

## **Extensive Reading on The Internet Among Malaysian ESL Students**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the nature and extent of extensive reading on the internet and the problems encountered when reading on the internet among a selected number of Malaysian ESL students in West Malaysia. A questionnaire adapted from Crawford and Kymes was used to obtain data from 155 students in an urban secondary school. Four students were randomly selected to participate in a structured interview. The reliability of the instrument was at 0.792. Descriptive analysis comprising means and frequencies was used to analyze the data. The findings showed that the frequency of extensive reading on the internet and motivation to read were at an average level. The results also indicated that there was no significant relationship between level of motivation and the variables gender and English language academic performance.

Keywords: extensive reading, internet, Malaysian ESL students, Malaysian secondary school

### **Introduction**

Good things happen to students who read a great deal in the new language. Research studies show they become better and more confident readers, they write better, their listening and speaking abilities improve, and their vocabularies get richer. In addition, they develop positive attitudes toward and increased motivation to study the new language (Bamford and Day, 1997). One approach that can be introduced to the students is extensive reading. Besides, Colin Davis says,

“Any ESL, EFL, or L1 classroom will be the poorer for the lack of an extensive reading programme of some kind, and will be unable to promote its pupils’ language development in all aspects as effectively as if such a programme were present”

(1995, p. 335)

The students’ own effort to read excessively outside the classroom can help them to develop their proficiency in language particularly in English. Extensive reading is generally associated with reading large amounts with the aim of getting an overall understanding of the material (Bamford and Day, 2002). The primary characteristic of extensive reading is, as the name implies, the large amount of reading compared with the amount that readers would read in different types of reading program which it called intensive reading (Yamashita 2008).

## Extensive Reading In English

According to Mason & Krashen, 1997 and Powell, 2005, extensive reading involves the reading of large amounts of longer, easy-to understand material, usually done outside the classroom and at each student's own pace and level. Extensive reading also is an reading activity whereby students choose the materials by themselves (Koch 2006 ; Bamford & Day 2002) based on their interest, levels of proficiency and favorite genre.

Koch (2006) has highlighted two elements that are particularly important in defining extensive reading based on the provided ten elements that characterize extensive reading according to Bamford and Day (1997).

1. Students read as much as possible, perhaps in and definitely out of the classroom.
2. Reading materials are well within the linguistic competence of the students in terms of vocabulary and grammar. Dictionaries are rarely used while reading because the constant stopping to look up words makes fluent reading difficult.

There has been a great deal of interest in Extensive Reading over the past decade among ESL/EFL educators. It has been drawing increasing attention from ESL/EFL educators as an effective form of English reading instruction. In the research done by Tanaka and Stapleton (2007), at the beginning of the extensive reading program, the reading materials chosen only have around 250 headwords, then slowly they introduced more difficult books with 700 headwords and gradually increased the number of graded readers based on feedbacks from students about their interests and the level of texts by the end of the five-months program. As a result, the findings of the research suggested that extensive reading program brings positive outcomes in enhanced motivation to read in English and the students' seemed to have positive attitudes towards reading English books.

Meanwhile, research done by Mason and Krashen (1997) and Tanaka and Stapleton (2007) suggested that the learners that involved in extensive reading program can improve their performance in English tests. Extensive reading also has been shown to be effective in increasing reading speed and comprehension (Bell, 2001; Mason & Krashen, 1997). Besides, reading with large quantities in English can build automaticity of word recognition. Comprehension and fluent reading depend on automatic word recognition and vocabulary knowledge, and thus are advanced through extensive reading (Porcaro 2005). This allows the reader to move from word-to-word decoding to processing the present language in context which essential to higher level reading and thinking process (Powell 2005 & Porcaro 2005). The reading process is not about comprehended the text in isolated chunks but the text as a whole idea.

There are many researches that have been done to investigate the effects of extensive reading on the students' L2 proficiency. In learning English as a foreign or second language, extensive reading can improve on learners' reading comprehension (Leung 2002; Tanaka & Stapleton 2007) and also on the learners' vocabulary acquisition (Leung 2002; Macalister 2008). Besides, Waring and Takaki (2003); Hayashi (1999) and Horst et al. (1998) have conducted the studies to investigate the effects of extensive reading to the students' vocabulary growth after the extensive reading program. From the findings, they have found that incidental learning vocabulary have shown occurred among the students from the results of extensive reading programs.

The extensive reading program also seems to give positive effects on the students writing ability (Mason & Krashen, 1997; Tsang, 1996; Robb & Susser, 1989 and Janopoulos, 1986). Janopoulos (1986) cited in Homstad & Thorson (1994) revealed the result from his study that

involved foreign graduate students admitted to OhioStateUniversity. The result indicates a strong correlation between the amount of L2 pleasure reading and L2 writing ability. This evidence suggests that proficiency levels for L2 reading and writing are closely related.

