they made group photos and uploaded the photos in their social media account with a short report about the meeting they had. Instruction which was usually dominated by teachers was then changed to be student-centered which means students were able to decide what, when, where, and with whom they read. The teacher's big moves through the program implementation need to be examined to unveil the students' responses. Therefore, the research question falls into 'what are students' responses about joining the implemented program?'

RESEARCH METHOD

This research carried out is to investigate students' voices about an extensive reading program they joined in which the data taken were based on students' experiences and opinion. Considering to that objective, this research is under descriptive qualitative study which is to provide a meticulous and accurate depiction of a phenomenon based on students' experience (Neuman, 2014). To obtain the data, six students joining the program were involved. Those consisted four females and two male students were taken for in-depth interview. The six participants were

presented using pseudonym namely Bertha, Mario, Nadia, Randy, Elsa, and Irina. They were selected as participants of this research because they attended more than 75 % of the whole semester for the meetings as required by the university for all departments and courses. Thus, they got more experiences compared to other members and could provide more detailed information about all activities in the program which could help the research obtain richer data.

Besides the attendance, the selection of participants was based on reading profile and English proficiency which were different which is to get rich data from various students' viewpoints. As the reading profile, Bertha and Nadia liked reading books in their first language and sometimes they read English books before joining the program. They wanted to shape their reading habit on English as their second language. Meanwhile, Mario, Randy, and Irina described themselves as a moody reader which means they actually wanted to love reading both in first and second language, yet they could not consistently do the activity. So, they intended to make themselves committed to reading by joining the program. Different from other five participants, Elsa is the only participant who literally admitted uninterested in reading either in L1 or L2 but since she realized that as a university student, reading could help improve her knowledge and English skills, she then joined the program to habituate herself to reading. Regarding their English skill, based on an English proficiency test that was internally conducted by the department, Bertha, Nadia, Mario, and Irina were intermediate which the score was equal with B1 while Elsa and Randy were still in a beginner level which the score was equal with A2. To sum up, the participants' profile is described in the following table.

Table 1. *Information of the Participants*

No	Name	Gender	Age (years old)	Attendances (out of 10 meetings)	Reading interest before the program	Motivation to join the program	English proficiency
1.	Bertha	Female	19	10	Great interest in L1 reading and sometimes did L2 readings	Improving L2 reading habit	Equivalent with B1
2.	Mario	Male	18	9	Moody readers in L1 and L2	Being a consistent and committed reader	Equivalent with B1
3.	Nadia	Female	19	10	Great interest in L1 reading and sometimes did L2 readings	Improving L2 reading habit	Equivalent with B1
4.	Randy	Male	19	8	Moody readers in L1 and L2	Being a consistent and committed reader	Equivalent with A2

5.	Elsa	Female	19	10	Very interest reading L1 and L2	low in and	Increasing reading habit	Equivalent with A2
6.	Irina	Female	18	8	Moody readers in L1 and L2		Being a consistent and committed reader	Equivalent with B1

After having the interview transcribed, the transcription was given to each participant for member checking. The result of that process showed that the information written in the data were all correct, addition or omission was not needed. Document analysis was employed as trustworthiness. The documents were the students' weekly notes posted in their social media account and reflective essay submitted in a final meeting of the program. The notes were talking about the students' feeling joining each meeting of the program and the essay discussed their views and opinion about the program. For data analysis, the researcher did categorization, thematization, and interpretation to the interview transcription, weekly journals, and reflective essay as what Saldaña (2015) suggested. The main data were taken from the interview supported with data from the journals and the essay.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The interview data presented students' positive and negative responses about the program. The positive responses mainly appeared because of benefits of joining the program while the negative ones came out due to the challenges they faced. All responses from the students are presented using themes emerged namely choosing own books, reading with friends, and sharing in social media. Besides benefits and challenges, some suggestions from the students to improve the program were also shown in the data.

Choosing Own Books

Referring the data, participants said that letting the students select their own book offered benefits and a main challenge. The benefits fall into making them more confident in reading L2, promoting their reading motivation, increasing students' writing skill. Meanwhile, the potential challenge that might come from choosing own books are getting clueless about what to read.

Positive responses. The participants thought that choosing own books could give them benefits and challenges. By choosing what to read themselves, they felt that their confidence in reading English increased and it significantly affected their reading interest. That is seen from what Mario said. Since joining the program, he started to enjoy reading because he could choose what to read. In parallel with that, Nadia and Bertha also had a positive response about self-selected books applied in the program. Both Nadia and Bertha perceived they could read more than they ever did because they could choose books based on their interest and English ability. In

her reflective essay, Bertha even wrote that by choosing own book, she could select books with the same topic week by week. In effect, she knew the topic better than before and it affects to her writing ability.

