

## **EXPERIENCES DURING EXTENSIVE READING PROGRAM FOR ENGLISH DEPARTMENT STUDENTS**

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### **Abstrak**

Membaca Ekstensif dianggap penting bagi mahasiswa baru Jurusan Bahasa Inggris karena membantu untuk meningkatkan kemampuan membaca terutama dalam hal komprehensi teks bacaan. Bergabung dengan program Membaca Ekstensif pada tahun-tahun awal pendidikan tinggi bermanfaat bagi siswa untuk meningkatkan pemahaman isi bacaan serta perbendaharaan kata. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi pengalaman mahasiswa ditinjau dari pendapat mereka tentang; 1) alokasi waktu selama membaca ekstensif, 2) potensi kendala yang ditemui saat membaca ekstensif, serta 3) panjang teks yang digunakan sebagai materi membaca. Penelitian menyasar subjek mahasiswa jurusan Bahasa Inggris. Jawaban yang didapat dari sebanyak 45 responden kuesioner Pengalaman Membaca Ekstensif dianalisis secara deskriptif dan tematik untuk mencari saran praktis yang dapat digunakan oleh mahasiswa dan dosen. Selain itu, artikel ini juga dapat digunakan untuk mengidentifikasi manfaat dan kekurangan program Membaca Ekstensif di Jurusan Bahasa Inggris. Hasil penelitian secara garis besar menunjukkan beberapa hal yaitu; 1) mahasiswa Jurusan Bahasa Inggris menilai alokasi waktu telah mencukupi untuk keperluan menyelesaikan tugas membaca ekstensif, 2) kendala yang paling menghambat perkembangan kemampuan komprehensi dalam membaca adalah kosakata sulit serta 3) teks panjang yang menarik dapat meningkatkan motivasi mahasiswa dalam membaca ekstensif. Saran praktis yang ditujukan untuk mahasiswa dan dosen disediakan di akhir artikel.

**Kata Kunci:** Membaca Ekstensif, Pengalaman Membaca Ekstensif, Penguasaan Komprehensi Membaca

### **Abstract**

Extensive Reading is deemed essential for freshmen of English Department as it helps to improve students' reading skills especially comprehension. Joining the Extensive Reading program assigned in early college years helps elevate students' reading comprehension skills and increase their vocabulary size. This article aims to explore students' experiences with the Extensive Reading program based on their perceived appraisal on; 1) time allocation during extensive reading, 2) potential obstacles found during extensive reading as well as 3) the length of text used as reading materials. This study took English Department's students as its subject. The answers gained from 45 respondents of Extensive Reading Experience questionnaire were later analyzed in descriptive and thematic fashion to form practical suggestions for college students and lecturers. In addition, this article can also be used to identify the benefits and drawbacks of the Extensive Reading program provided by English Department. The results of the study in general showed that; 1) English Department's students regard the time allocation as sufficient for completing extensive reading assignments, 2) the obstacle that hinders the development of comprehension skills in reading the most is difficult vocabulary and 3) long, interesting texts can increase student motivation to read extensively. Further recommendations would be served at the end of the article.

**Keywords:** Extensive Reading, Extensive Reading Experience, Reading Comprehension Mastery

## INTRODUCTION

In the early days of learning English, many students find it hard to learn the language in its major skills, especially reading. Since students, especially those who are currently pursuing their degree in higher education, have different reading skills and in fact develop it at a variety of pace, they would be better assisted if there is a special program that is dedicated to improving their reading skill. In the case of English Department students who are currently studying in Universitas Negeri Surabaya, for example, they are provided with a reading program named Extensive Reading in their freshmen year. According to the department, this reading program is described as a mandatory program involving reading mastery and other reading-related activities that freshmen of English Department must join. The purpose of this program is to help students improve their reading skill in many aspects, with one of them being reading comprehension. Regarding the technique, this reading program is set on an online program held in the evening in which students are required to read a passage of mostly fiction works with length ranging from 500-1000 words. The instructor for this program is a native English speaker who currently resides in the United States, hence the time is set in the evening.

Considering the way Extensive Reading as a program is implemented, it can be said that this program also helps students with cultivating their reading habits. Owusu-acheaw (2014) defined reading habits as a structured plan of study which takes form as a continuous activity of students' academic comprehension. They also stated that reading habits have a crucial role on students' academic achievements. Different reading can also affect different levels of academic achievements, because it gives great improvement to academic achievements.