### **Extensive Reading on the Internet**

Pino-Silva, 2006 believed that extensive reading through the Internet appears to be a very promising pedagogical approach that may strengthen students' learning for today's classroom. He has started a reading online project in 1999 due to the students' encouragements by giving complete freedom to students to access texts of their choices and submits their work to a web site. The findings shown the students have positive attitudes towards reading on the Internet and they do learn vocabulary incidentally.

Meanwhile, Elizabeth, 2003 has listed out some problems that the students may encounter with reading on the Internet. According to her, the Internet reader must be able to handle the sheer volume of text, which can be described as enormous. The potential for gathering information is virtually unlimited. Through links, or Internet connections, a reader can access innumerable sites related to the original idea or topic of a search. Besides, much Internet content has blinking graphics, vivid color, and lots of eye-catching phrases that can guide or distract from the reading. A reader must be able to evaluate all the features of a webpage and quickly decide which one will likely be the most helpful in accessing information. Each link can lead to other sites such as a definition, additional information, or a video or audio example related to the original linked word or phrases. By selecting links in various orders, a reader creates his or her own path when reading on the Internet that will distract his or her reading. This path can be ever changing because information on the Internet is ever changing, with websites continually being updated, removed, or remodeled. Text on the Internet is not static whereas the text of a book remains the same each time the book is opened. These are the problems that the reader may encounter in reading on the Internet and how they must learn to control these in order to sustain their reading.

Dail, 2004 in her research has describe the processes, including attitudes and behaviors, that students utilize in facilitating reading comprehension of instructional material presented as an online hypertext document and also make some recommendations on how these issues might impact classroom literacy practices. The participating class was a tenth-grade world literature class containing twenty-five students consist of 10 males and 15 females students. This study has found that students utilize a variety of strategies when reading hypertext on the Internet, including scrolling the document, skimming the text, note-taking by hand, summarizing information, and relying on prior knowledge. Despite employing traditional reading strategies, students scored low on the comprehension questions assessing their understanding of the hypertext. The findings of the study indicated that students need direct instruction to apply in reading strategies on the Internet. From the classroom observation, the researcher found that the students grew frustrated when the computer and the Internet did not function as they expected. From the study, the educators should understand that a key component in acquiring computer or technological literacy involves possessing an understanding of the environment in which one is working.

## Background Studies

The primary consideration in all reading instruction is for students to experience reading as pleasurable and useful with their own desires and not because they have to do it. Only then will they be drawn to do the reading and become fluent readers. And only then will they develop an eagerness to learn new skills to help them become better readers (Bamford and Day, 2002).

However, the reading habits among Malaysians is still low as reported by Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia (PNM) in the year of 1996 that average two books read by Malaysians within a year and the reading materials consist of comic, magazine and newspapers. Another profile study result by Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia (PNM) shown that in year 2005 there are only 10,310 titles in various fields book registered a year in Malaysia, compared to 180,000 titles in China, 116,000 titles in the United Kingdom, 60,000 titles in the United States and 45,000 titles in India (W. RahimahDraman, 2007).

Also, Dr Abu Hassan Hasbullahin 2007 reported on reading habit among the university students found that they readan average of 12 books within three years of their study. The number vastly lower compared to students in Australia which is 180 books, Indonesia (94), India (130), Thailand (56) and Brunei (26). It is shown that reading habits among our students is very low compared to the students at other country (MohamadSofeeRazak, 2007).

Teachers are usually concerned with developing in the students' ability to read, but how much attention do teachers pay to develop a habit, indeed, love of reading in among their students. However, in present, the students and teachers tend to turn to the Internet for classroom assignments, teaching and learning purposes, and information acquisition. Due to this, the teachers may falsely assume that because the students know how to use and navigate the Internet, which is they know how to point, click, and type, then they are also able to comprehend and analyze the information they have located (Kymes, 2007). This is probably the most common misconception among the students and teachers. In order to be able to comprehend and analyze information, reading research and reading theories indicate that students must be able to strategically process the information they read from the Internet. The Internet requires these skills from the students, as well as additional skill in their search strategies for information location. Therefore, the researcher wants to conduct this study to investigate the nature and extent of the extensive reading on the internet among a selected number of Malaysian ESL students in order to determine whether they are the group of students with initiatives and efforts to read more. This is important to provide information regarding our students' reading habits and what motivate them to read extensively.

Therefore, the objectives of the present study are to investigate the nature of reading extensively on the Internet among the ESL students. Second, is to investigate the extent of reading extensively through the Internet among the ESL students and third is to investigate the problems (if any) encountered by the students in reading extensively through the internet and how they solve them.

