

PORTRAYING LEARNER'S AUTONOMY IN EXTENSIVE READING CLASSROOM AT SILIWANGI UNIVERSITY TASIKMALAYA

Asri Siti Fatimah

(Siliwangi University/asrisitifatihmah@unsil.ac.id)

Abstract

Extensive reading, the activities to read a large amount of text and enjoyable input, becomes important to study since it has so many benefits for increasing the students' language competence. It has been noticed that this kind of activity really engages the students because it allows them to receive a large amount of comprehension in a leisure way. In this activity, they may also choose any reading sources and materials that are extremely enjoyable, and suitable with their level and interest promoting their learning autonomy which are responsible for their own learning. Thus this study has the purpose to portray the characteristics of their autonomous learning while joining extensive reading classroom. In this study, blog as instructional technology is used as a learning platform for supporting them conduct extensive reading activities. To collect the data, interview was given to six students who become participants of the study. It aimed to deeply investigate their autonomous learning while doing extensive reading. The findings show that there are several characteristics of autonomous learning in this class. They are setting the goal of their learning, adjusting learning strategies to improve learning, knowing how to use resources autonomously, managing the time properly, and having motivation to learn independently.

Keywords:

Autonomous learning; extensive reading; blog

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A. Introduction

Extensive reading becomes important to study since it has so many benefits for increasing the students' language competence. Extensive reading is the activities of reading a large amount of text and enjoyable input in order to get the information by using an interesting way. Bamford & Day cited in Lyutaya¹ argued that extensive

reading is the process of reading many texts which has the purpose to get the overall understanding of those texts. In the process of reading, the students are not necessary to translate all of the words provided on the text because they only need to understand the global meaning provided. Extensive reading may provide pleasant atmosphere where the students are encouraged to choose the texts that are suitable with their levels and interests. As a result, this task becomes fascinating for the students

¹ Tatiana Lyutaya, "Reading Logs: Integrating Extensive Reading with Writing Tasks," *English Teaching Forum* 14, no. 1 (2011): 26–34.

because they will read what they like and get valuable advantages from this activity. Unconsciously, their reading ability will also be improved.

Extensive reading is the process of getting the information by using an appealing way. Takahashi and Umino² argued that extensive reading is reading for enjoyment in which the students choose the books according to their language ability. In line with the statement, Brown³ explained that extensive reading means reading of large amounts of materials which are appropriate with the students' interest to make them enjoyable in reading. In extensive reading, students should be interested in the meaning of the material rather than learning grammar or other components of the texts.

Extensive reading has so many benefits increasing the students' language competence. Krashen in Stoeckel et.al⁴ said that extensive reading has the effect on the students' reading fluency, writing style, grammatical competence, and spelling.

² Wataru Takahashi and Tae Umino, "Out-of-Class Extensive Reading in Japanese as A Second Language: Enhancing Learner Autonomy Beyond the Classroom," in *Proceedings of CLasic*, 2018, https://www.fas.nus.edu.sg/cls/CLaSIC/clasic2016/PROCEEDINGS/takahashi_wataru.pdf.

³ Dale Brown, "Online Support Systems for Extensive Reading: Managing the Tension between Autonomy and Institutional Education," *The Language Teacher: JALTCALL Journal* 36, no. 2 (2012): 11–16.

⁴ Tim Stoeckel, Nevitt Reagan, and Fergus Hann, "Extensive Reading Quizzes and Reading Attitudes," *TESOL Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (March 2012): 187–98, <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.10>.

However, It is also found that this activity can improve their TOEFL scores in both first language (L1) and second language (L2). Extensive reading can force the students to change their habit by consistently reading a large amount of text. By doing so, the students will be familiar with the vocabularies and grammatical features provided on the text. This activity will certainly influence their reading speed and their awareness of the language itself. The students will enable to better guess unknown words from context given. As a result, their language skill and competence will also be improved.

