

Implementing Digital-Mediated Extensive Reading for Agriculture Students in Post-Pandemic: Inspiration from The Online Teaching

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Abstract. Extensive reading is believed to be beneficial to help students acquire a language. Nevertheless, it is not easy to implement extensive reading, especially in the non-English department. The first constraint is cost because most of the extensive reading strategy uses a grader reader, which is expensive to buy. The second constraint is students' interest to read printed materials. The third constraint is reading log management. During the pandemic, we are inspired by how to implement extensive reading because we applied online learning. This new experience with online learning expands our insights. This paper aimed to elucidate how to implement extensive reading in the post-pandemic, which is not costly, and inform the strengths and weaknesses of implementing it. The research method used was a narrative inquiry. The authors highlighted prominent aspects during the implementation of extensive reading as the data of the study. The data was analyzed qualitatively. Some recommendations are discussed in conclusion.

Keywords: agriculture student, extensive reading, post-pandemic

1 Introduction

The aftermath of the COVID-19 outbreak threw conventional education processes into disarray and altered the regulations in unexpected ways. The transformation included the rapid replacement of classroom-based instruction with online teaching for colleges and institutions forced to close. It will also affect how we teach and engage with learners in the future. New teaching methods will arise, and all academics will have to change how they assist learning outcomes. For some, this is an exciting opportunity to change current habits, but for others, it will not be easy.

Teaching reading in tertiary education is one of the sectors that has been affected by that shift. Reading is commonly acknowledged as critical to student learning (e.g., Manarin, 2018; Seaboyer and Barnett, 2019). Many university courses are structured around textbooks, and the course information tells students that they should be ready to do much reading. We all know that reading is necessary for mastering course material. There is also substantial evidence that mastering reading skills are beneficial. Therefore, educators, academics, and policymakers worldwide and in Indonesia strongly aspire to improve students' reading performance and stimulate students' reading interest. Carillo (2016) asserts that educators who teach reading are frequently responsible for aiding the transfer of reading skills and 'successfully preparing

students to read in various subjects and contexts. The struggle is getting doubled when reading is the only choice for acquiring the course material in the English language.

The prevailing young generation prefers to play video games or watch videos on the internet during their free time. Yildirim (2014) accounted that a negative attitude towards reading is a crucial obstacle to establishing a reading culture. Many language programs do not adequately address the conflict between the necessity to read for learning and the aversion to reading that many learners have. Some of today's learners would benefit from the development of a reading culture by educators. This paper contends that the extended reading technique can overcome the considerable challenges to building a reading culture among students. People who are learning a second language will find reading much material to be quite beneficial.

However, it is not easy to adopt extensive reading, especially in the non-English departments. This technique relies on a grader reader, which costs much money to obtain. In addition, learners sometimes are demotivated to read printed texts and managing reading logs. As a result of this new experience with online learning, we gained fresh perspectives. We developed a program for implementing extensive online reading during the post-pandemic. This study aimed to probe teachers' perspectives on developing students' reading interests through a digital extensive reading program, including instructional recommendations and addressing students' particular needs. After the pandemic, this study intended to explain how to adopt extensive reading cost-effectively and the merits and challenges of this program.

2 Literature Review

2.1. Teaching reading in a digital era

Due to the rapid advancement of technology, English Language Teaching (ELT) has gradually started paying attention to how teachers and students learn and practice English through various digital devices and the latest technologies (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016). Lee and Dražati (2019) identify this phenomenon as digital learning of English, when the EFL learner's activity involving various digital devices, such as computers, tablets, online applications, and smartphones. With the advent of the digital era, ELT attitudes and practices about digital devices have become a focal point for the methodical development of effective technology-assisted language learning.

The influence of technology on learning and reading is not limited to the classroom. Digital technology can be used for social or instructional purposes. In general, and specifically, it is vital to make this distinction concerning the Internet (Naumann, 2015). As opposed to social media, chats, and online games used for entertainment, informational use involves searching for information on websites, blogs, or forums that could be used to learn. Each of these has a various impact on learning, especially in teaching reading.