## Method

### Participants

Participants in this study were a group of 155 ESL students from five form four classes at one secondary school in Kuala Terengganu. About an equal number of male, 93 (60%) and female 62

(40%), students are involved in this study. They were all native speakers of Bahasa Malaysia and had studied English through formal instruction at school for at least nine years.

### Survey Instrument

The questionnaire is adapted from Questionnaire on Reading in English that was developed and validated by Crawford in 2001 relating to reading frequency and attitudes related to extensive reading in English and also other items that were developed by Kymes in 2007 pertaining to online reading strategies. The questionnaire is divided into 6 parts which are demographic details, general information, motivations toward reading extensively on the Internet, problems with reading extensively on the Internet, sustained reading on the Internet and benefits from extensive reading on the Internet. The reliability of the instrument is at 0.792.

## RESULTS

The descriptive data collected from the questionnaires provided information concerning the actual reading nature among the students including frequency, motivations and types of reading materials read by the students on the Internet (research questions 1).

Table 1: The Nature of Extensive Reading on the Internet among the Student

Items	% (N)	% (N)	% (N)	% (N)
The students are encourage to read for pleasure by a teacher	No, never 9.0 (14)	Hardly never 5.8 (9)	Sometimes <b>60.0 (93)</b>	Yes, very much 25.2 (39)
The students self-rating on reading for pleasure	Low 9.7 (15)	Average 36.8 (57)	Good <b>42.6 (66)</b>	Very good 11 (17)
Ability to understand the gist from what they read	Yes, almost always 25.8 (40)	Sometimes <b>54.8 (85)</b>	Rarely 9.0 (14)	No, always use a dictionary 10.3 (13)
How often the students read English reading materials on the Internet	At least once in a day 28.4 (44)	Once a week 16.8 (26)	Sometimes <b>43.2 (67)</b>	Never 11.6 (18)

Table 1 displays descriptive statistics of the nature of extensive reading on the Internet among the student. 60 percent of the respondents claimed that they are sometimes are encourage to read for pleasure by a teacher while 9 percent of the respondents said they are never encourage to read for pleasure by a teacher. 42.6 percent of the respondents rated themselves as good in reading for pleasure. On the other hand, 54.8 percent of the respondents stated that they are sometimes able to understand the gist from what they read while 10.3 percent stated that they always use a dictionary when reading in English. In their responses on how often the students read English reading materials on the Internet, 43.2 percent of the respondents said they only read English

reading materials on the Internet occasionally and 11.6 percent of them never read English reading materials on the Internet.

Table 2 : Frequency of reading extensively on the Internet per day

	Frequency	Percent (%)
0-30 minutes	81	52.3
31-60 minutes	42	27.1
60-90 minutes	14	9.0
91-120 minutes	7	4.5
over 120 minutes	11	7.1
Total	155	100.0

It is only 11.6 percent of the respondents read extensively on the Internet that spend more than 91 minutes per day to read reading materials on the Internet.

Table 3: The Students' Levels of Motivation in Extensive Reading on the Internet

Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Low	6	3.9
Moderate	131	84.5
High	18	11.6
Total	155	100

In overall, the mean score for the motivations to read extensively in English are gathered from the items number 11 to 20. From the findings, 131 students which represents 84.5 percent have moderate levels of motivation, 11.6 percent have high level of motivation while the other 3.9 percent of the respondents have low levels of motivation. Therefore, it can be concluded that majority of the students have moderate level of motivation to read extensively on the Internet regardless their reading frequency and types of reading materials.

In order to determine whether the gender factor is contributed to motivation in reading extensively on the Internet, t-test has been done and the results as followed:

Table 4: Differences between Genders in Motivation to Read

	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	Df	T	Sig.
Male	62	2.5963	.29286	153	-2.089	0.929
Female	93	2.6928	.27407			

From the table, we can see that the  $p=0.929 > \alpha 0.05$ . Therefore, null hypothesis is accepted and shown there is no significance difference between male and female in relation to their motivation to read extensively on the Internet.

Besides, to determine whether other demographic details is affecting the level of motivation to read extensively on the Internet, the researcher has run the ANOVA test and the results as followed:

Table 5: ANOVA Test for Latest English Result and Levels of Motivation

	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Intra group	3	.132	1.646	.181
Inter group	151	.080		

The results shown that  $p \text{ value} = 0.181 > \alpha 0.05$ . Therefore, null hypothesis is accepted and shown there is no significance difference between the students' latest English results in relation to their motivation to read extensively on the Internet.