To teach extensive reading, teacher can be a facilitator who provides reading sources and guides the students to find the suitable texts. Furthermore, students are forced to read as much as possible to get valuable experience and meaningful knowledge from those activities. By reading extensively, the students also acquire a broad range of background knowledge, which is an indispensable element for students to engage in reading activities in a meaningful way and to become autonomous readers who can read and make self-evaluation on their own. Thus, students' motivation to read for purpose is promoted to enable them to become the independent readers who can enjoy reading autonomously beyond the classroom.⁵

⁵ Hedge, cited in Hesham Suleiman Alyousef, "Teaching Reading Comprehension to ESL/EFL

Previous study conducted by Cew and Lee⁶ also found that actually blog can be one of the learning platforms facilitating the activities of extensive reading. Blog is actually a viable tool which can support the process of reading beyond the classroom. As one of 2.0 Web technologies, blog is a kind of online journal which can facilitate the students to express their ideas and thought in his own words and publish them easily. Blog is very useful as the platform for doing extensive reading in which they can get so many reading sources and express what they read in the written form. It has been stated that actually extensive reading can be followed by several activities such as changing the beginning or ending the story, writing letter for the characters of the story, making poem, etc. These activities can encourage the students' independence learning in which they are forced to be responsible with their own learning. Fattah⁷ said that Blogs is one of the web tools technologies having several features supporting the students' autonomy. Blog consists of the features facilitating users to easily attach files, texts, pictures, links, and sound.

Learners," *The Reading Matrix* 5, no. 2 (September 2005): 12.

⁶ Magdalene Meow Chew and Catherine Cheng Kiat Lee, "Using a Blog to Facilitate Extensive Reading: An Exploratory Study," *IAFOR Journal of Education* 1, no. 1 (May 2013): 160–64, <https://doi.org/10.22492/ije.1.1.06>.

⁷ Said Fathy El Said Abdul Fattah, "The Effectiveness of Using Blogs as an Independent Learning Tool to Develop Reading Skills for University Students," *Journal of Education and Practice* 7, no. 32 (2016): 71.

Furthermore, blog allows the students to interact with the teacher and their partners in order to discuss what they learnt independently. Research conducted by Aydin⁸ showed that the use of blogs is very good developing interactions among students and also between teacher and students in the target language.

There are many studies found that actually extensive reading can force the students' autonomous learning. The study conducted by Mede, et. al.⁹ found that actually oral book reporting conducted in extensive reading activities can foster language learners' autonomy. Extensive reading encourages the students to recognize their potential on reading ability and increase their confidence on learning language. In this way, they will choose their own texts which are suitable with their interest and level. Consequently, they will be responsible with the progress of reading text, become autonomous reader and get valuable knowledge from those activities. In a similar vein, Pinkman¹⁰

⁸ Selami Aydin, "The Use of Blogs in Learning English as a Foreign Language," *Mevlana International Journal of Education* 4, no. 1 (March 1, 2014): 244–59, <https://doi.org/10.13054/mije.13.79.4.1>.

⁹ Enisa Mede, Gorsev Incecay, and Volkan Incecay, "Fostering Learner Autonomy through Extensive Reading: The Case of Oral Book Reports," *International Association of Research in Foreign Language Education and Applied Linguistics: ELT Research Journal* 2, no. 1 (2013): 16–25.

¹⁰ Kathleen Pinkman, "Using Blogs in the Foreign Language Classroom: Encouraging Learner Independence," *The JALT CALL Journal* 1, no. 1 (2005): 12.

also investigated the effectiveness of using blogs in developing students' independency. The result shows that blog is very valuable to develop reading skill. Blog can provide situation forcing the students to become autonomous learner.

However, Autonomy becomes the crucial goal of education for a long time. It cannot be avoided that actually autonomy affects the students' language learning and their success to get the learning objective. Having autonomy means that students have responsibility of the process of their own learning. They can independently apply the strategies throughout their learning process. However, this ability is not inborn and should be acquired either naturally or through the process of formal learning.

In line with the statement, Little in Meigen¹¹ defines autonomy as the ability for critical reflection, independent action, and decision making. Students actually create their own decision about when, how, and what they will learn. Benson in Haddad¹² also highlights that this ability is not inborn but should be obtained by

natural means or by the process of formal learning.

Autonomous learning also can be defined as the learner responsibility to their own learning process, Ridley¹³ stated that the term autonomy can be used in at least five ways: a) for *situations* in which learners study totally on their own; b) for a set of *skills* which can be applied in self-directed learning, c) for an inborn *capacity* which is repressed by institutional education; d) for the exercise of *learners' responsibility* for the process of their own learning; e) for the right of learners to decide the direction of their own learning. Autonomy becomes important because it is related to the students motivation which influences their success in learning. Carbe in Benson¹⁴ stated that learner autonomy is very important because it is linked to the students' successful development that is communication skills in foreign languages curricula. Considering the previous background, therefore this study aims to answer the following question, "What are the characteristics of autonomous learning found in extensive reading classroom?"