A recent study by Laeli, Setiawan, and Anam (2021) in East Java, Indonesia, reported that most ELT teachers were optimistic regarding the use of reading digital content in the classroom. In contrast, most ELT teachers have misconceptions about what they need to know and how to do it. They said they had never attended training on reading digital text for English class. Literacy levels appear to be affected by the usage of digital technologies and resources. In

Quebec, Canada, Lysenko and Abrami (2014) examined the impact of two digital technologies on reading comprehension. An interactive digital story was linked to instructional exercises using multimedia technology. Instructions were given orally to encourage listening comprehension. An electronic portfolio on the web was the second tool. Students could develop their reading portfolios and share them with peers, instructors, or parents to gain feedback. Both vocabulary and reading comprehension were significantly higher in classes, where both tools were utilized throughout the school year (with medium effect sizes) than in classes where neither tool was used. In contrast, Kurniawati, Maolida, and Anjaniputra (2018) contends that although technology aids teachers in delivering materials, the way they interact with and treat students occupies a pivotal role in establishing a positive relationship between teachers and students. The results demonstrate that English teachers must improve their digital literacy to remain competitive in the digital age.

2.2. Overview of extensive reading

A teaching approach known as extensive reading (ER) promotes learners to read extensively to become fluent in English and any other foreign language (Day, Prentice, et al., 2016). Basic reading instruction follows the premise that reading is the most effective method of learning the skill. ER has the unique characteristic of allowing students to choose the kind and number of reading materials they want to do independently. Educators need to ensure that the content they select is easy to read. Students benefit from this strategy in a variety of ways. For example, they can grasp the gist of information while also finding reading enjoyable. Teachers who employ the ER method let students drop a book if it becomes too stressful or tedious. In conventional extensive reading, the students are usually required to report in reading logs and show the books or printed reading sources, which is paper consuming, to the instructors.

The significant advancement of information and automation technologies has altered how learners access knowledge resources and has broadened their learning opportunities across various platforms and methods (Fahnoe & Mishra, 2013). Poláková & Klmová (2019) presume that the classroom learning process has undergone a radical transformation since digital natives prefer technology to books. They expect that technology will continue to be used in the classroom throughout their education. Soroya and Ameen (2020) examined the millennials' reading habits in the digital era. The result indicated that millennials prefer to read more electronic material to consume e-content, as free websites were their favorite method of accessing reading material. Nonetheless, the reading format is influenced by the reading purpose. Based on the previous research, this current study proposes implementing extensive digital reading to increase and instill reading habits for university students that are economical and efficient.

In this case, we examine graded readers as a common platform used to support extensive reading programs, including what they are, how they are used, and their benefits and drawbacks. Graded readers are carefully graded books by reading levels and are written for language learners (Kara, 2019). To assist readers in comprehending texts, graded readers limit the number of headwords and simplify the vocabulary and syntax of the original text (Allan, 2009). With adjusted lexis and syntax, teachers or parents will be able to predict students' reading levels. Therefore, they will select books from different reading schemes with confidence, knowing that they are the right level for their children/students. Albay (2017) proclaimed that

graded readers effectively motivate learners, promote reading fluency, enhance vocabulary and grammar knowledge growth, and improve vocabulary and grammatical knowledge.

On the other hand, Milliner and Cote (2015) indicated that students require further instruction in using the graded reader method, specifically selecting books suited for their linguistic level. Throughout the semester, teachers should establish smaller, incremental word targets. Finally, teachers must dedicate additional time to educating children about the ER system's purpose and practices. Graded readers also have some issues with text authenticity. It is essential to consider these concerns to guarantee that learners only read materials whose authenticity has been demonstrated, such as magazines, newspapers, novels, and others. Waring (2014) also argues that extensive reading is not always required in a scaffold or graded, it can also be from a teacher's reading material if the school cannot afford to purchase graded readers from a publishing company. In a nutshell, based on the pros and cons, our extensive online reading examines strategies to reduce the burden of reading complex texts without graded readers and beyond graded readers.

3 Methodology

This study used a narrative inquiry. This design was chosen because this study looked for the practice of extensive reading and its strength and weakness based on the teacher's view. A narrative inquiry tells the story of lived experience and investigates the participants' experience (Macías Villegas et al., 2020; Nordstrom, 2020). This study arose from the authors' experiences in implementing digital-mediated extensive reading. The authors implemented digital-mediated extensive reading.

This study site was in Malang, Indonesia in which English is considered a foreign language. Moreover, the reading habit of Indonesia tertiary students was poor (Iftanti, 2012). It encourages the authors to use extensive reading as an alternative to familiarize students with reading habits. This study is applied to the university in which we teach because we had the authority to apply various teaching strategies. The teaching and learning were still conducted online because of the increasing number of COVID-19 cases in Malang.

