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A tale from extensive readers in an online extensive reading classroom

Extensive
reading in
online
classrooms

AQ: 1

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Abstract

Purpose – While extensive reading has been widely implemented in face-to-face settings, few studies have examined how extensive reading in online classrooms is enacted. The present study aims to explore students' voice in online extensive reading classrooms.

Design/methodology/approach – This brief report is part of classroom action research. It involved 3 undergraduate students majoring in English education who undertook extensive reading course during the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants documented their reading experience through digital storytelling (DST) at the end of the semester. Data from the DST were collected and analyzed using thematic analysis with narrative approach.

AQ: 6

Findings – The story began with the recollection of the participants' memories in the past when they studied English. It then moved to students expressing meeting the intersection between challenges and opportunities when becoming an extensive reader. The digital story ended with a reflection on the action of the participants when engaged in extensive reading and its learning tasks. The present research suggests that extensive reading teachers should involve students in meaningful but flexible online activities to develop reading habit and interest, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Originality/value – Ample studies have investigated how students experience extensive reading class situated in either online or offline setting. However, few studies have explored students' voices when they have to do extensive reading online during university closure due to COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, this study investigates students' voice from DST as a data collection technique.

Keywords Digital storytelling, Extensive reading, Narrative inquiry

Paper type Case study

Introduction

AQ: 7

Extensive reading (ER) has long been grounded in Krashen's notion (1982) of pleasure reading that allows readers to select reading topics in their first language that interest them. In response, Davis (1995) emphasizes the importance of incorporating ER into foreign language learning curriculum. It is believed that ER is helpful for language learners to acquire vocabulary as the main resource for supporting language learning (Nation, 2001). Supporting this hypothesis, ample empirical evidence has demonstrated how ER can be used to facilitate learners' vocabulary enrichment. For example, Ro (2017) showed evidence that ER club could best serve as a platform that mediated interactions among readers and expanded their lexical knowledge. Additionally, Suk (2016) reported an experimental study conducted at a Korean university which revealed that there was a positive impact of ER on undergraduate students' reading comprehension, reading rate and vocabulary. With this in mind, ER can become a catalyst for actions in sustaining either English as a second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL) curriculum because it helps learners develop L2 vocabulary as the basis for learning a language.

Previous studies on ER also have showed positive results in EFL settings in higher education contexts. In South Africa, Nhapulo *et al.* (2017) found that students majoring in journalism who studied English III could improve their reading speed through ER program.



Previous studies on ER have also been reported that ER supports other language skills development. [Hadiyanto \(2019\)](#) revealed that ER helped undergraduate students build creativity in writing a short story. Furthermore, conducting research which involved English teachers in Korea, [Cho and Krashen \(2019\)](#) found that there was a positive and significant correlation between ER and competence in four language skills (speaking, reading, writing and listening). From psychological perspectives, past literature examining the correlation between ER and readers' attitude also grew significantly. To mention a few, [Peterson \(2022\)](#) found that ER helped students build learner autonomy in choosing their own reading materials which, in turn, created positive feeling, emotion and motivation. In the same vein, [Chen \(2018\)](#) reported that undergraduate students engaged in ER program improved their motivation in reading and built their reading interest. These previous studies indicate that ER as a pedagogical orientation can significantly impact on both students' cognitive domains (i.e. comprehension, creativity) and affective domains (i.e. learner autonomy, reading interest).

The ubiquitous presence of technology in language learning has impacted the pedagogical-oriented implementation of ER. [Kirchhoff and Mision \(2022\)](#) promoted the utilization of audio-assisted extensive reading which refers to audio narration of electronic reading materials. They encouraged their university students to engage in reading while listening (RWL) that they could access from the electronic library. The study reported that the students benefited pronunciation, prosody and intonation improvement. Meanwhile, [Milliner and Cote \(2015\)](#) introduced digital-mediated ER project to their university students through which the students were engaged in ER program through mobile devices. Their study pointed out the pedagogical implication which emphasized on the importance of software training and ER practice. Although conducting ER online is feasible, the pedagogical design of online ER needs further observation. In addition, few studies have investigated the enactment of ER in an online setting in response to COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the recent study explores undergraduate students' voices as extensive readers in an online ER classroom that they experienced amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Method

This article reports the narrative data garnered from action research conducted in an extensive reading classroom. Grounded in narrative inquiry lens, narrative data provide a deeper understanding of participants' unique lived experience ([James, 2018](#)). This study aims to explore students' experience as extensive readers focusing on how they built interest in reading and faced their fluctuating motivation when ER classrooms were enacted online.