¹¹ Yu Meigen, "On the Cultivation of Non-English Majors' Learner Autonomy," *International Journal of Education and Research* 4, no. 10 (October 10, 2016), <http://www.ijern.com/journal/2016/October-2016/10.pdf>.

¹² Rawan Hamdi Haddad, "Developing Learner Autonomy in Vocabulary Learning in Classroom: How and Why Can It Be Fostered?," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 232 (October 2016): 784–91, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.10.106>.

¹³ Ridley, Reflective Self-awareness: A Basic Motivational Process, in Barbara L. McCombs, "Unraveling Motivation: New Perspectives From Research and Practice," *The Journal of Experimental Education* 60, no. 1 (September 1991): 3–3, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220973.1991.10806575>.

¹⁴ Benson, *Teaching and Researching Autonomy in Language Learning* (Harlow: Longman Pearson Education, 2001).

B. Method

This study used case study as the research method. It was conducted in class D of extensive reading classroom in English Education Department Siliwangi University Tasikmalaya Indonesia. This study has been conducted during one semester to 40 students coming from fifth semester. In this study, blog was used as the learning platform facilitating the student to do extensive reading activities. The lecturer made one blog as the tutor blog which includes the syllabus, materials and guidelines for these activities. Furthermore, the students were asked to create their own blog individually for facilitating them conduct extensive reading activities. In this class, the students were encouraged to read a large amount of the text beyond the classroom and come to the class to discuss it.

There were several kinds of the text which should be read including story (comic, novel, and fable), procedure texts, news, argumentative article, biography, and journal. The students were forced to report what they have read every week on their blog which has been connected to the tutor blog. This report, also called reading log, included general information got from the reading texts, unfamiliar words found by the students, feeling after reading the texts, and the amount of texts which have been read every weeks. However, reading log should be uploaded on their blog two days before the class.

Therefore, the lecturer was easy to monitor the progress of the students reading and provide feedback and encouragement in the class to the students. The subjects of the study were six students taken from the 40 participants joining this class. Interview was used to get the data in order to investigate the characteristics of autonomous learning existed in this classroom. However, thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Braun and Clarke¹⁵ stated that there are six steps of thematic analysis, they are:

1. Familiarizing the data.

Familiarizing the data means the data taken from interview was transcribed. In addition, data were read and re-read in order to be familiar with the depth and breadth of the content.

2. Generating initial codes

After familiar with the data, the data was classified into several codes. In this step, important ideas were highlighted related to research purpose and identify whether they were relevant or not.

3. Searching for themes

In this step, the codes were grouped which possibly have the same theme. Then the themes were also highlighted differently in order to ease the process of including the codes into the appropriate theme.

¹⁵ Braun & Clarke. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), (2006) : 77-101

4. Reviewing potential themes

This phase involved reviewing the themes to ensure whether the themes were appropriate or not. In addition, if the themes were not appropriate, they were omitted or replaced.

5. Defining and naming themes

The themes were named as the representation of its following sub-themes. Those became the findings of this study.

6. Producing the report

In this phase, data were reported in a way which can convince the reader of the merit and validity of the analysis.

C. Results

In order to find out the characteristics of autonomous learning existed in extensive reading classroom, data got from the interview were analyzed using thematic analysis. After interview was given to the participants, the data were transcribed and then coded by the researchers. In addition, contextual themes were identified according to recurring the words and ideas on the data. Finally, these themes were listed followed by the discussion of the data as follows:

1. Setting the goal of their own learning

As the activities of reading easy and appealing texts, extensive reading actually encourages the students to feel comfortable and enjoy while reading. They can choose their own text and avoid or leave the texts which are not

suitable with their interest. In these activities, the lecturers are not allowed to force the students to read the same texts because the students' interest can be different. Therefore, the students are encouraged to be responsible to choose their own reading text and set their own objective of learning as shown in the excerpts below,

I usually set my own objective of learning. Especially when I found the text which is suitable with my interest, I frequently set a plan for finishing reading the texts.

Reading story is actually my hobby. It makes me feel enjoy although I need to read so many pages in a day. I believe it will help me increase my English ability. Therefore I usually read as much as I can.

