

AN ACTION RESEARCH ON THE IMPACTS OF EXTENSIVE READING ON NON-ENGLISH MAJOR FRESHMEN'S VOCABULARY ACQUISITION AT UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS - TECHNOLOGY FOR INDUSTRIES

NGHIÊN CỨU ẢNH HƯỞNG CỦA PHƯƠNG PHÁP ĐỌC MỞ RỘNG ĐỐI VỚI VIỆC HỌC TỪ VỰNG CỦA SINH VIÊN KHÔNG CHUYÊN NĂM THỨ NHẤT TẠI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC KINH TẾ - KỸ THUẬT CÔNG NGHIỆP

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Abstract: This research aims to investigate the effects of extensive reading on the development of vocabulary acquisition of the freshmen at University of Economics - Technology for Industries (UNETI). Mixed methodology was employed with data collecting instruments as pre-test & post-test, reflective journals and questionnaires. The validity and internal consistency reliability of the research was evaluated through the results of the T-test and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. It is indicated that extensive reading had a significant role in expanding students' vocabulary knowledge and promoting their vocabulary learning. Besides, the project encouraged the participants to create their own reading habit. The study also discussed some pedagogical implications for schools, teachers and learners that will teach and learn English in relation to extensive reading. In addition, some suggestions for further research in the area were made as well.

Keywords: Extensive reading, graded readers, vocabulary acquisition.

Tóm tắt: Nghiên cứu tìm hiểu ảnh hưởng của phương pháp đọc mở rộng đối với việc học từ vựng của sinh viên năm thứ nhất Trường Đại học Kinh tế - Kỹ thuật Công nghiệp (UNETI). Phương pháp hỗn hợp được sử dụng với công cụ thu thập dữ liệu gồm bài kiểm tra trước và sau khi áp dụng phương pháp, nhật ký suy tưởng và bảng câu hỏi. Tính xác thực và độ tin cậy nhất quán của nghiên cứu được đánh giá thông qua kết quả kiểm định T-test và hệ số Cronbach alpha. Kết quả cho thấy việc đọc mở rộng đóng vai trò quan trọng trong việc tăng khả năng thu nhận vốn từ của sinh viên, đồng thời thúc đẩy việc học từ vựng của họ. Nghiên cứu giúp những người tham gia tự tạo cho mình thói quen đọc sách; đồng thời, thảo luận về các tác động sự phạm đến trường học, giáo viên và người học khi áp dụng phương pháp này. Bên cạnh đó, một số đề xuất được trình bày cho các nghiên cứu có liên quan đến lĩnh vực về phương pháp đọc mở rộng trong tương lai.

Từ khóa: Đọc mở rộng, sách phân loại theo từng cấp độ ngôn ngữ, tiếp nhận từ vựng.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Definition of Vocabulary

In Cambridge dictionary, vocabulary is defined as “*all the words known and used by a*

particular person” or “*all the words that exist in a particular language or subject*”.

According to Day and Bamford (2005), vocabulary is regarded as an element linking languages skills in English as foreign

language (EFL) that learners must know to listen, speak, read and write effectively. Pigada and Schmitt (2006) argue that vocabulary and lexical units are at the core of learning and communication.

1.2. Vocabulary learning

1.2.1. Incidental vocabulary learning: can be defined as a kind of learning method from reading, listening, speaking or writing to language use meanwhile learners concentrate on the information of passages or texts. In other words, Pigada and Schmitt (2006) state that this method consists of learning from extensive reading, listening to stories, watching English movies or taking part in conversation in either outside or in classrooms.

1.2.2. Intentional vocabulary learning: is the method that words are absorbed through learners' direct contact with the form and meaning of words, such as dictionaries, vocabulary lists and direct vocabulary explanation. However, it is time consuming and too laborious for learners to learn language. In addition, this approach is teacher - centered which does not suit to the teaching and learning modals nowadays.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Extensive reading

2.1.1. Definition of extensive reading

Day and Bamford (2005) conclude that extensive reading is a way of the careful, short, complex reading texts for detailed understanding and skills practice. Parrott (1993), cited in Nguyen Thi Lam Anh (2008), advocates that extensive reading aims for one's own pleasure, mainly involving the information content. The features generally include the comparatively fast reading of a numerous longer, easy-to-understand materials, with the reading done mostly

outside of the classroom and at each learner's own pace and level.

