

The Perceptions of Indonesian University Students on the Use of Extensive Reading in English Grammar Class

Maryani^a

English Department, Maranatha Christian University, Surya Sumantri 65, Bandung, Indonesia

Keywords: Extensive Reading, Grammar, Students' Perceptions.

Abstract: It is undeniable that by reading texts in the target language, learners can achieve both the vocabularies and the grammar of the target language. Therefore, reading in the target language is necessary as students can observe various grammatical patterns in the texts. As one of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to offer the opportunities for lifelong learning, it is important for teachers to encourage students to read English texts extensively so they practice self-learning in their lives. The purpose of this study is to show the perceptions of Indonesian university students of the use of extensive reading (ER) activities in English Grammar class. The data were gained from 34 private-university students in Grammar class in Indonesia who submitted a weekly learning log that reflected their reading progress. To collect the data, an online questionnaire through Google Form was distributed at the end of the semester. The questionnaires result was analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The results indicated the positive and negative opinion regarding the students' perceptions on the use of ER in Grammar class. By implementing ER activities in English Grammar class, the students' grammar competence is hoped to develop naturally as they have been exposed to ER.


1 INTRODUCTION

Language learning either first language or second even foreign language is always related with learning its grammatical structures. Understanding grammar is important in learning a language, especially in second or foreign language learning, because it is the base of the language structure for learners to convey their ideas as Crystal (2004) defined grammar as “the structural foundation of our ability to express ourselves. The more we are aware of how it works, the more we can monitor the meaning and effectiveness of the way we and others use language. It can help foster precision, detect ambiguity, and exploit the richness of expression available in English” (as cited in Tuan & Thi Minh Doan, 2010). Therefore, it is necessary for learners to learn and understand the rules of grammar, also to apply those rules accurately. Learners also need to observe how those rules are applied in written texts, such as books or e-books.

Learning grammar in Indonesia is commonly done through explicit grammar instruction in class.

Teachers usually introduce grammar rules and ask their students to do grammar exercises. As Al-Mekhlafi & Nagaratnam (2011) pointed out that this kind of teaching approach is still traditional, as a result, learners' grammatical knowledge is increasing, but they lack the ability of applying the grammar rules in the authentic language (as cited in Lee et al., 2015). Therefore, there is a new perspective of learning grammar by exposing learners to reading in the target language. Lee et al. (2015) stated that this new perspective is aligned with the approaches to grammar instruction that “reject discrete sentence-level grammar teaching and emphasize using numerous examples of a target structure in context to develop knowledge of form-meaning connections”. Moreover, Christine Nuttall (1982) argued that “the best way to improve one's knowledge of a foreign language is to go and live among its speakers, the next best way is to read extensively in it” (Renandya, 2007, p. 136).

Comprehending the grammar of a target language and being able to use it in daily life situation is a proof of a learner's success of mastering a language;

^a <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5863-475X>

however, there are other things which support one's language mastery. Renandya (2007) argued that there are many factors that contribute to lack of success in learning a second or foreign language, such as learners' lack of motivation, language classrooms that are too crowded, inappropriate learning strategies, less language practice; however, he believed that learners' lack of suitable input is the biggest factors that supports the learning success. Renandya (2007) further stated that as the first language (L1) input is available plentifully, but the second language (L2) input is limited. He mentioned that teachers cannot create learning environment that is similar to L1; however, teachers can "immerse our students in the language they are learning by making available a large supply of books and other print or non-print materials in the classroom" (p. 134). His statement supports reading as important activity in language learning. Renandya (2007) also claimed that after learners are immersed with L2 rich language environment for a period of time, students' language proficiency will improve dramatically.

To support one of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which is to offer the opportunities for students' lifelong learning, it is important for teachers to encourage students to read English texts extensively so they can do self-learning in their lives. Reading extensively or extensive reading (ER) becomes more popular among second language researchers and teachers (Mikami, 2020). Richards and Schmidt (2002) defined extensive reading (ER) as "reading in quantity and in order to gain a general understanding of what is read. It is intended to develop good reading habits, to build up knowledge of vocabulary and structure, and to encourage a liking for reading" (Yamashita, 2008, pp. 661-662).