Participants

The study involved 35 undergraduate students of an Islamic university situated in Indonesia. Their age ranged between 19 and 20 years old. They were in the third semester and majored in English education department at a state Islamic university in Indonesia. However, in this case, 3 female students named Rini, Munah and Rina (pseudonyms) were recruited to participate in this study. While the rest of the students received similar pedagogical interventions such as weekly reporting their reading of selected e-books, sharing what their read to other students online and engaging in reflective practice, the three participants were recruited based on three reasons. First, they always submitted their reading log on time. Secondly, they were willing to voluntarily participate. Despite the voluntary nature, their comfort and privacy were maintained. Finally, they shared their past, present and future voice of becoming extensive readers in the online classroom through digital storytelling (DST). The temporal transition experienced by the participants can shed a light on how their past and present experience can inform their future for improvement purposes ([Clandinin and](#)

Rosiek, 2007). Furthermore, Manankil-Rankin (2016) highlights that narrative inquirers immersed themselves in the participants' stories, empathizing deeply with them and tuning into their emotions. Anchored in this argument, the data obtained from the three student participants were considered sufficient for addressing the research objective.

Research procedure

Extensive reading is a compulsory course with 2 credits. Prior to taking the extensive reading course, they passed intensive reading class which aimed to build their reading comprehension skills. Their reading skill was at the intermediate level. During the prevalence of COVID-19 pandemic, the extensive reading classrooms were enacted online. To facilitate students' learning, they were taught virtually using online learning platforms such as Google Meet, Zoom and WhatsApp. As part of action research, the students were engaged in learning activities through the following cycles including planning, action, observation and reflection (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988). These cycles were later translated into learning stages below.

- (1) Planning: the researchers and the students conducted online briefing to discuss the learning goals and reading resources via Zoom. This aimed to help students understand the learning goals (i.e. built reading interest, expanded vocabulary knowledge and use, improved other language skills), reading resources (i.e. Novelah application, <https://freegradedreaders.com/wordpress/>) and course outcomes (i.e. book review and digital storytelling). In addition to this, the students were encouraged to write reading logs submitted weekly to a learning management system platform.
- (2) Action: the students were put in 9 groups of 3–4 students. They were requested to read a chapter or two of the selected title depending on their preference, spare time and situation at home. They jotted down the date and time, time spent, summary (50 words), reflection (50 words) and new vocabulary (between 5 and 10 words). They discussed what they had read with their group members, using virtual communication application. At the end, they wrote a book review and turned it into a podcast posted on Instagram.
- (3) Observation: all students were invited to meet online on a scheduled meeting of extensive reading class using Zoom, and the meetings were digitally recorded. They were asked to share the chapter(s) they read to other members of other groups in between 5 and 10 min. In response, other group members could ask questions or confirmation. In one meeting, three groups shared and discussed what they had read in turns. The observation focused on evaluating students' engagement and participation during the online discussion.
- (4) Reflection: the students were encouraged to create a digital storytelling that voiced their learning experience. Digital storytelling refers to a personal story exploring their individual experience when doing ER. They made the digital storytelling by combining still images, narration, sounds and effects using digital tools in between 5 and 7 min. They started from telling the past, learning expectation, ER learning experience and learning gain. One example of the students' digital storytelling can be accessed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Imr7lfZPSgg>

From this cyclical process, data were collected from the participants' DST. Lang *et al.* (2020, p. 5) propose DST as data because it is a powerful tool in "(a) cultivating understanding through genuine conversation, (b) addressing the challenges of language, and (c) apprehending the immediacy of understanding."