2.1.2. Benefits and limitations of extensive reading

A great deal of studies has reported the positive influences on various aspects of students' foreign language ability. First and foremost, students' reading ability is enriched, thanks to extensive reading. Learners' reading ability level is gradually upgraded when moving from reading word-by-word to reading-with ideas; hence, enhancing reading fluency (Hitosugi & Day, 2004). Furthermore, knowledge excluded from students' reading process is also claimed through Day & Bamford (2005). The second merit of extensive reading is found on other language skills when Pigada and Schmitt (2006) indicate that extensive reading facilitates grammar learning. Besides, students' writing capacity is directly influenced in Hitosugi & Day (2004). Elley & Mangubhai (1981) cited in Nguyen Thi Lam Anh (2008) report gains in listening and writing ability in their study investigating the impacts of an extensive program in primary schools. Last but not least, in terms of vocabulary knowledge development, it is confirmed that the number of new words that students obtain during short time they spend in language classroom is not substantial compared with lexical knowledge that learners acquire from reading books.

Nevertheless, it is argued that vocabulary development in reading is time-consuming for two reasons. The first problem is that students have to read a large amount of materials, so the word meaning they perceive or guess may not be exact (Parry, 1993 cited in Nguyen Thi Lam Anh, 2008). The second issue is if the words they come across while reading are not practiced, they will probably forget them.

2.2. Graded readers

Richards and Schmidt (2013) define graded readers as a simplified version of a previously written work or an original work written in a simple language.

It is plain that selecting appropriate level for extensive reading is a challenge for EFL teachers and learners. Therefore, the scale offered by Extensive Reading Foundation (ERF) is respectively recommended.

It is apparent that seven different levels, each with sub-levels for further classification are divided in the ERF graded scale. The headword count of the books should be found and seen where it fits the scale; then the reading materials can be labelled at that level for easy selection by students.

Undoubtedly, the classifications of graded readers help EFL students find the reading documents that fit their English proficiency and so bring enjoyment from reading activity.

2.3. Related studies about extensive reading

2.3.1. Foreign researches

The effectiveness of extensive reading was investigated by Hitosugi & Day (2004) at the University of Hawai'i using Japanese children's literature in a period of 10 weeks. As Japanese was their target language, the researchers selected reading materials written for children in their first language. The findings were reported that the students' reading ability gained a little but there was an increase in positive responses on the questionnaire about participants' feeling and emotions from the beginning to the end of the semester and extensive reading program led to independent study in Japanese.

Pigada and Schmitt (2006) indicated in the study on a 27-year-old learner who speaks

English fluently that extensive reading enhanced knowledge of words' spelling, meaning and grammatical characteristics. Throughout the study, the participants had to take pre- and post-test first, then were interviewed for the practitioners to crosscheck the validity and reliability of the information. The results indicated that 1 per 1.5 target words tested was fostered in several ways

It is apparent that extensive reading has been complied in different teaching contexts. Those studies also originated a basis for domestic researchers to explore the influences of utilizing graded readers in their own classes. The next part will discuss some Vietnamese authors' studies on extensive reading.

2.3.2. Vietnamese researches

A study conducted by Nguyen Thi Lam Anh (2008) on the population of 30 second-year students at Military Political Academy during 6 weeks revealed that learners gained some progress in vocabulary learning and learners' positive attitude towards extensive reading was significantly improved. The validity and reliability of the data collected from questionnaires, reading journals and pre- and post-test was crosschecked respectively.

Serving the same aims of examining the impacts of extensive reading program, Nguyen Thi Thu Huong (2013) carried out an action research with 41 non-English major students at Thai Nguyen University of Education in eight weeks outside class. After analyzing the database from reflective journals, follow-up activities and interview, the author found that the students learned new words while reading extensively. In addition, the participants showed positive attitude to graded readers because they reported that the reading materials were interesting and useful.

For all these benefits of extensive reading

investigated in both international and national institutions, the researcher decided to examine its influences on students' vocabulary acquisition at UNETI.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research questions

This study aims to explore the impacts of extensive reading on non-English majored freshmen's vocabulary learning at UNETI and their perspectives towards this approach. Therefore, the researcher conducted an action research to address two questions

- To what extent does the extensive reading influence the students' vocabulary acquisition?
- What are the students' perspectives towards extensive reading?