As it is clear in the above assertion, students have recognized that actually extensive reading is beneficial for increasing their language competence. Although they are only trained to focus on main idea instead of understanding all of the words on the text, it has been found that this activity helps them to be fluent readers. In addition, Reading many texts for fluency makes the students recognize that there are many new vocabularies found when they read the texts. It encourages them to guess the meaning based on the context on the text. S2 states, "When I read my texts, I frequently found many unfamiliar vocabularies. But I don't stop my reading to open dictionary because I focus on the plot of the story.

Surprisingly, I can guess those meaning from the context.” It is supported by Bell¹⁶ stating that ER is a type of reading program used in ESL or EFL settings which has the effect on the students’ vocabulary development. As the ability to control the students’ own learning, learners’ autonomy can be easily found in this classroom.

Although there is no encouragement to understand all of the words provided but it is found from the data that the students have their own goal to comprehend and get those unfamiliar vocabularies. It is in line with the statement given by Holec in Neupane¹⁷ that Learners can claim to have autonomy when they are able to be responsible of their own learning, determine their own goals, select methods and strategies of learning, and evaluate what has been obtained.

2. Adjusting learning strategies to improve learning

Learning strategy plays important role helping the students to get their learning goal. Penggabean and Kesuma¹⁸

¹⁶ Bell, “Extensive Reading: Speed and Comprehension,” *The Reading Matrix Vol 1 No 1 April 2001* 1, no. 1 (October 28, 2018), <http://www.readingmatrix.com/articles/bell/>.

¹⁷ Madhu Neupane, “Learner Autonomy: Concept and Considerations,” *Journal of NELTA* 15, no. 1–2 (January 1, 1970): 114–20, <https://doi.org/10.3126/nelta.v15i1-2.4617>.

¹⁸ Christina I.T. Penggabean and Ingelia Kesuma. “Language Learning Strategies Of High Proficiency Students in Their Oral Presentation at English Language Education of PGRI Ronggolawe University Tuban. OKARA: Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra, vol. 11, no. 2, November 2017 (November, 2017) : 206

stated that language learning strategies helps the students to learn easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations. The use of appropriate learning strategy in learning is very important because if inappropriate strategies are applied, the result of learning will not be satisfied. Especially in this classroom, it is found that there are several strategies done by the participant to do extensive reading. It is shown on the following excerpts;

In these activities I usually read the text from internet. However, I do not like to read directly using my phone or laptop. Therefore, I usually print those texts. It makes me comfortable and I get the point of the texts easily.

When I found unfamiliar words on the text, I usually write those words on my book. I do not open dictionary to see the meaning of the words, but I guess the meaning from the context. However, by writing these words, It helps me remember and memorize the words.

The previous statements show that actually the students have their own strategies to improve their own learning. Using blog in these activities provides situation encouraging the students to regulate their efforts. Different with traditional tool such as paper and pen, blog can allow the students to get more benefits including the opportunity to get many resources for reading texts, doing collaborative activity, giving feedback and also be creative with the content of

the blog. It is supported by Howard in Fattah¹⁹ who states that blog activities are the way helping the students to move from being dependent on their teachers towards independent learning.

3. Knowing how to use resources independently

Since the activity of extensive reading encourages the students to read a large amount of text which is suitable with their level and interest, the lecturers should give them millions of reading sources which can be chosen easily by them. However, although several reading sources have been written on the guidelines posted on tutor blog, but almost of the students choose their own texts coming from other resources. It is clearly explained on the following excerpts;

Although my lecturer usually provides links or sources that I can use for finding the text that I can read, but I usually find another text that I like. I am happy because in this course I do not need to read the same text with the other students. I can read what I want and I like it.

From the previous statement, it can be noted that actually the students' autonomy can be found easily in this classroom. Littlewood²⁰ described

¹⁹ Fattah, "The Effectiveness of Using Blogs as an Independent Learning Tool to Develop Reading Skills for University Students," 71.

²⁰ Garold Murray, Xuesong Gao, and Terry Lamb, eds., *Identity, Motivation and Autonomy in Language Learning*, Second Language Acquisition 54 (Bristol; Buffalo: Multilingual Matters, 2011), 230.

reactive autonomy as 'the type of autonomy which allows learners to organize their resources independently in order to reach their objectives'. However, the use of blog in this activity provides the opportunity allowing easy access to a vast resource of reading materials. Therefore, the students will be easy to find the texts which are suitable with their interest. There is no doubt that internet is a rich resource having a variety reading material which can be used for extensive reading activity. Consequently, the students are really helped to do this task. In line with this statement, Prensky²¹ noted that a Web server survey conducted by Internet Services Company Netcraft in August 2011 found that there are more than 460 million websites in existence. Not only do these sites supply text on every topic imaginable but they also provide a wide variety of text types including comics, jokes and video clips which are the staple fare of the visual-hungry digital natives.