Data analysis

In the data analysis, the participants' DST were transcribed and analyzed thematically. In this study, the thematic analysis of narrative was employed. Barkhuizen *et al.* (2014) pinpoint that thematic analysis of narrative categorizes and constructs narrative data into narrative writing. This thematic narrative analytical approach is used to explore the participants' past history as a language learner, experience in facing the challenges and perceived opportunities as extensive readers. The emerging themes are critical to explore how online extensive reading shaped the participants' attitude as engaged extensive readers in an online learning environment. Following this step, lexical coding was applied by underlying phrases, clauses or sentences in line with the objectives of the study. After this stage was completed, the emerging themes were interpreted.

Findings and discussion

Students' voice: my starting point

For the first, the students were encouraged to briefly provide their personal background in their DST. For instance, when the participants began their story, they recollected their memory of being encouraged by a personal figure to learn English deeply and professionally. The encouragement given was expected to impact greatly on the student participants' motivational drive to study English education for their future as pre-service English teachers. From the study, it was found that the participants showed how their teacher, father and twin sister inspired them to learn English. Rini began her story by expressing that she had no passion in reading, with no reasons. When she was first introduced to extensive reading class, she remembered her secondary school English teacher who motivated her to enjoy reading for pleasure. *"But there was one factor that encouraged and forced me to read [motivational factor]. When I was in the 3rd grade of senior high school, my English teacher taught all the students patiently in his way."* (Rini's DST, 00:09–00:21). The second DST was from Munah. Her story was surprising because she started her story by telling that she actually disliked learning a language. However, one day her father encouraged her to learn English because her father thought that she might find it helpful when she talked to a foreigner in English. *"At some point, I started to learn to speak English. My father asked me to. He told me that if I could speak English, I could help foreigners [purposeful factor] who needed help."* (Munah's DST, 00:16–00:27). Finally, Rina expressed that she preferred to learn English with a partner so that she could share and discuss what she read for her extensive reading class. She was lucky that she had her twin sister who also studied English in the same department. Rina's twin sister was her partner doing the reading assignment at home during the implementation of online learning. *"It is not a severe problem for me because having a twin sister that studied in the same class and taking the same subject makes me more simply finishing our task together [collaborating factor]."* (Rina's DST, 00:16–00:27).

From the findings, it can be seen that the inspirational figures featured in the students' DST played a significant role in developing motivation in reading. Williams and Burden (1997) categorize teachers, parents and peers as extrinsic motivation. Furthermore, motivation that is embedded in interpersonal relation may refer to interpersonal motivation, a motivation that is built through interpersonal relation (Liu and Young, 2015). Particularly in classroom contexts, Chen (2018) found that students' reading motivation can be built and sustained by engaging students in various learning tasks.

Meeting the intersection along the way

In this study, the participants read their novel online either from their laptop or mobile phone. Reading extensively on screen was a great challenge for the participants. Rini found this stressful. *"Reading an online novel book means we spent our time using a smartphone because it's a very long English story, a novel. However, the experience of mine was I was getting tired"*

[physical burnout] of reading English. Sometimes I got some interference that happened when I was doing it; get a headache, dull, unfocused. [physical burnout]" (Rini's DST, 04:28–04:53). In a similar vein, Rina was concerned about her eye health. "Using an online novel, we can read maximal an hour only per chapter. If it is longer than that, it will make our eyes getting tired and heavy [physical burnout]. The radiation from our screen harms our health [anxiety of illness]" (Rina's DST: 06:02–06:11). While Rini and Rina were worried about their health, Munah was concerned more about her busy schedule. "It was not that bad when I did the first twelve chapters. However, still I struggled to arrange the right time [time management disorder] to read the chapters as I was a committee of a webinar and leading an Indonesian basic language group on SPEAK, a language learning platform, at the same time. Not to mention the other assignments which were chasing me" (Munah's DST, 03:07–03:38).