Several benefits of ER have been argued by several researchers. First, according to Day and Bamford (1998), extensive reading (ER) gives learners the opportunity of reading different genres of English books, delighting in the process also simultaneously developing their reading skill (as cited in Ng et al., 2019). Second, ER is possible to assist L2 learners to study autonomously, particularly in EFL environments where there is limited exposure to the target language (Mermelstein, 2014). Third, Yamashita (2015) also argued that both researchers and language teachers put their interest in ER because by reading extensively, readers' feelings are engaged (as cited in Mikami, 2020). Fourth, the amount of reading contributes to learners' competence of second or foreign language as Renandya (2007) stated that "the amount of free reading that ESL students reported doing was a significant predictor of their

TOEFL test scores and their ability to judge the grammaticality of complex English structures (Lee, Krashen, Gibbons 1996, cited in Krashen 2003)". Kiyomi et al., (2018) were also in line with Renandya (2007) as they pointed out that "ER provides EFL learners with not only linguistic input, but also opportunities to engage with reading processes repeatedly by themselves". However, Ng et al. (2019) stated that in order to take ER seriously, learners should be monitored and the result should be graded.

There are various popular terms for extensive reading programmes, namely: "Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading (USSR), Drop Everything and Read (DEAR), and Silent Uninterrupted Reading for Fun (SURF), and the Book Flood programme" (Renandya, 2007, p. 135), he concluded that ER has the same purpose, which is language learners read various kinds of reading materials that results in their lifelong habit of reading (Renandya, 2007). Based on his experience of reading numerous English books, Renandya (2007) admitted that it has given significant contribution to his language development; on top of that; he obtained better grades in grammar tests compared to his friends who have spent hours of test preparation.

Moreover, there are several latest researches dealing with the use of extensive reading in language learning. First, Yamashita (2008) conducted a research on the effect of ER on L2 proficiency on 38 Japanese university students who were enrolled in EFL Reading class. The participants were tested twice: pre-test and post-test using placement tests and ER tests. They also filled in a post-class questionnaire about their English exposure in the whole semester. He found that the effect of ER was more on the students' general reading skills than their linguistic ability.

Second, Mermelstein (2014) did a one-year research on the use of ER for improving EFL learners' writing. The participants were 211 Taiwanese undergraduate EFL learners which were divided into control group and treatment group. The students in the treatment group were introduced to Oxford Bookworms and Penguin Readers grader reader series. They did a sustained silent reading activity for 15-20 minutes in class and they also read minimum three pages per day from the books provided in their own free time. They were also asked to complete a reading record. Whereas the students in the control group were asked to do a one-hour weekly homework that is related with intensive reading activities. The researcher used pre-test and post-test in the form of paragraph writing assignments to measure his participants' writing. The result showed

that the students in the treatment group gained better writing performance in terms of organization of ideas, content, vocabularies, and language use.

Third, Lee et al. (2015) investigated the effects of extensive reading and translation on 124 EFL learners' knowledge of general grammar also articles and prepositions. Moreover, they observed the attitudes of these learners in South Korea for two semesters. The instruments used were the attitude survey and the linguistic tests. They found that learners' L2 proficiency affected their attitudes and grammar knowledge. Low proficiency learners showed more negative attitudes, whereas high proficiency learners showed more positive attitudes and grammar knowledge.

Fourth, Yen (2018) examined the benefits of extensive reading on Vietnamese university students' reading fluency. There were two groups of students participated in the ER program: treatment and control. The treatment group did ER for two months, whereas the control group did the homework based on the reading materials in class. The treatment group was given English general test, pre-test, post-test, reading inventory template, and online stories. They were also interviewed after completing the ER program. The results showed that the students in the treatment group has better reading speed than those in the control group. Besides, the students who disliked reading at first became liked reading and willing to continue reading even after the program has ended.