As Chettri and Rout (2013) have stated, reading habits could develop an individual's critical thinking. Reading is also effective to improve learning activity which an individual can improve himself through self-learning. Furthermore, reading can be called as a process of thinking experience involving many complicated skills (Abdul Karim & Hasan, 2007). Nowadays, students will find it hard to face academic things and their will to learn, if they do not develop reading skills from their childhood (Annable, 2017). In other words, voluntary reading may indicate the extent of learning that students achieve. Reading is a receptive skill so it mostly trains learners' comprehension ability toward written text. Brown et al (2008) noted that learning may take place without intention and it is referred to as incidental learning. Vocabulary acquisition can also be incidental when students are not intentionally reading to improve their

reading skill or to memorize the meaning of some words. A possible way for incidental vocabulary learning is by extensive reading. It is reading for enjoyment as in its narrow sense. Many studies recognized extensive reading to be beneficial to academic improvement. In addition, it can shape a learner's motivation in reading. Thus, extensive reading can also be seen as an alternative to help develop a student's reading skill.

According to Suhana and Haryudin (2017), students' reading habits had a positive impact in improving reading comprehension. Their study shows a significant effect of reading habits toward students' reading comprehension. This study was conducted on senior high school students and consisted of 80 students. The Extensive Reading program assigns English Department's freshmen with various types of whilst and post-reading tasks such as answering a set of open-ended questions and making a summary. The questions provided as a post-reading assignment as well as summarizing can help students increase their reading comprehension. This can conclude that the Extensive Reading program may assist students with mastering reading comprehension indirectly by cultivating their reading habits and training their understanding of the text or reading passage used in the program's activities.

Iftanti (2012) in her research found that her subjects agreed that reading English can improve their English skills and knowledge, this is proved by the amount of reading practice. Her study shows that the students rarely read English text in their daily practices unless there is an obligation to do so. It means that reading English text is not their habitual activity, or that they don't do it out of their own initiative. Although the students are motivated to read English text, their reading practices were only through doing assignments. So it is hard to develop habitual reading when they are not doing it for pleasure. To further explain it, interest in reading comes from the enjoyment that a person can find in reading. What is known as pleasure reading also works the same way in which students spend a considerable amount of time reading not because they are burdened by or tasked with it but rather as a voluntary move. To put it simply, students extend their reading time beyond classroom-bound schedules or learning hours. This way, it will assist their reading habit to develop overtime. Other than that, it is also good for students because it can possibly influence the type of motivations that they have toward reading.

Habitual reading can influence many reading components such as reading comprehension and summarization skills. Study by McGeown et al., (2015), found that students' with greater reading habits and motivation will gain a deeper understanding of the text when engaged during reading tasks. This implies that

students with better reading habits are capable of comprehending text beyond superficial level. As noted in an earlier section that reading habits can stimulate learners' critical reading (Applegate, 2014; Karadeniz & Can, 2015), students will be able to analyze written text better and evaluate what the text lacks if they maintain their reading habit decently.

There are factors on how students perceive reading. A study by Huang et al (2014), showed that students' activities such as; part-time job, extracurricular activities could decrease students' reading activity. In Huang et al's (2014) study, the students who were involved in part time jobs, claimed that they never engaged in reading activities except when they were in class. Thanuskodi (2011) also added that student's working times shorten their time for reading activities. To illustrate, some students in higher education took part-time jobs and their working hours shortened their time for reading. Hence their habitual reading might not develop better because of this working time interference. It has been widely known that reading habits cannot be instantly developed in a short time. It especially needs time and space because it is hard to mix reading with other activities. For example, it would be difficult to focus on reading while working for something. The disadvantage such as having hectic assignment hours likely makes reading habits become inconsistent and it can also disrupt one's enjoyment in reading. The researcher believes that reading on young adults should be improved by motivating them on how they develop reading habits. Encouraging young adults to read more often so that they can develop reading habits better therefore is important.

There are also factors that contribute to the availability of time and spaces for reading. Huang, Capps, Blacklock, and Garza (2014) state that part time jobs and social networking are believed to have an influence on reading habits development. To illustrate, learners may extend their reading time because some of their peers or their teachers recommend a book or reading passage that may help them to finish their reading assignment or better yet, draws their interest toward a certain topic. It can be closely related to motivation and attitude that learners have toward reading. Thus, reading extensively needs to be developed in order for students to learn better through their reading passages.

