

# Developing Students Level of Autonomy through Extensive Reading Activity in EFL Context

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**Abstract**—Learner autonomy places important role in language learning because it promotes independent role to increase the learning progress as well as learning achievement. Reading on the other hand becomes one of the important sectors of language capability; thus, the purpose of this study was to analyze the affectivity of reading activity towards students' level of learner autonomy. The study aims to reveal whether an extensive reading activity affects the readiness of becoming autonomous learners. Classroom observations and questionnaire were the primary tools of the study. A case study design was used in analyzing the data to gather in depth insight from the actual settings and participants. The results show that extensive reading activity affects students' level of learner autonomy since it indirectly forces the students to understand the passage and practice in and outside the classroom context.

**Keywords**—autonomous learner; independent learning; reading comprehension; reading enhancement

## I. INTRODUCTION

LA encapsulates the idea of being independent, having ability to take charge and having motivation to complete task in and outside classroom with or little guidance of teacher [1]. It is inevitable to say that learner autonomy (LA) is considered as desirable aims of teaching and learning process especially in ELT context [2]. Within the previous decades, there is on-going interest in LA field which shows that LA does not only play important role in teaching and learning process, but also in students' development [3]. Learner autonomy does not only let learners take charge of their own learning process, but also improve a sense of achievement and confidence [3,4], hence, developing LA becomes universal idea to improve language learner development [5].

ER activity is deemed to be a paramount of students' language development. The development is supported by the ideas that students are free to choose their reading pace, and vocabulary written in the passage does not exceed their reading capability [6]. Extensive reading encapsulates the rapid process and wide reading to understand concept or content in the passage rather than a focus on language application [7].

Despite the spark of research regarding learner autonomy, few studies have examined the development of students' autonomous learning through extensive reading activity, especially in EFL context, thus, it is essential to conduct a

research to address this paucity. Extensive reading (ER) matches the development of LA since extensive reading enhances various language skills [8].

Few studies have discussed the use of ER in LA field, even though there are other methods to develop LA [8]. The research was conducted in order to analyze students' autonomy level through extensive reading activity in EFL context. The research aimed to reveal the extensive reading activity is related to students' autonomous learning, indicators of students' readiness to be autonomous and developing students' autonomous learning through ER. Since learner autonomy is important part of students' language improvement, developing students' level of autonomy become necessary as well; furthermore, the research emphasized that developing LA through Extensive reading is crucial in order to learn language effectively.

### A. Extensive Reading

Extensive reading is defined as the rapid process and wide reading to understand concept or content in the passage rather than a focus on language application [7]. McLean and Rouault proved that extensive reading which is done continuously over a certain period of time positively bring impact on students' reading ability [9]. He argued that ER is not merely more effective but also more efficient at increasing students' reading rate. Learners who read extensively for the sake of enjoyment improve learning motivations and spark the desire to read more [10]. In other word, students who are exposed to ER method have better understanding of identifying reading facts, guessing vocabulary from context as well as identifying main idea in the text. In similar vein, ER allows learners to bring clearer reading experience.

1) *Important features in ER*: There are ten features in ER as proposed by Day and Bamford which are as follows [11]:

- Wide variety of reading materials are provided
- Reading materials is easy
- Students are able to choose their reading materials
- Students read for themselves without having any related practice or homework

- Vocabulary and grammar of reading material can be followed by the students so that reading is related to seeking information, having general understanding and having reading enjoyment
- Reading should be done by looking into personal pace
- Reading speech is fast
- Reading goals should be determined by personal interest
- Teachers' role is to guide the students to complete their reading goals
- Teachers act as a role model of a reader and regard a group of students as reading community

Looking into Day and Bamford's perspective, it can be seen that reading is a self-driven activity. Learner-centered becomes the main idea of extensive reading since reading materials are chosen by the learners. Enjoyment of reading is deemed to be a paramount because students are free to choose their reading pace, and vocabulary written in the passage does not exceed their reading capability [6]. Further analysis regarding ten principles proposed by Day and Bamford's theory can be classified into different groups based on its nature. The principle is divided into the nature of reading material, the nature of reading, the nature of learner and the nature of teachers. Each point is related to how reading should be done and how students and teachers act in applying ER.

Extensive reading is associated with positive attitudes and motivation. Liu identified a strong path relationship between extensive reading and students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation [12]. It is proven that ER activity enhance students' motivation and inspire them to participate more in EFL learning. Even though evidence of affectivity of extensive reading is mushrooming, the application of ER is not commonly done [13]. The paucity of conducting ER lies within the teachers' knowledge or belief as well as the availability of the books [14]. Even though there is a particular paucity of conducting ER, it is worth to be conducted as a part of English language learning activities. To simplify the concept of ER, Waring & McLean put four different elements of ER which are fluent comprehension, reading speech, large amount of text and meaning of the text [15]. The parameter of fluent comprehension, reading speed and large amount of text are based on the students themselves. What constitutes of reading speed is related to the individuals. This is also the main reason why ER is very much learner-centered.