3.2. The population

The study was conducted based on the participation of 31 freshmen from different faculties at UNETI. They were chosen randomly according to their names on the researchers' class lists to guarantee the reliability of the project. They are non-English majored. All of them passed the entrance exams including English test, so they are considered to be at elementary level of English proficiency.

3.3. Reading materials

The selection of books for extensive reading project was based on the participants' English levels which is considered to be at elementary level of proficiency. Hence, the researcher selected graded readers in level 1 with 300-400 headwords and level 2 with 600-700 ones. Another important thing is that the typical features of graded readers cannot be complicated sentence structure and the use of headwords which are chosen by the publisher

as the words that are most frequently used by native speakers. Therefore, a series of graded readers of Oxford Read and Imagine was taken as the main reading resources for the participants.

3.4. Data collection instruments

3.4.1. Tests

Pre-test and post-test were implemented to investigate the influences of extensive reading on learners' vocabulary learning. The same test was used without informing the students to assure that they would not use any memorization techniques to remember the words in the former test. The quantitative data collected from those tests was to measure the differences might have been caused by the treatment. In addition, the students were informed that the results of the test would not affect their grade to guarantee the reliability of the test.

3.4.2. Reflective journal

Students were asked to complete the reflective journal with the aims of helping the researcher monitor students' reading. Hence, she could offer guidance and decided what was necessary to be modified in the next circle of the action. The report was adapted from Day and Bamford (2002) because it helped the teacher to assess learners' achievement over period and enabled learners not only to record their ideas and responses and their own progress as well.

3.4.3. Questionnaire

A questionnaire was delivered to the participants at the end of the project to investigate the learners' attitudes towards extensive reading program. Some items were adapted from the one of Nguyen Thi Lam Anh (2008) because this study got the similar purposes as those in this research.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. To what extent does the extensive reading influence the students' vocabulary acquisition?

4.1.1. Pre-test results

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0 was utilized to analyze the results of the test. The table 5.1 presents the results of this test which really varied. Three quarters of the participants had scores below average. Although they passed the entrance exam, their results were quite poor. A reason might be that they did not spend much time reading in English language. As mentioned before, concerning vocabulary acquisition, the majority of the students leaned new words through reading low-level texts in the course books before the project. Moreover, the students hardly got the habit of reading extra English texts. Another explanation may be that they could not find the suitable reading sources.

Table 1. Results of the pre-test

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Deviation
Score on Test before treatment	31	45	92	63.73	12.884
Valid N	31				
Valid N	31				

4.1.2. Post-test results

The post-test was given at the end of the project to determine the impacts of extensive reading on learners' vocabulary. The table 2 below shows the results of the test.

It can be seen from the table 2, the mean score was 81.34, the lowest score of the test was 63

and the highest was 119. From the analysis, 7/31 students got score from 63 to 70; the score from 74 to 90 were graded for 15/33 students; 4 out of 33 students got from 93 to 99; and 4 students got score over 100. The findings revealed that most of the students got score above average.

Table 2. Results of the post-test

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Deviation
Score on Test after treatment	31	63	119	81.34	16.340
Valid N	31				

4.1.3. Comparison between pre-test and post-test

The table below reports the descriptive statistics of the pre-test and post-test.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of pre-test and post-test

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Score on Test before treatment	31	63.73	12.884	2.635
Score on Test after treatment	31	81.34	16.340	3.303

The table shows that the mean of the post-test (81.34) was higher than that of the pre-test (63.73). Thus, it is indicated that there was an increase of 17.61 points between two tests. The standard deviation in the pre-test (12.884) was much smaller than that in the post-test (16.340). As a matter of fact, the students gained over 17 points on their vocabulary post-test. As a result, it was suggested that there was an improvement in vocabulary knowledge of the students.