The participants of this study were the authors themselves because the author implemented the digital-mediated extensive reading in their class and their students were agriculture students. The teaching experience of the participants has been more than 10 years. The participants have been applying online teaching for more than a year. They obtained a master's degree from a decent university.

The data was garnered from interviews and field notes. The interviews were conducted by asking each other questions. The questions were made by ourselves and then were asked during the interviews. We kept the questions secret in order the answers given during the interviews were natural because we did not know the questions. The interviews were conducted online at the end of the extensive reading implementation and were recorded. Field notes were written when there was a prominent aspect during the implementation of digital-mediated extensive reading.

The interviews data was translated, transcribed, and coded to reveal the theme. The field note was used to complement the interviews data. The field note helped us to recall what incidents happened during the implementation.

4 Finding and Discussion

This section is divided into two sections: teaching procedure, and strength and weakness. The teaching procedures elucidate the steps of implementing a 6-week digital-mediated extensive reading that we have done. The strengths and weaknesses elaborate the benefit and the pitfall of the implementation based on our perspectives.

Teaching Procedures

The teaching procedures consisted of three phases: preparation, implementation, post-implementation. The preparation phase explains what the teacher prepares before he/she informs the digital-mediated extensive reading to the students. The implementation phase explains what the teacher and the students do during the digital-mediated extensive reading. Post-implementation explains the appreciation and follow-up activity.

- *Preparation*

The first thing to do before implementing digital mediated extensive reading is to make a Google spreadsheet which functions as a reading log for students. One Google spreadsheet consists of eight students or more, depending on the total number of students in the class. The name of students in a spreadsheet is grouped alphabetically in order to monitor easily. The link of the spreadsheet is shared with the students in order the students can fill out the spreadsheet.

- *Implementation*

The digital-mediated extensive reading is conducted for a half-semester. At the first meeting, the students are informed about the digital-mediated extensive reading. They are informed that extensive reading is a voluntary activity and out-of-class activity.

The teacher tells and encourages the students to implement the digital-mediated extensive reading at the first meeting. It is essential to encourage the students by explaining the goal and benefit of extensive reading. In addition, the teacher emphasizes that the extensive reading activity is to make a new habit for students to read more and, then, their language ability is improved through reading a lot. Read more facilitates the students to learn better (Ro, 2016). The teacher also involves in the digital-mediated extensive reading as a way to motivate and to give a role model that the teacher does the same activity. The teacher shares his/her extensive reading progress, thus the students are able to see what the teacher reads.

The students are allowed to read some texts interesting to them as long as the text is not printed. They can look for the texts on the internet. They can read article journals, news websites, and others. The students are able to read at any time after the class. After the student reads a certain text, they should fill out the reading log in the Google spreadsheet which had been made by the teacher. They type the title of the text, the source of the text, the difficult vocabulary, the tenses, and interesting points of the text. They may read more than one text weekly and type it in the reading log weekly.

The teacher also types his/her reading progress in the reading log for the students to be encouraged to read. Besides, the teacher monitors the students' progress and reminds them to read. The teacher's involvement in the extensive reading shows that the teacher emphasizes the voluntary activity and the enjoyment of extensive reading, not as a burden of assignment. Doing extensive reading together can possibly motivate the students to keep reading. It created an atmosphere in which students are motivated to read (Ro, 2016).

Regarding integrating to a speaking skill, the students are required to share what they have read with other students. This sharing session offers an opportunity for students to speak and present their readings. It can be done biweekly for 10 minutes.

The students read texts on the internet. It provides the students with authentic text. Reading authentic text provides the students not only the language components but also knowledge or information. This new information gained from their readings can be shared and exchanged with other students during the 10 minute-sharing session.

Since digital-mediated extensive reading is a voluntary activity, the teacher does not need to monitor students' progress rigidly. Instead, the teacher gives a follow-up activity such as a writing or speaking assignment.

- *Post-implementation*

After 6 weeks of implementation of digital-mediated extensive reading, the teacher showcases all progress of the students. The teacher can ask the students about the obstacles they faced and the reason why they do not do the extensive reading. In addition, the teacher praises the students who do very well on the extensive reading as a reward or appreciation. There is no punishment for the students who do not do the extensive reading because it is a voluntary activity, not an assignment.

As a follow-up activity, the students are required to write a review about one text that they like most. The review consists of 250-500 words. The review includes students' views on the topic discussed in the text they read.