### *B. Learner Autonomy*

Learner autonomy has been deliberately used since the past decades. The improvement of teaching and learner method has brought new perspective of learner autonomy. Benson stated that during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, there is growing interest in LA field [3]. Holec research contributed to the development of LA. Taking charge of learner own learning is central focus of LA [16,17]. LA encompasses learner ability to learn and set their learning goals, organize learning activity which provide opportunity to use their potential and develop it [18]. There is a great flexibility in classroom teaching and learning process

which will benefits learners. It implies that teachers are not the only expert and the most powerful actor who cannot be compromised. Learner autonomy is marked with the idea that learners take changes and hold responsibility for their learning process, such as objectives, contents, progressions, method, technique, time, place, as well as evaluation [19].

It can be concluded that LA is a method that encourages learner to learn more on their own with teacher as their guide. LA is defined as an empowerment and chances for the learner to actually take control more of their own learning and continue grow by themselves.

## II. METHODS

This present research was designed in a phenomenological case study design in order to reveal the development of LA through extensive reading. The research analyses the current phenomenon by looking into the problem to provide insight into the phenomena. The research itself was conducted in an English course where extensive reading is applied as one of its literacy programs. Since extensive reading has been managed by the course, it can be seen as a case study. Each participant in this research yielded unique quality with potential to learn English.

The research deployed questionnaire to the participants. Classroom observation was also done to reveal the real phenomenon in classroom setting. The participants in this research consisted of 20 students who studied English in the English course. Their age ranged between 13 and 15 years old. 18 students are female and 2 students are male. Each of them is junior high school students who belong to intermediate level. Even though they belong to the same level, their English proficiency varies in nature. The participants were chosen because they have experienced the on-going steps of extensive reading activity.

In terms of research instruments, the questionnaire was adapted from Mikulecky and Jeffries' questionnaire about advanced reading power and Chan about learner autonomy development. The questionnaire focuses on students' interest in extensive reading activity, their willingness to improve their reading and their autonomous learning characteristics [6,20].

Participants' questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first sections focused on participants overall reading activity. The second section reflects students' willingness to improve their reading activity. The third section was designed to reveal autonomous learning inside and outside the class. The response of questionnaire could conclude students' extensive reading activity and the development of learner autonomy.

The classroom observation was done to look into the extensive reading activity in the class and see how LA can be fostered through extensive reading activity. The procedures of the research stated with giving the questionnaire to the participants to see their reading activity, willingness to learn English, and level of learner autonomy. Since the extensive reading activity was continuously done in the class, there was no any urgency to create another extensive reading activity; furthermore, the classroom observation was used to see the actual situation. Extensive reading activity was done in the

class. During the activity, classroom situation is recorded and transcript. After all data has been gathered, general result of the data was analyzed. Collections of data were analyzed by tallying each questions and drawing percentage basis which generate general information. Data from the participants were analyzed in several stages. Since the data was analyzed qualitatively, the raw data were organized and identified based on the key themes.

**III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This section presents findings and discussion from data collected through questionnaire and classroom observation. The research aimed to investigate how to develop learner autonomy through extensive reading activity and the indicators of students’ readiness to be autonomous through extensive reading activity.

**A. Developing Learner Autonomy through Extensive Reading**

A structured questionnaire was administered to investigate how extensive reading leads to the development of learner autonomy. The questions include their overall reading experiences, activities to improve LA and the connection between LA and ER.

*1) Participants’ general reading experience:*The first section of the questionnaire reveals general information and participants’ reading experience. Participants revealed that they read comic, novels, and magazine as well as fairy tales story as their first reading experience. They showed their enjoyment in reading even though they have different reading preferences; furthermore the participants mentioned that they read books both at school and at home. Each of them spends about 15 minutes until 6 hours a week to read English book. They expect that they would be able to read more in English, read faster with good comprehension, improve English vocabulary and gain broader knowledge. Each participant hopes to gain better reading skill. It is in-line with Ro report that students enjoy ER classroom practice including review and book report since students are given chance to share their feelings and learn different books.

The second section of the questionnaire attempted to reveal students’ willingness to improve their reading activity (see Table 1).

**TABLE I. STUDENTS’ WILLINGNESS**

No	Statement	Students’ Willingness				
		never	rarely	Some time	Often	alwa ys
1	Can you find specific information in the text?			25% (5)	35 % (7)	40 % (8)
2	How often do you read outside the classroom activity		15% (3)	60% (12)	20% (4)	5% (1)
3	Are you happy when you are reading?			55 % (11)	25% (5)	20% (4)
4	Look up dictionary to find meaning of a word?	5% (1)	30% (6)	35% (7)	25% (5)	5% (1)
5	I like to read English text from internet or book both in and outside the class	10% (2)	5% (1)	15% (3)	50% (10)	20% (4)

Table 1 shows that in general participants show willingness to read and improve their reading ability; however, participants have different perception of their motivation to sharpen their reading skill. It shows that 50% of the participants states that they often read English text from internet or book both in and outside the class. It can be concluded that there are various different perceptions of students’ willingness to read and improve themselves. The result is supported by Raissi & Roustaei report that self-efficacy and motivation of the participants are improved by extensive reading activity.; furthermore, it can be seen that 11 participants chose ‘sometimes’, 5 participants chose ‘often’ and 4 participants chose ‘always’ to express their enjoyment of reading [21]. It can be synthesized that extensive reading lead to enjoyment and willingness to read more. As being stated by Safaeia & Bulca, students are willing to read and create post reading activity when extensive reading is applied in classroom practice, since extensive reading offers creative way to explore the reading passage itself [22].