Fifth, Kiyomi et al. (2018) conducted a research on 431 Japanese EFL students on how extensive reading could help improve their grammatical knowledge and reading fluency. These students were grouped into experimental and control groups. They were divided into three classes based on a latent profile analysis. These two groups used different textbooks and were taken three grammar tests and fluency check. The findings showed that the participants' grammatical ability and their reading fluency has developed due to ER; however, the factor that is crucial to the participants' improvement is their individual amount of reading extensively.

Based on recent researches above, it can be seen that extensive reading are proven effective in language learning, especially in reading, writing, and grammar. Furthermore, to date, none of the above studies address the language learners' perceptions on the use of ER in Grammar class for Indonesian university students. Thus, this study tries to fill in the research gap, which is to discover the Indonesian university students' perception on the use of extensive reading in Grammar class by answering these two research questions: first, what are the

benefits that the university students obtain regarding the use of extensive reading in learning Grammar; second, what are the students' opinion on applying extensive reading activities in Grammar class. By investigating the learners' perception on the use of ER in learning Grammar, it is hoped that the result of this study will provide insights and strategies for English teachers or lecturers in implementing ER in their Grammar classes.

2 METHODS (AND MATERIALS)

To answer the research questions, a qualitative research was used. Open-ended online questionnaire is used to collect various students' perceptions regarding the use of ER in Grammar class. In order to analyze the questionnaire data taken, descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were used. Braun & Clarke (2006, p. 8) defined thematic analysis as "a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail".

Regarding the participants of this research, 34 Indonesian private-university students in Grammar: Verb Patterns class were involved. They joined the class for one semester from August until December 2019, in which each class lasts for about 90-100 minutes. In Grammar class, these students learnt various sentence patterns, such as transitive and intransitive sentences, active and passive voice, the use of inchoative verbs, etc. Besides answering the grammar exercises in the students' handout, they were asked to submit one learning log each week to Google Classroom. Each student was asked to read or listen to at least one e-book from er-central.com every week. This website offers hundreds of graded reader e-books in various topics. It turns out that each student in the class read one e-book per meeting as it was instructed. None of the students missed the task, this is due to the points collected after submitting each learning log.

After reading the e-book(s) that the students like which suits their level, then they were asked to post their response (50-100 words) to the question provided in each learning log in Google Classroom. Samples of the questions provided are (1) What do you like/dislike from the story that you have read? (2) What will you change from the story? (3) How will you change the ending of the story? (4) Which character of the story that you like/dislike and why? etc.

In collecting the data, online questionnaire through Google Form was distributed at the end of the

semester to each student. To make each student feel at ease to express their opinion, the questionnaire remains anonymous. The questionnaire covers eight questions related to the ER activities, such as the following:

1. How many e-books have you read in ER website this semester?
2. Why do you read e-books from ER website?
3. What level of e-books that you have read?
4. Does your level of e-books increase gradually from the beginning of the semester until the end of the semester? Why or why not?
5. What benefits do you get from reading e-books from ER website regarding your vocabulary knowledge?
6. What benefits do you get from reading e-books from ER website regarding your grammar knowledge?
7. What do you think of applying ER activity in Grammar class? Agree/disagree? Why?
8. Will you keep on your reading habit like what you have done in this class? (either from ER website or not) Yes/no, why?

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the analysis of the first research question about the benefits that the university students obtain regarding the use of extensive reading in learning Grammar. The questionnaire results show that 34 responses, 27 (79.4%) students showed their positive responses and admitted that they are benefited from reading extensively, as can be seen in the following answers:

S2: "I can improve my grammar by reading the e-books."

S3: "I can determine about what the tenses that the author using."

S7: "I believe that I could apply what I learned in class into the reflections I made, so I could remember & review the material."

S11: "It helps remind me of the grammar that have been used in the e-books."

S16: "I learn new patterns from ER website."

S17: "I know from the stories that this should be with this, or something like that because they use simple pattern and easy to understand."

S20: "It helps me to improve my grammar, even though I still have some grammar mistakes."

S24: "My grammar knowledge increased from reading e-books from ER website because I found it easier to read in short texts and the more I read

English texts, the easier for me to understand grammar."

S27: "I know the right pattern for particular tenses"

S32: "Some of ER stories are still grammatically incorrect. However, thanks to that, I could analyze which part is wrong."