The students' responses about choosing books that can promote their reading motivation are in line with one of purposes of extensive reading by Day and Bamford (2002) and research carried out by Fraumeni-Mcbride (2017) which revealed that self-selection to books could increase students' comprehension level. By being able to comprehend the text, they then feel compelled an engaged with the content and want to read more and more. In relation with that Gambrell (2011) mentioned, choosing own books is one of strategies to gain reading engagement which would grow to be great reading motivation.

Not only reading motivation, a benefit gained from choosing own book is also seen in students' writing skill. Bertha argued that choosing own book could help her produce a better writing work since by selecting books under the same topic, knowledge about the topic and linguistic features used to describe elements in the topics are improved. What happened to Bertha is in line with a study conducted by Salehi, Asgari, and Amini (2015) which proved that extensive reading gave a positive impact to students' writing ability.

Negative responses. Even though choosing own books was considered as a benefit, the participants also saw it as a challenge. Elsa said that she got confused in deciding which books to read. She told her unpleasant experiences when searching books. 'I should go to three bookstores to find books that I could easily understand. It is tiring.' At some points choosing own book can accommodate students' interest in reading but it could be a roadblock for them as what happened to Elsa. Irina had a similar experience in choosing books. Irina argued, book selection was her prominent problems in joining the program. She spent more than a week to find an interesting book that corresponds with her linguistic ability. "it (selecting own books) is frustrating," said Irina. Irina also added, "the teacher had better provide more books so that we do not need to go here and there to find a good book." Even though the teacher provided some books for the program, Irina thought that the number of books available was not enough. They needed more options so that the teacher needed to improve book collection for the program.

Referring to the data, choosing own book could be a barrier in the program. The participants said that the teachers did not provide rich options of book. It caused students' confusion in selecting interesting reading materials. The suggestion from the participant that more available books were needed in the program corresponds with a principle of extensive reading about the need of wide options of reading materials (Day & Bamford, 2002). In accordance with that, Gambrell (2011) said that wide varieties of reading materials could enhance students' reading engagement and motivation. If the books available are limited, the students should do more effort in finding a suitable book which could possibly hinder their reading motivation.

Reading with Friends

One of aspects emphasized in this program is reading with friends. Like the first finding which gained negative and positive responses from the participants, reading in a group also has those two types of response. Positive responses were

obtained because reading with friends enable them to get book recommendation, borrow books from friends, and motivate themselves to read. However, the negative responses were dealing with agreeing the schedule to meet and feeling intimidated with other friends' reading speed.

Positive responses. Mario, Irina, and Berta stated that joining the program could improve their social life. They had new friends and got closer with known friends. Having a similar opinion, Nadia said that she enjoyed reading with her team because she got a lot of book recommendation. She stated that joining the program enabled her to read a book without buying. She could borrow books from her team members. In addition to that, Nadia thought that her reading preferences grew influenced by her reading friends. "My friend suggested me to read a horror book and I started to enjoy it," she admitted.

The result shows that having reading friends could motivate students to read. It is in line with an interview study done by Protacio (2012) which showed the significant role of friends in building students' reading motivation. What was told by Nadia that she was happy because she could get book recommendation from friends is in parallel with Gambrell (2011) who pointed out that social interaction increased students' willingness to read and Gambrell defined sharing books is also a type of interaction in reading. Referring to Nadia who started to enjoy horror which was out of her taste before, Álvarez-Álvarez (2015) agreed that reading in a community could broaden a scope of students' reading preferences and made more open to read what other friends read.

Negative responses. However, Ryan had a different opinion. He saw that reading with friends was not as easy as it seemed. He should deal with different characteristics and interest of the members that frustrated him in a way of arranging the schedule to meet to do timed reading with group. Sometimes, the members also argued in deciding where to meet and it ended up without any decision. He felt disappointed about it. Elsa had a similar view about reading with friends. She said that her English was not quite good so in timed reading session, she was slower than others which caused her intimidated and anxious. "I was not comfortable reading with friends. They read very fast," she said.