Table 4. The comparison between pre- and post-test results on mean score

	Paired differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence interval of the difference				
				Lower				Upper
Score on Test Before Treatment								
Score on Test After Treatment	-17.612	3,456		-18.643	-16.828	-17.522	23	.001

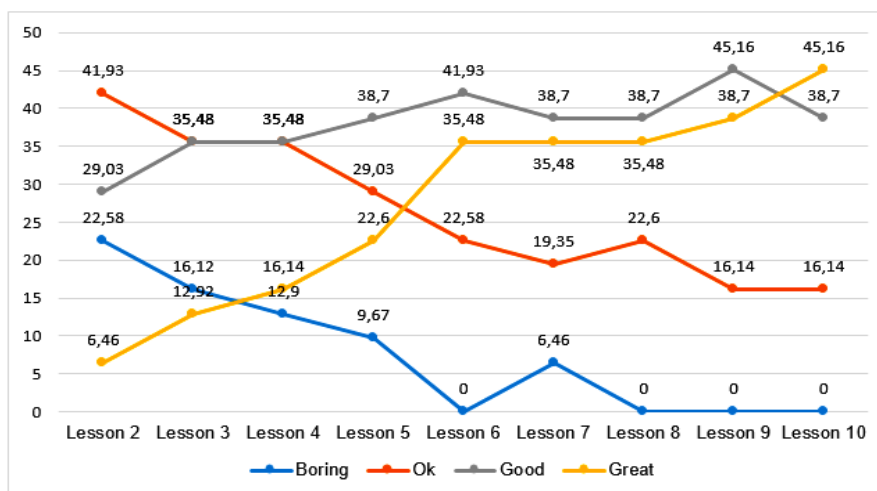
The table showed that the critical value of df for a two-tailed test with degree of freedom was 23. By conventional criteria, the difference in means of two tests is considered, $t=-17.522$, $p = 0.001 (<0.05)$. It demonstrated that the difference reached a statistically significant level. It pointed out that a positive improvement in school’s vocabulary learning

after they read extensively. It also meant that the extensive reading program seemed to be effective in the sense that it helped to develop the students’ vocabulary.

4.2. What are the students’ perspectives towards extensive reading?

4.2.1. The reflective journal

Figure 1. Students’ general feeling about the books



From the line graph it can be indicated that the percentage of students who had positive attitude towards the graded readers increased lesson by lesson. In the first three lessons, few students were really keen on the story. An explanation analyzed from the reflective journal, the researcher knew that it resulted from their inexperience of reading extensively before. They were just read the textbook materials when they were asked to. Besides,

the students did not get used to guessing the meaning of new words from the context so they spent much time looking up in the dictionary. Nevertheless, after having received the first reflective journal, the researcher clearly guided them how to guess the unknown words, so it did not take them much to look up new words; they needed to focus on the content of the stories. There was a significant increase in the following lessons

when students found the graded readers better and greater. Especially, there were no students who reported no interests in reading books in lesson 6, 8, 9 and 10. It is noticeable that in lesson 7, there was about 6,46% of the students who thought the books boring but it accounted for 74,17% who felt good and great. In this lesson, it could be explained that the two students started to pick up stories in level 2 with 600-700 headwords. As a consequence, they had negative attitude because of feeling unfamiliar. From lesson 8 to the end of the program, no one thought the books were boring. In short, most of students had a positive perspective towards the graded readers. After 10 lessons in implementation, the number of students enjoying reading extensively grew dramatically while this period experienced a considerable decline in the percentages of students of negative attitude.

4.2.2. Questionnaire

Through the analysis of questionnaire, students' attitude towards beliefs, feelings and intentions were measured through the Cronbach's alpha, which reported the internal consistency reliability of the research.

Concerning students' belief about the project, about 77,5% of students thought that extensive reading program was interesting and beneficial when they could expand their vocabulary. There were no negative responses and only one student said extensive reading could not develop his/ her reading habit or the reflective journal failed to motivate him/ her to improve the vocabulary retention. 12,8% of the students said extensive reading placed no effects on their background knowledge. It is indicated that most of the participants (90,4%) are aware of the positive influences of extensive reading. They commented that reading extensively enabled them to broad

their knowledge and reflective journal was useful in enhancing their vocabulary intention. Their answer was relevant to the findings which showed that their post-test results were significantly higher than the pre-test. Before the implementation, the participants stated that they had never read any English documents at home. In other words, the program might orient or motivate them to read in English and build up their reading habits for them.