Moreover, 5 (14.7%) students stated that they only gained few benefits from the ER activities, as can be seen in the following answers:

S1: "not that many"

S8: "Not much, since it doesn't really differ from one level to another level grammar-wise."

S12: "It helped quite a bit since it's easy to understand."

S15: "I think it help me a little bit, because the stories usually written in a proper grammar."

S31: "not really improve"

However, 2 (5.9%) students did not feel any benefits after reading extensively, as can be seen in the following answers:

S6: "I didn't get benefits from e-books for grammar knowledge because when I reading a book I didn't care about the grammar, I just enjoyed it."

S18: "I don't feel any benefits in grammar to be honest, but I don't know, maybe I just don't realize it."

The above findings indicate that majority of the students have benefited from reading extensively. They could remember and review the grammatical patterns learnt in class from ER and by writing their responses in the learning logs. Their comprehension of English tenses has improved. Besides, they could learn new grammatical patterns from e-books provided in ER website. They also admitted that the more they read English texts, the easier for them to understand grammar. Nevertheless, only few students did not benefit from reading extensively as S6 admitted that he/she did not care about the grammar when he/she were reading and S18 stated that he/she did not realize about its benefit.

Regarding the second research question, this section describes the students' opinion on applying extensive reading activities in Grammar class. The questionnaire results show that 34 responses, 27 (79.4%) students showed their agreement towards the use of ER in Grammar class, as can be seen in the following answers:

S5: "Agree, because I think by reading ER I can improve my grammar and vocabulary."

S7: "I agree because it is quite fun to put your own thoughts and opinions into the reflections. However, I believe that to improve our grammar & vocabulary

further, perhaps we could read from other ER websites.”

S8: “I agree, what's there to lose? It only takes like mostly half an hour to finish the task so it's not that hard of a task and it can add reading time to students who aren't familiar to reading on a weekly basis.”

S11: “It can help the students to increase their grammar skills and vocabularies.”

S13: “Agree, because in my opinion it makes class to be more entertaining and fun”

S20: “Agree. It pushes me to read a lot and of course helps me to improve my grammar”

S24: “I agree, because it helps me improving not only my grammar skill, but also my reading, listening, and writing skills.”

S28: “Agree. Because if we want to increase our English skill we have to read more to add more knowledge from other sources”

Moreover, there are a few students who opposed to the use of ER in Grammar class. 2 (5.9%) students had no opinion because they stated:

S10: “I don't know”

S31: “Don't really know”

However, 5 (14.7%) students disagreed with the use of ER in Grammar class, as can be seen in the following answers:

S1: “disagree because the readings in the website are very simple even the high level ones”

S14: “Disagree. Honestly, yes it does improve my reading skill and maybe grammar skill, but it's not really suitable I think. It's better to give an ER reading to students in Reading/Writing Class.”

S18: “It would be better for reading class I guess.”

S23: “disagree. because in grammar 3 class, every ER material below level 8 is irrelevant with what was taught in the class”

S32: “Disagree. It would be better if ER activity applied in reading class instead.”

The above findings show that more than half of the students agreed on the use of extensive reading in Grammar class as they stated that ER not only improve their grammar, but also their vocabularies, reading, listening, and writing skills. On top of that, several students clearly stated that the ER activities have made them feel entertaining and fun as S7 stated “I agree because it is quite fun to put your own thoughts and opinions into the reflections...”. Although the majority agreed to the use of ER in Grammar class, but 5 students disagreed. They preferred to use ER not in Grammar class, but in Reading or Writing class. One student mentioned that he/she disagreed because “...the readings in the

website are very simple even the high-level ones” (S1).

The findings of this study is in line with Richards and Schmidt's (2002) definition of ER: “is intended to develop good reading habits, to build up knowledge of vocabulary and structure, and to encourage a liking for reading” (Yamashita, 2008, pp. 661-662). It can be seen from the students' opinion that the use of ER activities in Grammar class has helped them to improve their reading habits, grammar and vocabularies, and also to push them to read a lot as S20 shared: “...It(ER) pushes me to read a lot and of course helps me to improve my grammar”.