Based on the interview, it is known that Ryan and Elsa experienced anxiety and social discomfort. They did not feel comfortable reading with friends whose English was way better than them. In relation to that, Ro (2013) mentioned that friends become one of potential factors causing students' anxiety. Ro added, in order to avoid that feeling, students needed a non-threatening place and to help students reduce the degree of anxiety, supportive friends are required.

Having Discussion after Reading

What the students did next after reading together with friends is discussing what they had read. This session received positive responses in a way it could empower students with new knowledge and speaking skill since they discussed in English. The negative response was revealed by one only participant due to anxiety in speaking English.

Positive responses. In weekly meetings with own group, students did not only read a book together but also had discussion after doing timed reading. Based on the

interview, it is known that some participants enjoyed the moment, but some others did not. The engaged students stipulated that the discussion empowered them with knowledge and English skills especially speaking. Bertha, Nadia, Irina, and Mario agreed that he got much new information from the discussion which was about books, general knowledge, happening issues and trends. Irina also said that due to the discussion, her relationship with her best friend was getting closer because they usually talked about books related to their own story and it led them to a deep conversation. For Mario who liked practicing speaking in English, he perceived that the discussion was a perfect medium to train his English-speaking ability. "I start to get used to it (speaking in English)," he said. Similar to Mario, Elsa gained a linguistic benefit but in a different domain. Elsa said that in the discussion, she obtained a considerable amount of vocabulary from her friends' speaking.

Discussion was an obligatory activity that all students should do in the program. The data revealed that the participants responded the activity positively. In addition, the participants also said, besides increasing their knowledge, discussion was also able to train their speaking skill. It is in parallel with Warfield (2019) stating that group discussion makes reading classroom more interactive. So far, reading is known as a silent and tedious activity. By putting a touch of interaction in a group such as discussion, the cold situation would be certainly melted and make the activity more enjoyable. In correspondence, Gambrell (2012) highlighted the prominence of social interaction including discussion to reading motivation. Through discussion, students exchanged the knowledge and culture on the book read. A slight of information given by their friends would invite their curiosity. In effect, they ask for more information which leads the discussion merrier. By the process, the students might not be satisfied to their friends' information and tickled to read the book by themselves. That is in the same line with Extensive Reading Foundation (2011) that considers discussion as one of suggested post-reading activities in the implementation of extensive reading. Making the position of group discussion after reading strong and robust, Kirchhoff (2015) empirical research posited that extensive reading accommodated students' need to speak up their mind and share their thought to friends through discussion. All in all, discussion does not only enrich students' knowledge but also linguistic skill such as speaking.

Negative responses. Even though most of the participants agreed that discussion after reading was fruitful for them, two participants, Elsa and Ryan did not have the same view. As what Elsa revealed that reading with friends caused her intimidated since at some point, she thought her English was way lower than other members in her group, the anxiety also happened in discussion session. She revealed that she could barely speak English. She should ask to her group many times to find what she wanted to say in English. It made her uncomfortable. "Maybe they feel ok to answer my questions, but I feel I'm so bothering for asking them back and forth," she said. She also added, "it hindered me to keep going. I have times where I want to quit because of this (speaking English in discussion)."

Elsa was not the only participant who did not like discussion session after reading. Ryan felt the same way. Different from Elsa who felt hesitant to join the discussion due to her low ability in English speaking, a factor that made Ryan give

negative review for this activity was about his demotivating group member. The group was almost never in a full team. Of the group who came the meeting frequently were only him and his leader and the leader dominated the conversation in the discussion. "I usually only listened to him and it was a one-way discussion," he explained.

From the interview, it could be seen that what was experienced by Elsa is about speaking anxiety and what made her confused was post-reading discussion where all members should use English to share or respond ideas. If what Elsa said is just neglected, it might turn her reading motivation off. This situation is in line with Ulper (2011) who considered that post reading activity could drag reading into success or failure. If the activity was not fun, the significantly positive impact was that the students just withdrew from the program or even stopped reading. As a way out, Gambrell (2011) gave luminous light to avoid students' demotivation in reading. Gambrel said that hesitant students would be engaged with a reading activity if the students could understand the purpose of the activity. When students figured out the objective why they read and discuss, they kept going with the activity no matter how serious problems they faced in doing it. Yet, Brantmeier's research (2005) empirically proved that some students, even ones with good reading ability, felt uneasy and anxious with oral performance after reading activity. That explained why they got nervous when they had to share what they read orally. To lessen the pressure sticking on discussion as post reading activity, Byun and Hayriye (2012) suggested that conducting discussion after reading using L1 is preferable rather than utilizing L2 because students could share their opinion and knowledge without language limitation. In relation to integrating reading and speaking performance like discussion forum, what Elsa felt is understandable.