In terms of students' feelings and emotions, 90,3% of the participants indicated that they liked post-extensive-reading activities like writing reflective journal and a vast majority of the students disagreed or strongly disagreed that they felt tired from participating in this project and up to 87,10% of the respondents mentioned that through extensive reading activity, they felt pleased in their language learning. It seemed that the students were keen on the reading materials which were introduced to and became familiar to them when 87,08% of them felt the materials interesting. It could be explained that graded readers is chosen based on their interests.

Regarding the third aspect of students' intentions, there were 29 out of 31 students who showed their wish to read extensively before if they had been encouraged by ticking agree or strongly agree. 87,08% of learners pointed out that they changed their minds on reading in English. As mentioned before, the students had never read at home. After the treatment, most of them intended to read more outside classroom. As a result, the proportion of 90,3% showed that they would like to join reading in the same way the following year.

The overall comparison of the students' responses to attitudinal statements after the projects is made by calculating the mean scores for individual and the groups of statements as presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5. General reading attitudes after the project

Related categories	Statements	Mean	SD	Overall mean
Cognitive component of reading attitudes: Belief	1. My background knowledge has been improved thanks to ER	3,85	0,878	3,97
	2. The ER materials were suitable for me	4,01	0,679	
	3. The ER project helped me develop reading habits	3,85	0,688	
	4. Writing weekly report was useful in improving my vocabulary retention	3,65	0,835	
	5. The ER activity helped me to expand my vocabulary	4,46	0,647	
Affective component of reading attitudes: Feelings, emotions	6. The ER activity did not give me more pleasure in learning English	4,20	0,518	4,07
	7. I feel tired from participating in this ER project	4,07	0,506	
	8. The ER materials were interesting	4,03	0,865	
	9. I do not like post-extensive reading activities	4,03	0,548	
Conative component of reading attitudes: Intention	10. I wish I had been encouraged to read extensively before	3,77	0,860	3,95
	11. I start to feel like reading stories and texts in English in my free time	4,02	0,657	
	12. I would like to continue reading in the same way next year	4,02	0,760	

When mean scores are reviewed for individual items in the above table, it can be seen that item 5 received the highest rating with mean score of 4.46. Besides, SD is relatively small with the value of 0.647. This figure shows that most of the students had very positive scale. It means that they significantly believe that their vocabulary was expanded by extensive reading activity. Similar to item 5, item 6 also received very high rating with mean score 4.20 and the value of SD is 0.518. It can be interpreted that the students really enjoyed reading graded readers and through extensive reading activity, they were pleased in learning English. It is apparent that all items received high ratings with mean score from 3.65 to 4.46 and their values of SD are quite small, range from 0.506 to 0.878. In addition, mean scores of three attitudinal aspects, namely beliefs, feelings and intention are 3.97; 4.07 and 3.95 respectively. The results indicate that the students had positive attitudes towards extensive reading program.

From the open-ended question, students' suggestions for enhancing future extensive reading project were collected and summarized. Eight students hoped that the future project related to extensive reading should have increased more reading materials and they could read more than one graded reader after a class. They also suggested that the researcher should have added more popular books by famous writers in the world published in Vietnamese so that it would have been easier for them to quickly get the target language. Moreover, five students reported that some types of collaborative activities should have been organized in class so that they could have used words in the stories. It was believed that they could have got more fun to work with other classmates and they could have shared unforgettable moments together. Last but not least, besides soft-copies of graded readers, some students suggested establishing a Facebook page or a Facebook group so that they could have

exchanged their stories, reading strategies, shared the ways to overcome difficulties in reading extensively and discussed some difficult phrases or sentences to understand.

In a nutshell, the findings showed the positive influences of extensive reading. In the first place, the students' vocabulary size and receptive vocabulary knowledge was gained. Secondly, extensive reading helped them develop positive attitudes towards reading in EFL. It is reasonable that the more students read, the easier reading becomes. Furthermore, learners also stated that reading extensively motivated them to read more. To have a good reading habit is very crucial for students who are expected to mainly self-study at university. In addition, the students' responses to the questionnaires revealed that they strongly appreciated the extensive reading project. Most of them considered reading during the project enjoyable and useful, and almost participants would like to continue reading extensively in the next year.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1. Recommendations

Educational institution should create favorable conditions for teachers and students to use the extensive reading as it is well supported to be a suitable method to help learners achieve progress in vocabulary acquisition. Due to its practical benefits, extensive reading approach should have a due place in the curriculum or a feasible extensive reading project should be integrated at the school level. This program could create a friendly environment where learners experience reading as they might do in their daily lives. University library should be provided with culturally-responsive and age-suitable graded readers to be more attractive and motivated for students.