The third section of the questionnaire attempted to reveal autonomous learning inside and outside the class.

**TABLE II. LA AND ER**

No	Statement	Learner Autonomy				
		Strongly disagree	disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Through reading activity in the class, I make sure I improve my reading skill during the lesson		5% (1)	10% (2)	85% (17)	
2	I make sure I improve my reading skill outside class			20% (5)	60% (10)	20% (5)
3	I boost my interest in learning english		10% (2)	5% (1)	85% (17)	
4	I know my weakness in reading		15% (3)	5% (1)	15% (3)	65% (13)
5	I like deciding what I want to learn			10% (2)	75% (15)	15% (3)

Table 2. cont.

6	Through reading activity in the class, I evaluate my learning progress		5% (1)	20% (4)	15% (3)	60% (12)
7	I like to read english book by my own			20% (5)	60% (10)	20% (5)
8	I use the internet to improve my english skill		5% (1)	10% (2)	60% (12)	25% (5)
9	When I learn english, I write new information about English language, e.g grammar or new word			5% (1)	50% (10)	45% (9)
10	I practice my english skill with friends by learning together or talking in english together		5% (1)	15% (3)	70% (14)	10% (2)

The results show how participants perceive their autonomous learning experience and their extensive reading activity in the classroom context. 17 participants agree that they make sure of their improvement, while 2 participants chose to be neutral and 1 participant chose disagree. It can be seen that majority of the participants are aware of improving their reading skill during the lesson through the reading activity; furthermore, they are aware of how to improve their reading skill outside the classroom activity. Borg & Alshumaimeri state that autonomous realize their improvement [1]. This is the idea of learning autonomy in which participants realize what they learn and try to improve their skill. Being autonomous learning encapsulates the idea of being independent in developing the overall skill [21]. Even though, the majority of the participants see that their interest in English is gradually improving through the application of extensive reading, some participants perceive that they are not interested in learning English.

One of the key terms of learner autonomy is being able to evaluate the learning progress and understanding weakness. Majority of the participants choose “agree” and “strongly agree” in terms of knowing their weakness. It shows that through extensive reading, they are able to determine the lacking skill from their overall language ability. Participants also use internet to improve their overall English skill and practice their English skill. It can be synthesized that participants show autonomous characteristics during the lesson.

During the classroom observation, most of the participants show their excitement in each extensive reading activity. They are able to choose the books that they like and enjoy reading. Learner autonomy can be developed through extensive reading since extensive reading embodies characteristics of learner autonomy as well.

Below, LA is discussed with reference to the characteristics of ER and how ER can develop the LA.

- Ability to be Independent

Participants are exposed to various reading materials which they can choose based on their preferences. In usual classroom setting, students may not get exposure of independence. The main challenges in applying LA is number of students and curriculum setting [23]. Through ER activity, students are given opportunity to determine what to learn and read. This encapsulates the idea of LA in which students are given independence to choose the learning

material. During the ER activity in the class, teachers encouraged learners to choose after reading activity. Teachers and students discussed the extensive reading activity which included making comic strip, summary, book poster, etc. Participants chose the extensive reading activity.

- Teachers as fellow learners

Teachers’ role both in LA and ER is as the guide. Through extensive reading activity, teacher can strengthen their role as the guide. Teachers encourage learner to read more and learn more. Each student has different English capability. The challenges of applying LA is the students’ capability [24]. Through ER, teachers may give some guidance to the learners.

- Defining the appropriate goal

LA encapsulates the idea of evaluation and deciding goal. ER’s characteristics are being aware of the goal. Each student has different aims and reading speed. In LA students have expectation to achieve something.

*B. Characteristics of Autonomous Learner Through ER*

Through extensive reading activity, students show behaviours that can be categorized into autonomous learning. Each participant in this study always shares his/her understanding regarding the book chosen previously. Even though, participants have different English capability and personality, they try hard to describe the book. Through the after-reading activity, participants are eager to create a writing project based on the activity that they like.

It can be synthesized that the characteristics of autonomous learner through ER are as follows

- Having motivation to improve
- Learning in and outside the classroom context
- Knowing their need
- Knowing how to use available resources
- Having individual learning strategy
- Managing time effectively

Liu stated that motivation is important in ER application since it drives students to read and improve themselves [11]. On the hand Humphreys & Wyatt also suggested that

providing various support to the learners can help learners to be autonomous [25].

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, learner autonomy can be developed through extensive reading since ER has various similar fundamental characteristic to LA; therefore, it is considered as important to support the application of ER to develop LA. Both ER and LA are significant activity that can improve students' language capability.

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