Although the online ER was quite challenging, the participants could see some opportunities. Rini tried to manage the time between reading and submitting the report. "Besides, I was so busy with some events recently. Usually, I finished the reading log maximal five days before the submission day. But recently, I did it for two days and even a day before. However, it was not an excuse not to have time to read [sense of responsibility]. It is based on our strategy to manage the time [self-regulated time management] as well as possible" (Rini's DST, 05:18–05:41). Meanwhile, Munah expressed that she could improve her English skill. "I also found out that extensive reading helps improve language skills [language skills improvement]. I read a lot of Harry Potter fanfictions on Wattpad. It improved my English skill, especially in speaking and writing [language skills improvement]. It also helped me double my vocabulary [lexical knowledge development]" (Munah's DST, 05:44–06:02). Finally, Rina enjoyed the story and its plot. "Day by day, I felt as if I was playing a character in that novel [pleasure reading] because the romantic genre usually narrated the story that mostly happened to me. When Cheska, the main character, started to fall in love with Jed, I was also happy. I felt what Cheska felt. [pleasure reading]" (Rina's DST, 02:01–02:14).

From the participants' DSTs, it could be seen that the participants encountered some challenges during their online ER classroom. They experienced physical and mental burnouts (i.e. feeling tired, eyes getting tired) because they spent much time in front of their gadgets reading the online novel. This is echoed by Huang's study (2013) which showed that the participants were concerned about their eyes due to the long blue light exposure. Notwithstanding the challenges, the participants elucidated that ER helped them improve their language skills and vocabulary. This finding is consistent with studies by Hadiyanto (2019) and Cho and Krashen (2019), indicating that ER impacted the development of other language skills. Additionally, Peterson (2022) reported that students would enjoy their reading if they were given freedom to read what they like.

What could I reflect on?

In the DST, the participants were requested to reflect on the experience of doing the online extensive reading class. Munah ended her DST by reflecting on the importance of extensive reading as a pre-service teacher. "This extensive reading helped me improve my English or any language skills other than English and increase my vocabulary. As an English education student who will be a teacher in the future, I must read a lot [self-reflection]. Thus, I need to keep motivating myself to read and sustain my reading interest" (Munah's DST, 06:28–06:47). Meanwhile, Rina claimed that ER and its learning tasks helped her with English skills improvement and creativity. "In my opinion, the extensive reading subject can improve our skill, especially in reading. Not only about reading, because we will get several advantages also such as speaking, listening, and writing. We can improve our speaking aspect by making a video [creativity] for our middle test. Moreover, making a reading log indirectly teach us how to write well. Because before we submit it, we correct the structure in grammarly.com" (Rina's

DST, 05:11–05:25). Finally, Rini perceived the growth of her reading interest after one semester ER program. “By doing extensive reading activity in one semester, *my reading interest arises slowly* [self-reflection]. *Because if I compare with my habit before, I never read even an Indonesian reading*” (Rini’s DST, 05:43–05:57).

The findings show that the students’ DSTs voiced a similar reflection. Reflecting on the voices, they expressed the importance of building interest in reading and advantages of engaging themselves in ER and its tasks. In particular, Munah’s reflection supported the notion that “reading is the driving force in teacher education” (Litheko and Maduekwe, 2011, p. 72). Additionally, the findings suggest that teachers or teacher educators can design ER activities that allow students to exercise their creativities such as making book review through video podcast at the end of their reading. This aligns with Hadiyanto’s (2019) study that found that integrating collaborating story writing project into ER program enabled students to build creativity and imagination.

Conclusion

The present study explores undergraduate students’ voice in an online extensive reading (ER) class through a thematic analysis of narrative. The findings of the study show that interpersonal motivation, derived from interpersonal relation between student and teacher, parents and peers, plays an important role in building students’ motivation to learn English, particularly in ER class. This suggests that learning motivation should be built to help students sustain their learning, for example through learning collaboration. Furthermore, students’ narrative revealed challenges (mental and physical burnout) and opportunities (language skills improvement) encountered by the participants during the online ER class. Drawing from this finding, flexible but meaningful tasks incorporated in ER classroom should be reconsidered by teachers or teacher educators. Finally, DST has served as a media that facilitated student participants to engage in reflective practice. Data obtained from DST allowed teacher educators to reformulate the enactment of ER for pre-service teachers because it can become a powerful tool to empower their literacies.

While the findings of the study contribute significantly to the growing body of literature on ER, they cannot be generalized to other contexts the whole contexts of the study. It is due to the limited numbers of participants and data collection technique used. Thus, future studies on online ER in response to COVID-19 pandemic are still needed. For example, studies are needed on how innovative online ER can be designed with minimal impacts of technology exposure on students’ physical or mental health.

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AQ: 5

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