With existing problems related to reading habits' cultivation, it would be best to use students' point of view about the program dedicated to improving their reading mastery. The present study thereby bears the following question; How are students' experiences with the Extensive Reading program based on the time allocation, the potential obstacle found during reading and the length of text used as reading materials?

Recent studies about reading rarely delves into the matter of a reading program and its contribution towards students' reading comprehension skill. In order to fill the existing gap, this study focuses on exploring how students' experience in the Extensive Reading program allows them to have better reading comprehension mastery based on the perceived time allocation, potential obstacles during reading and the length of text used as the reading materials.

## METHOD

This study was carried out on English Department's freshmen year students who were enrolled in the Extensive Reading program. The objective of the present study was taken from the research question asked, which was to figure out students' experiences with the Extensive Reading program based on the time allocation, the potential obstacle found during reading and the length of text used as reading materials. The design for the current study is qualitative by nature, with an additional extension of quantitative data in the form of descriptive statistics to further strengthen evidence gained. First, the study would try to explore how students perceived time allocation used in completing reading assignments given in the Extensive Reading program. Second, this study would also try to explain what kind of potential obstacles that students perceived as the most hindering to their reading comprehension mastery during extensive reading. Third, the study would also explore how the length of text in the reading passage contributed to their reading comprehension. The data took source from students' answers to a set of questions consisting of both open and close-ended questions. The data collection technique adopted an online survey form because it helped the researcher to organize the data for the analysis better. As for the data analysis, the researcher used descriptive and thematic analysis to discover repeated patterns that would give an insight to how time allocation, potential obstacles during reading and the length of text used as reading materials shape students' experiences in Extensive Reading program. Moreover, the qualitative analysis will also serve as a means to achieve the purpose of the present study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The following findings will be presented along with its interpretation and explanation according to the order of the purpose stated. The data will be served with descriptive statistics first then the themes that were deductively drawn from students' responses.

### *1. Students' experience based on time allocation of Extensive Reading*

First, the majority of English Department students perceived the time allocation given to complete reading assignments in the Extensive Reading program as 'sufficient' with 31 of total respondents (N=45) voting so, while 11 others regarded it as 'too short'. Only 2 respondents perceived the time allocation as 'too long' and 1 person considered it as 'just right'. This implies that the time allocation in the Extensive Reading program has set students in the right pace. By the right pace means that students didn't feel rushed or pressured with the reading assignments and post-reading tasks such as answering a set of questions that stimulate their high order thinking, finding the main ideas of the passage, and etc. In further context, this also indicates that the time allocation used by the instructors of the Extensive Reading program creates positive experiences for students, hence fostering their reading comprehension development. This is also supported by the result from students' response to whether or not the time allocation aided their reading mastery especially in comprehension. The result showed that 32 out of 45 respondents (71.1%) agreed that the time allocation set for reading assignments helped them understand the reading passages and materials better.

Two themes emerged after the open-ended question asking students' reason for their choice on the perceived time allocation is thematically analyzed. The first theme deducted from students' answers on the questionnaire was that motivated students in reading tend to finish reading assignments earlier than the given deadline. This shows that the majority of students have a good ability in time management, which can also be associated with a good maintenance of reading habits. This result corresponds to Applegate (2014) and Karadeniz & Can (2015)'s assertions that students who are able to maintain their reading habits are better in analyzing written text and evaluating the lacks found in a reading passage. Even though their reading habits were cultivated through a program; meaning that the attempt to improve reading skill is fundamentally deliberate with a time limitation to achieve a certain target; students can still benefit from reading extensively as much as when they initiate a relaxed, independent reading outside of the required target.

The following are excerpts directly cited from students' answers on the question that asked them to elaborate their reason based on their previous answer on "What do you think of the time allocation to complete reading assignments?":

"...With only 60,000 words per semester, I think it's quite acceptable for students to finish it on time."

"I've finished reading my target words some days before the deadline..."

"The time is sufficient enough to complete the assignment..."