The findings is also in line with the research of Day and Bamford (1998), they claimed that ER makes the readers feel delighted in reading and improving their reading skill (as cited in Ng et al., 2019) and Yamashita's (2015) argument that that readers' feelings are engaged by reading extensively (as cited in Mikami, 2020). Several students in the study admitted that ER activities have contributed to their being entertained, especially they could express their ideas in the learning logs after they finished reading or listening to e-books that they like.

Moreover, the findings is also in line with the research of Mermelstein (2014) as he noted that ER is one way of assisting L2 learners in EFL environment to do an autonomously study. Several students showed their agreement to the use of ER that supports autonomous learning as he/she stated that “...(through ER activities) the students can learn by themselves alone in the home...” (S17).

Compared to the previous researches on the use of ER, the findings of this study does not support Yamashita's (2008) findings of the effect of ER, which is more on the students' general reading skills than their linguistic ability. From the questionnaire results, it can be seen that most students noted that their grammar skill has improved due to ER activities, despite of their reading and vocabularies. Besides, the findings of this study also supports the result of Mermelstein's (2014) research as both studies have shown ER is correlated with the improvement of students' writing skill, though in this particular study, grammar skill is more emphasized by the students. Moreover, the findings of this study is also in line with the findings of Yen's study (2018) as the students who did not get used to reading before the ER activities became liked reading and they were willing to continue reading after finishing ER activities. Furthermore, the findings of this study also supports the findings of the research of Kiyomi et al. (2018) as most participants' grammatical ability has developed

due to ER, but only several participants mentioned about their reading skills have improved too.

4 CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the finding of this study underlines two main points: first, the students' positive and negative perceptions on the benefits of the use of ER in Grammar class. Second, the students' perception on the use of ER activities in Grammar class. Majority of students have benefited from ER activities in improving their grammar skill on top of reading, writing, listening, and vocabularies. Most students also agree on the use of ER in Grammar class as they are encouraged to read more which helps them to develop their grammar skill.

Despite the findings, there are several limitations of the study: first, the number of participants is relatively small. Second, there is no treatment and compared group in this study. Third, the use of individual interview is not used. Therefore, future studies should include larger numbers of students, use more rigid research design, and use interview to gain deeper insights of the students' perceptions regarding the topic.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author gratefully acknowledge Maranatha Christian University for providing financial support for this study.

REFERENCES

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.
- Kiyomi, Y., Atsuko, T., & Kyoko, O. (2018). How does extensive reading help Japanese EFL learners to develop grammatical knowledge and reading fluency. *Journal of Extensive Reading*, 4, 1–11. <https://jalt-publications.org/content/index.php/jer/article/view/117>.
- Lee, J., Schallert, D. L., & Kim, E. (2015). Effects of extensive reading and translation activities on grammar knowledge and attitudes for EFL adolescents. *System*, 52, 38–50. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2015.04.016>.
- Mermelstein, A. D. (2014). Improving EFL learners' reading levels through extensive reading. *Reading Matrix: An International Online Journal*, 14(2), 227–242.
- Mikami, Y. (2020). Goal Setting and learners' motivation for extensive reading: forming a virtuous cycle. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 32(1), 28–48.
- Ng, Q. R., Renandya, W. A., & Chong, M. Y. C. (2019). Extensive reading: Theory, research and implementation. *Teflin Journal*, 30(2), 171–186. <https://doi.org/10.15639/teflinjournal.v30i2/171-186>.
- Renandya, W. A. (2007). The power of extensive reading. *RELC Journal*, 38(2), 133–149. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688207079578>.
- Tuan, L. T., & Thi Minh Doan, N. (2010). Studies in literature and language teaching english grammar through games. *CS Canada. Studies in Literature and Language*, 1(7), 61–75. <https://url2.cl/fEvBY>.
- Yamashita, J. (2008). Extensive reading and development of different aspects of L2 proficiency. *System*, 36(4), 661–672. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2008.04.003>.
- Yen, T. (2018). The benefits of extensive reading for Vietnamese EFL learners. *Proceedings of the Fourth World Congress on Extensive Reading*, 64–72.