Teachers should play a role as model in reading books so that they can encourage students to read more. In this research, the teacher read materials as students to understand and guide them effectively. The more books teachers read themselves, the more they tend to set a good example to their students. Hence, the model of teachers plays an influential role in stimulating students' motivation.

It is undeniable that students played a vital role on the effectiveness of the project. They are expected to be responsible for their own reading. However, some students might not fully understand the advantages they can get from joining the research. As a consequence, sometimes a small amount of students forgot to read the extra reading materials. It is suggested that a series of graded readers should have been delivered to the participants for them to pick the materials freely which they were interested in. Additionally, when learners are engaged in the extensive reading activities, they should ignore unknown or difficult words and guess the meaning of the words based on the context because it will take much time to look up the words, which distracts them from getting the main idea and makes them depend too much on dictionary.

5.2. Limitations and suggestions for further studies

Firstly, the project was conducted with a small population, 31 freshmen. The sample size is not big enough to generalize the findings. Furthermore, the target participants were first-year, not the higher level like second-year, third-year or last-year students. Though their scores that were used for analysis proved to be normally distributed, this narrow range of students prevented the researcher, to some extent, from getting full idea of the effects of

reading graded readers at varying levels of proficiency. Hence, it can not ensure yet whether the same extensive reading project could solve the same problem with different participants or not. As a result, further researches on the same issue should be conducted with a larger number of participants so that the results will be more reliable and further applicable.

Another restriction of the research is that the study emphasizes only on one language area - vocabulary and students' perceptions on extensive reading. It is suggested that extensive reading is a good way to tackle the problems of vocabulary shortfall and disadvantageous attitudes on reading. Further studies may look at other benefits of this kind of material, like investigating other language skills or elements, for example speaking, writing, reading comprehension, spelling, grammar or even other elements of vocabulary acquisition such as pronunciation, collocations, derivations and so on. Other researchers can also examine the similarities and differences between the effectiveness of graded readers and other materials.

Lastly, the results are based on a small number of self-rated words (150 items). A larger word checklist will be more reliable and provide more chances to investigate growth after more unfamiliar words have been encountered in the reading materials. In addition, only two tests could not reflect the whole picture of the vocabulary learning of the participants. Only word checklist was used to test learners' vocabulary of the words in this research. Hence, another studies should be carried out to measure vocabulary gains through extensive reading using more sensitive instruments to degrees of acquisition. Another idea is that all four language skills

should be involved in the test so that their knowledge of the words could be reflected more comprehensively.

5.3. Conclusion

The teacher-researcher realized students' vocabulary at UNETI was poor and needed to be taken into consideration. A study on the impacts of extensive reading was carried out on the population of 31 first-year students from different departments at UNETI. A mixed methodology was implemented with the devices of pre-test, post-test; the reflective journal and the questionnaire. The quantitative data was compared to evaluate the effects of the project on students' English vocabulary. The reflective journal and the attitudinal questionnaire were utilized to analyze on students' perception towards the extensive reading program.

For the first research question, the participants 'vocabulary learning was impacted positively as their score was higher in the post-test. It can be stated that the students acquired incidentally vocabulary through reading extensively, which contributed to the upgrade scoring of students' vocabulary test. It can be concluded that graded readers helped expand the students' vocabulary knowledge and improve their vocabulary learning.

For the second research question, reading graded readers had a positive effect on the students' attitudes towards reading. It is considered as an effective way to broaden students' vocabulary knowledge and motivate them in reading. The project also made other benefits through post-extensive reading activities assigned by the teacher. As the students had to write a reflection they read every class, their writing skills and grammar were also improved as well. Students shifted

from extensive depending on dictionary to based on the context. Hence, they improved trying to guess the meaning of strange words their reading skills.

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