## 2. Students' experience based on obstacle found during Extensive Reading

The second theme manifested was that unfamiliar vocabulary found in reading passages used as materials leads to regression in reading. Some students explicitly stated in their responses that reading passages with vocabularies which are hard to understand made it difficult for them to finish their reading assignments with the desired result. They had to re-read the reading passage several times before they were finally able to comprehend the text as a whole because they were not familiar with some words. This regression in reading that was found among students in the Extensive Reading program may hint at the difficulties encountered by those voting the time allocation as 'too short'.

As for the second finding, it is found that students perceived the structure of written text used as reading passages in the Extensive Reading program as the most hindering to improve their reading comprehension. About 29 (64,4%) out of 45 respondents agreed that unfamiliar vocabulary and complex grammar use intervened with their attempts to understand the text. Thematic analysis of students' reasoning specifically with this choice also pointed to the same direction where students admitted that their reading comprehension mastery was hindered by their limited knowledge of vocabulary and sentence structures. This further strengthens the evidence gained from previous themes drawn from the first finding, which was related to the role that vocabulary use in reading passage and how it intervenes students' reading comprehension mastery. At this point, it is safe to conclude that the problem with difficult vocabularies is tied to how students perceive the time allocation for reading assignments. That is, students' inability to contextualize unfamiliar vocabularies and complex sentences to form an in-depth understanding of the text unfavorably prolonged their time, which caused regression during reading and to some extent might also make them lose interest in reading. In other words, students needed extra time, which also rendered them extra efforts to comprehend the whole text when they couldn't understand the meaning of some words found in the reading passage.

The following are evidence directly cited from students' answers on the question that asked them to elaborate their reason based on their previous answer on

“Which of these do you think makes it difficult for you to improve your reading comprehension?”:

“I think the unfamiliar vocabulary makes it difficult for me to improve my reading comprehension, why? Because if I don't know the meaning of a certain word, of course I can't understand the material.”

“...Because I need to figure out the words or structures which are uncommon for me. yet, I'll try to find it through context clues or else although sometimes it's still harder than I thought.”

“If there is a lot of unfamiliar vocabulary, it's quite time consuming for me.”

### *3. Students' experience based on the length of text used as materials in Extensive Reading*

Aside from unfamiliar vocabularies and complex structure of the text, around 8 students (17.8%) consider the length of text as an obstacle to improve their reading comprehension while the other 5 (11.1%) voted for the time allocation, which presumably didn't meet their needs to complete the reading assignments. From this third finding, most students concluded that the longer the text, the longer the time they would need to finish reading it and that they might not be as motivated as when they started. However, this doesn't necessarily mean that students perceive extensive reading as negatively impacting their reading mastery. This was proven by the result that showed 38 out of 45 respondents (84.4%) voted 'yes' when asked about whether long texts used in the Extensive Reading program helped improve their reading comprehension. Thematic analysis of their reasoning for the choice revealed that students benefited from lengthy reading passages in a way that it helped them train their reading skills, such as in speed and comprehension, though some also expressed their concern for the knowledge retention that only lasted for a while. A somewhat intriguing finding gained from this showed that students might vary in terms of how they dealt with unfamiliar vocabularies. Some responses indicated that students considered long texts as motivating because it provided them with opportunities to improve their vocabulary size, hence indirectly helping them with their reading comprehension mastery. This is partly in line with McGeown et al's (2015) idea that stated students with greater motivation and reading habits will likely comprehend texts better since they're able to read past the

superficial representations. From this point, it can be said that unfamiliar vocabularies found in the text used as reading materials may have some sort of paradoxical role to the development of students' reading comprehension since it has both advantages and disadvantages at the same time. The following are evidence directly cited from students' answers to a question that asked them elaborate their reason to whether or not long texts help improve their reading skill:

“It pushes me even more in getting some new vocabularies/idioms that I have never seen before.”

“The more passages I will read, I think I'll get some new vocabularies.

“The text can help me learn new vocabulary and complex grammar.”

Another finding that was gained from students' responses in the question asking how the Extensive Reading program helped them improve reading comprehension showed that the majority (57.8%) or 26 out of 45 perceived that they were assisted by the time allocation, while 10 others (22.2%) chose the method used by the lecturer/ instructor and the rest 9 students (20%) thought that the text provided as reading materials contributed more. The evidence gained through thematic analysis following students' reasoning showed that vocabulary mastery is the main driving force for students' motivation given the time allocation that allows them to read more extensively. Although the motivation to expand knowledge of new vocabulary is more of an effect rather than a cause that students started on their own, it doesn't take away the advantage that students can still get from extensive reading. Moreover, other evidence also suggests that interesting texts will likely keep students motivated in reading.