The students are also asked to choose their most preference reading materials on the Internet. The results are as following:

Table 6: Reading materials on the Internet

Materials	Frequency	Percent (%)
lyrics of pop, rock songs	70	45.2
newspapers	40	25.8
online magazines	26	16.8
online books	19	12.3
Total	155	100.0

From the table, the most frequent reading material is lyrics of pop, rock songs (45.2 %), followed by newspaper (25.8%), online magazines (16.8%) and online books (12.3%).

Based on the conceptual framework, the researcher has inserted the sustained reading under the extent of the extensive reading on the Internet. The researcher also investigated the problems encountered by the students when they read online, and the benefits from reading online.

The most common problems facing by the students from their reading on the Internet is item number 24, "The sites that are loading slowly always make the students less motivated to read" with the overall mean 2.93. The second most common facing by the students from their reading on the Internet is item number 26, "Too many commercials pop up during my reading on the Internet." While the less frequent problem facing by the students is item number 25, "My computer crashed many times while reading online" with overall mean 2.10.

## DISCUSSIONS

The result in this study is similar to the research done by Crawford (2001) on reading frequency and attitudes related to extensive reading in English among 182 Italian EFL students at the University of Florence. The findings also revealed most students have not developed the habit of reading in English. However, their attitude toward it is actually quite positive. The findings of the present study are also similar to the findings by Tanaka and Stapleton, 2007 whereby the students' seemed to have positive attitudes towards reading English materials and also another findings by Pino-Silva, 2006 when he found the students have positive attitudes towards reading on the Internet and they do learn vocabulary incidentally.

The respondents in this study are motivated to read extensively on the Internet. Similar findings also found by Ratnawati & Ismail (2003) and Tanaka and Stapleton (2007), suggested that extensive reading program brings positive outcomes in enhanced motivation to read in English and the students' seemed to have positive attitudes towards reading English books. In this study, the most frequent reading material read on the internet by the the students is lyrics of pop, rock songs (45.2 %), followed by newspaper (25.8%), and online magazines and books as can be seen in Table 4.10. The research by Powell (2005) also revealed that the most popular choices for home reading material were pop song lyrics and magazines, with graded readers coming third. It seems that the students are more interested in reading materials that suit their interest and their age.

In this study, the students have mentioned several problems they are facing while reading on the Internet such as links, commercials and the sites that are loading slowly. Elizabeth, 2003 in her paper has listed out these problems that distracted students when they are reading on the Internet. For example, content that has blinking graphics, vivid color, and lots of eye-catching phrases that can distract from the reading.

The findings from this present study signified the students in fact have high level of sustained reading while reading on the Internet. From the findings, the students have high overall mean with reading strategies that can help them to sustain their reading on the Internet. For example, item number 29, 'I look at the overall view of the text before I start reading' and item number 30, 'I try to get back when I lose concentration'. This means the students know how to use a particular reading strategy to help them when they read online reading materials. This is supported by Day and Bamford (1998), they noted that it is only through the actual reading experience that second language readers can acquire the complex linguistic, world, and topical knowledge needed to improve their reading skills.

Besides, in relation to the benefits from extensive reading on the Internet, the students agreed that they have learnt new words and their reading, writing and speaking skills are also improved due to their reading on the Internet. The same findings also found by Leung, 2002 and Macalister, 2008. In this study, the respondents perceived that reading extensively on the Internet help them to learn new words. Study by Waring and Takaki (2003); Hayashi (1999) and Horst et al. (1998) also have similar findings where they have found that incidental learning vocabulary have shown occurred among the students from the results of extensive reading programs. Meanwhile, research done by Mason & Krashen, 1997; Tsang, 1996 and Robb & Susser, 1989 also revealed the students' perceptions on the effects of extensive reading. They think that their writing skill is improved from the reading on the Internet.



## CONCLUSION

In conclusion the results of this study suggested that extensive reading on the Internet may continue to have an important role in the students' life at the secondary school and perhaps deserves more attention. Moreover, unlike other printed materials which maybe are not very influential, access to reading materials on the Internet is something that can be more crucial in the learning environment. Therefore, priority should be given to develop ICT infrastructure as a means of encouraging students to read extensively on the Internet in English.

To deal with the problem occurred from the reading on the Internet, which has become a barrier for limited reading on the Internet, it is important to educate the students on how to overcome it by integrating an extensive reading on the Internet program into the curriculum since the current syllabus already focuses on reading strategies for the academic textbooks, an extensive reading on the Internet program would constitute a further application and consolidation of these skills.

Once an extensive reading on the Internet program has been implemented, research in this area should be expanded. It would be worthwhile to set up an experimental study in an effort to quantify improvements in reading skills and vocabulary acquisition from the extensive reading on the Internet. Moreover, it might also be interesting to conduct a second survey to determine student reactions to the program and then compare it to this study to identify possible changes in reading nature and extent among the students.

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