4. Managing time properly

Since the use of blended learning is used in the classroom, the students are required to maximize their time to learn not only in the classroom but also outside the class. Especially in the activities of extensive reading forcing the students to read a large amount of text, the students should manage their time

²¹ Marc Prensky, "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants," *Horizon* 9, no. 5 (March 2, 2018): 15–24.

effectively. This situation can be seen on the following excerpt;

Reading can be conducted in our spare time such as before sleeping or directly after sleeping. Since I have a lot of assignments to do, I need to do it by myself. I need to have good strategy between doing this assignment and other subjects. Good strategy is always balanced by the good time management. The process then becomes my responsibility. However, I also sometimes forget to do it then I reflect myself how to manage time more effectively.

The previous statement show that student generally can manage their time to do extensive reading activities. It can be seen on their reading log posted on blog that they usually spend more than 1 hour a day to read. CIEL Handbook²² argues that developing key transferable skill including time management, IT and interpersonal skill become one of the dimensions in which the students move away from dependent to learning autonomy.

5. Having motivation to learn

As the factor influencing the students' success in learning, motivation becomes important factor affecting the student's ability to master English language. Especially in this study, motivation affects the effort on the

students to read and get valuable input from this activity. Seeing from reading log reported by the students, it can be seen that the students' willingness to be active on the task is very good. This situation is also supported by the statements given by the S1, as follows:

Reading is actually not my hobby. Surprisingly, I like to read and become motivated to read in this class. I think it is because I can choose what I can read and there is no question that I need to answer after reading my text. I am so grateful having this class.

When firstly, my lecturer guides me to read in this class, I am so curious whether I can regularly read or not. But I can enjoy reading because using blog allows me to search by myself what I will read and it is interesting.

The findings show that students who participated in this project were interested showing their enthusiasm to do the tasks. Hedge cited in Alyousef²³ states that students' motivation to read for purpose enables them to become the independent readers who can enjoy reading autonomously beyond the classroom. In this respect, we might say that motivation has the important role in the autonomy. As Ushioda²⁴ stated that autonomous learners are by definition motivated learners. However, it is also supported by the use of blog as the

²² Ciel Language Support Network, "Integrating Independent Learning with the Curriculum | LLAS Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies," accessed March 18, 2018, <https://www.llas.ac.uk/resources/gpg/1400>.

²³ Alyousef, "Teaching Reading Comprehension to ESL/EFL Learners," 174.

²⁴ Ema Ushioda, *Learner Autonomy 5: The Role of Motivation* (Dublin: Authentik, 1996).

learning platform used beyond the classroom. The use of this technology really gives the effect on the students' motivation. As the researcher's finding on the previous study²⁵ that technology can enhance the students' motivation and curiosity for learning.

D. Conclusion

As the capability to control one's own learning, autonomy has a great role influencing the students' success on their own learning. Especially in extensive reading activities, the indicators of autonomous learning are easily found and noticed. Through interview given after the class of extensive reading using blog, it is found that all of the students have responsibility on their own learning. Firstly, the students usually set their own learning objectives when reading the texts. As the activities to read a large amount of easy texts, the students are forced to read text as many as possible. As a result, the students need to have their own objective to do this task. From the reading log posted on their blog, it is seen that the students can increase the amount of the texts they read and develop their vocabulary mastery. In addition, the students also know how to use resources independently. Although the lecturer has given the sources for

doing their reading activity, but they usually use their own sources taken from the internet. In this activity, the students also can manage their time well. It is found from their reading log that they usually spend more than 1 hour a day to read. Finally, their motivation to do the task can be seen effortlessly. Data from the interview show that the students give their best effort on reading their own material. They feel engaged and motivated showing their interest in these activities.

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²⁵ Asri Siti Fatimah and Santiana Santiana, "Teaching in 21st Century: Students-Teachers' Perceptions of Technology Use in the Classroom," *Script Journal: Journal of Linguistic and English Teaching* 2, no. 2 (October 8, 2017): 125, <https://doi.org/10.24903/sj.v2i2.132>.

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