“I think it's because of the time allocation. If we don't have to deal with deadlines, we can relax more and enjoy reading and understand the texts..”

“We are able to choose what we want to read and what we don't want to read, and it makes us feel relaxed. It's different when we are commanded to read what we don't want to read, we won't like it and we will be stressed.”

“The instructor methods are interesting and make learning much more fun and interactive.”

## CONCLUSION

### Conclusion

Students' experiences in extensive reading generally have shown many important points about how the Extensive Reading program has helped them in improving reading comprehension and their overall reading mastery. As discussed before, the importance of time allocation that the instructors/ lecturers set for students to complete their reading assignments determines their perceived effectiveness in extensive reading. It is worth noting how students' view towards time allocation implies the difficulties that they encountered in reading. For example, students who consider the time given in the Extensive Reading program as 'too short' might have found many troubles with completing their reading assignments. As the evidence suggested, they needed longer time to finish a passage because there were some words that they didn't understand. Although it was a part of students' struggle in improving their reading comprehension, it can't be denied that such problems may also lead them to develop ineffective reading strategies, which to some extent can result in a poor reading skill.

On the other hand, students who consider the time allocation as 'sufficient' are less likely to regress during reading. It can be seen from the finding that shows the majority of students finished their reading assignments earlier than the deadline, meaning that they are improving their reading comprehension in analytical and evaluative levels at a better pace. The evidence also implies that students are learning how to make better their reading strategy and good time management. There is also an indication that each might have a unique way of overcoming the obstacles with unfamiliar vocabularies or complex sentence structure. Although there's only a few examples that can be directly cited from the evidence suggested such as opening the dictionary to find the meaning of the unknown words or recontextualizing the sentence into understanding 'the bigger picture' that the passage is trying to portray, it still can be used to prove that the majority of students indeed have different approach to reading tasks assigned in the Extensive Reading program.

The length of the texts used as reading materials also played an important role in influencing students' opinion of how far they have been progressing with their reading mastery. The logic that seemingly prevalent in most of the respondents' answers concluded that the longer the text, the longer the time they will need to finish; hence putting

their motivation at stake. To explain further, the length of the text used as reading materials might make students lose their motivation to read due to the prolonged time to finish the whole passage. The evidence also suggested that students were concerned with their reading comprehension ability because they felt that their understanding of the text remained short-termed. As surprising as it may seem, students seemed to have a contradictory belief of lengthy reading passages and how they helped with their reading mastery. Other evidence suggested that students considered long texts as beneficial for them to improve their reading comprehension and expand their vocabulary size. This, however, shouldn't be perceived negatively since the contradiction that students showed indicates that they're also actively seeking for better improvement in reading skills and thus cultivating their reading habits.

### Suggestions

Students might feel overwhelmed because they're expected not to just read superficially, but also comprehending intrinsic aspects of the text such as the intended purpose, the attitude that the writer used in writing, the values and ideas that the writer offers, and so on. Though students' perceived experience showed that the Extensive Reading program has been effectively helping them to improve their reading mastery especially in reading comprehension, objective assessments from the evidence suggested need to be addressed properly. First, some students are still poor in terms of reading strategy and time management. Second, some reading passages may have lacked elements that can support students such as glossary to explain the unfamiliar words. Third, there are still students who are plain unmotivated in reading and haven't received proper attention from the program.

To deal with those problems, the instructors or lecturers in charge of the Extensive Reading program are advised to start working on teaching students reading strategies aside from reading skills. Furthermore, students can also be arranged in a sharing session that allows them to exchange information about time management. Next, authentic reading passages should be handed out with supporting elements to help students save time when they encounter unfamiliar words. This way, students can reduce the chance to regress during reading and so improve their comprehension better. As for students with low motivation or no motivation at all, it is advised to provide several texts with different topics or themes that students can select based on their interest. Heterogenous reading passages are believed to be beneficial in increasing not only students' reading skills but also insights on real-life matters.

As the present study is limited into a narrow scope, there needs to be further exploration to some interesting matters from the findings gained.

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