In Ryan's case met a demotivating friend who dominated the discussion. Because of that situation, he found that activity was not fun. From that statement, it can be concluded that what Ryan disliked is not about the activity but with whom he did it. In parallel with that, Ro (2013), Gambrell (2011), and Protacio (2012) said that friends are one of the most significant factors in defining students' reading motivation. If Ryan had a supportive friend, he might enjoy the discussion as much as other participants did. Viewing the case from the lens of cooperative learning in which group discussion activity lies on, the finding confirmed Kohn's statement in Baloché and Brody (2017) about potential challenges of cooperative learning. Students' self-thought about individual accomplishment and competitions become a big task to solve in the implementation of cooperative learning.

Sharing in Social Media

Weekly reading meeting with friends was closed with posting reflection in their social media account. In the posts, they wrote about their feeling while joining the meeting, perception about the books, and lessons that they had learned from the discussion. According to the data, this is the only feature of the program which does not obtain positive response.

Negative response. Bertha, Nadia, Randy, Elsa, and Mario agreed posting the meeting reports in social media was the hurdling part because it took much time. Even in his reflective essay, Mario wrote "I don't mind if it was only posting a group

photo with a short caption, but I think telling our feeling about the meeting is too long and quite demanding. In the interview, he confirmed the statement by uttering, “that’s too much if the objective is just monitoring our activities in weekly reading”. Elsa also had the same view about the assignment, “at some point, I think it (sharing the meetings in social media) is good to improve my English, but that’s too much”.

In relation to Mario’s report, the teacher’s aim for asking all students to post the reading meeting in social media was to check how the meeting ran and to identify active and passive students in the program. If so, Mario suggested another strategy to the teacher, “instead of using students’ posts in social media, the teacher had better give a visit to the groups in turn”. He thought that the teacher’s visit would be not only effective to know whether the group were still active but also give a positive impact to the students’ motivation. “The teacher’s presence means a lot to us,” he explained.

One of interesting things that extensive reading offers is not weighing students with tasks and examinations. Looking at the data, it is shown that the participant felt unpleasant with the task of posting in social media. In doing that, of course students need allotted time to think about what to write and edit some photos. In writing, they had to arrange English sentences and it becomes a burden which might turn off their reading motivation. It corresponds with what Extensive Reading Foundation (2011), in order to cultivate reading motivation, the teacher should avoid too demanding assignments. Additionally, Mario’s suggestion that the students need the teacher’s presence to accompany them doing the activity. It is closely related to the principles of extensive reading by Day and Bamford (2002) about what roles the teacher should play. In extensive reading, the teachers should show their support to the students. Giving a visit to each group in turn as what Mario suggested could be one of alternatives to do that effort.

CONCLUSION

In the nutshell, the reading program which comprises choosing own books, reading with friends, having discussion after reading, and posting reports in social media obtain positive and negative feedback for each session from the participants. Choosing own books develops students’ self-confidence in reading L2, motivates students to read L2, and enhance students’ writing ability. However, it somehow makes students muddled if done without teachers’ assistance. Social interaction that this program brings up is seen through reading with friends and discussing what they have read with their group. By reading together with friends, students get recommended books to read, find available books to borrow from others, grows their motivation to read L2, and have their taste of reading extended. At some point, the participants see that reading in groups is intimidating and raises potential conflict due to schedule and interest. Discussion as a post-reading activity helps students attain new knowledge, enhance their language ability, and boost reading motivation. It also has a potential challenge which make students with low English proficiency feel uncomfortable for bothering friends with their lack of English or being bothered to superior friends who take more part in the discussion.

Regardless the challenges, the program is still worth establishing to promote students’ EFL reading motivation by considering students’ negative response to

resolve or anticipate. As suggested by the participants, they enjoyed the freedom given but they still need the teacher's support. The support could be in a form of book provision and presence in students' weekly meetings. By being visited by the teachers, the students felt enthusiastically motivated.

In the light of the discussion above, some recommendations are given to the next researchers. Data employed for this research were taken from limited number of participants so the findings could not be generalized. The potential research that other experts could be taken up is designing a questionnaire about students' perception on the implementation of extensive reading in Indonesia. The questionnaire then could be employed to collect data with massive participants. Thus, the research findings might be more representative to depict the students' voices in the country regarding extensive reading.

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