Strengths and Weaknesses

This section elaborates the strengths and weaknesses of the digital-mediated extensive reading based on our views on who implemented it. We elaborate on the strengths, and then the weaknesses.

The management of the reading log was easier using the digital-mediated extensive reading. A teacher said “Google spreadsheet is easy and I do not need to bring a printed reading log”. Monitoring students’ reading was one of the concerns in applying extensive reading (Brown, 2009). Google spreadsheet lessens the teacher’s burden of bringing many papers of reading log. The teacher added “I can monitor students’ reading everywhere using my smartphone or laptop”. Using a digital reading log such as a Google spreadsheet provides flexibility because it is an online platform, thus the teacher is able to check the reading log everywhere.

The cost of the digital-mediated extensive reading was cheaper because the teacher did not need to buy the published graded readers. A teacher said “I do need to buy graded readers because of the expensive cost”. With web 2.0, the cost could be reduced because of the various free sources on the internet (Windsor & Park, 2014). An additional cost was not needed for online extensive reading (Arnold, 2009). It is a relatively good approach especially for non-English department because the department will not buy graded readers for a course having 2 or 3 credits; the department would rather buy equipment related to its department. The cost of graded readers usually impedes the implementation of extensive reading since the price of graded readers is relatively high. Furthermore, the students read authentic texts on the internet. All types of text were available on the internet with unlimited access (Arnó-Macià, 2012).

The digital text was in line with the students’ interests. A teacher said “my students like to read digitally because they are accustomed to reading on their smartphone or laptop”. As the students are included as a digital native, they prefer to read digital-related texts or images. Digital materials were preferable for a pleasure reading (Stoller & Nguyen, 2020). Digital text lessens the burden of the students to bring books or papers and they can read the text everywhere using their smartphone. The smartphone is the most universal device owned by students (Pratama & Scarlatos, 2020). Therefore, digital text makes the students access it easier since the students have owned a smartphone and feel comfortable using the smartphone.

The digital-mediated extensive reading was possible to enhance students’ vocabulary and awareness of grammatical tenses. The students were exposed to various vocabulary and tenses during reading extensively. A teacher uttered “It helps students to read independently and learn a new vocabulary. It is better for students to learn the vocabulary independently than being spoon-fed the vocabulary”. The students work independently through extensive reading and find their approach to learn the language pro-actively (McCollister, 2019). Extensive reading provides the students to meet a similar vocabulary frequently. Students encounter high-frequency words repeatedly and learn new vocabulary from the encounter (Chang & Hsuehchao, 2018; Suk, 2017). Furthermore, reading an authentic text offers students with grammar in context. A teacher uttered “read extensively makes my student aware of tenses used”. Learners engaging with extensive reading improved their writing and grammar (Day, 2018). Another teacher said “my students are exposed to various tenses in the text, thus they learn it subconsciously”. The teacher believes that his/her students learn the tenses through grammar in context while reading various texts. In a similar vein, teacher’s belief was that students’ overall language competence could be enhanced by extensive reading (Chang & Renandya, 2017).

The weakness of implementing digital-mediated extensive reading was an unstable internet connection. Internet connection plays a pivotal role in online or digital learning because it is the media to access the learning materials. A stable internet connection was entailed for successful remote learning (Raes et al., 2020). It is difficult for a city having a bad internet connection to apply the digital-mediated extensive reading. Poor internet connection was a technological problem faced by the students undergoing blended learning (Bidder, et.al. 2016).

Another weakness was to forget to write in the reading log. The teacher said “I also involve in this extensive reading, but I often forget to write my own reading progress in the reading log”. The teacher forgets to write the reading log because it is a digital and non-visual report. It is different from a paper-based which the teacher is able to see the paper and it prevents forgetfulness.

5 Conclusions

Pandemic makes the teachers explore new tools related to a digital platform. Pandemic has expanded the teacher’s comfort zone, just teaching with monotonous teaching aid such as whiteboard and LCD projector in the classroom, into using a technological application in the internet platform. This new experience offers two options: grow or leave behind.

The teachers who want to grow and keep up with technology see an opportunity to improve their teaching strategy with the assistance of technology. The digital-mediated extensive reading is one of the strategies utilizing technology that can be implemented in the post-pandemic. There are three phases implementing the digital-mediated extensive reading.

Considering the strength and weaknesses of the digital-mediated extensive reading, it is advisable to use this strategy because the strengths outweigh the weaknesses. The recommendation is suggested to use this strategy in secondary education which possibly has different characteristics.

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