

Implementing Extensive Reading in English Language Teaching

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Abstract: This paper has provided an overview of extensive reading in English language teaching (ELT) in Vietnamese context. It is mainly organized in accordance with the four main parts: (1) introduction, (2) literature review, (3) implementing the program of extensive reading in the Vietnamese context, and (4) conclusion. In the first part, the introduction, the writer introduces the necessity and the importance of extensive reading which would be the rationale of the paper. The part of literature review shows some definitions and descriptions of extensive reading, which clearly gives a full understanding about extensive reading. The third part is related to implementing the program of extensive reading in ELT classrooms in Vietnam, which includes some challenges, promises and suggestions for the implementation. The final part concludes main points of the whole paper with the hope that teachers and educators should try their best in applying and encouraging learners in extensive reading.

Keywords: Extensive reading, ELT, reading habit.

1. Introduction

In the context of the development of technology, people tend to get information so quickly by using media. Learning English language is a not an exception. Practicing the four skills of English, which include listening, speaking, writing and reading, has become easier via using online tools or programs. However, in order to get the proficiency in English language is not easy and it is a really hard process of learning. Day and Bamford (1998) suggest that one of the best ways to master a target language is forming the reading habit in the language. By reading a large number of “comprehensible and interesting texts” in the second language, students develop into fluent readers in that language (Day & Bamford, 1998, p.181). Furthermore, extensive reading can support students in acquiring the target language naturally by engaging them in reading process where they can choose what to read and when to read during the program (Day & Bamford, 1998). These are considered as the reasons why extensive reading is widely regarded as an effective way to enhance the target language, particularly in English teaching and learning.

2. Literature review

2.1. Extensive reading

There are many journals and articles proving that extensive reading is considered as one of the interesting and effective tools to encourage students

developing their language development thanks to the characteristics of such kind of reading. Davis (1995) in his journal paper also mentions that students in the extensive reading program have selected books related to their interests and lifestyles rather than to their “literary merit”. The chosen reading genre includes non-fiction or teenage magazines, but fiction takes the priority over the others (Davis, 1995). In addition to the concept of choice, Mutoh (2009) asserts that the quantity of books is the main implication of extensive reading.

Students can develop their language competence as well as their reading skills and vocabulary day after day by encountering a large number of books or whatever they read at their own level of the target language. Through their extensive reading process, “the foundation vocabulary and grammar of English” are established unconsciously along with their writing skills which are formed naturally (Mutoh, 2009).

2.2. Some benefits of extensive reading

Day and Bamford (1998) analyze some benefits that extensive reading brings to learners in language learning. Firstly, extensive reading develops learner autonomy. With extensive reading, learners can do individually at anywhere and anytime of the day. They can read at their own speed and in their own way. Thus, when they read extensively, they have an opportunity to work with their own including visualizing, interpreting, implicitly and explicitly

making questions for themselves and even noticing about the language to serve their own learning. Secondly, extensive reading offers comprehensible input. It is undeniable that reading is the foremost tool to acquire language in a comprehensible way.

With extensive reading, the learners can absorb the target language in their own. Thirdly, extensive reading enhances general language competence. It is clearly that, in a great extent, reading competence has positive effects on other language skills - writing, speaking and control over syntax (Mutoh, 2009). Fourthly, extensive reading helps develop the knowledge of general world. Actually, extensive reading helps learners to open their minds with lots of things around the world seen through different eyes.

Finally, extensive reading creates and sustains motivation to read more. In order to read successfully in foreign language, learners need to be encouraged to read more and more. Extensive reading is one of effective ways to interest learners in reading (Mutoh, 2009).

2.3. Implementing the program of extensive reading in the Vietnamese context

2.3.1. Challenging

Reading material unavailable for remote areas' students

Day and Bamford (1998) describe one of the characteristics of a successful extensive reading program is that a variety of materials on a wide range of topics is available in order to encourage reading. However, it is a matter of fact that reading material are very few delivered to rural areas in Vietnam. As Mutoh (2009) mentions, the school library mainly includes textbooks and reference books, and most of the students have very little chance to see or read any single picture book or even a magazine. She also claimed that because of the poor supply of reading material, students seem not to engage in reading. If Vietnamese educators and teachers cannot ensure the available reading material for students, the implementation of extensive reading in Vietnam could not be successful.

Hard and heavy curriculum of studying

Another major challenge for integrating the programs of extensive reading in Vietnamese context is that the system of Vietnam's education strongly sticks to the tight curriculum assigned by the MOET, which makes both English teachers and students unable to find and arrange time for it. Referring to the principles for a successful extensive reading program

(Day and Bamford, 1998), students are encouraged to read as much as possible, but because of the heavy curriculum, there is no way they can have a spare time for extensive reading.

The habit of reading not being deeply developed

Vietnamese people in general and Vietnamese students in particular have not formed a solid habit of reading (Tran, 2019). That is why it is difficult to give our students extensive reading as a way to develop their language competence. Vietnamese people are traditionally fond of learning and getting knowledge, but it does not mean that they are ready and eagerly to read, as Bui (2008), Principle of Lotus University, complains in the Conference of "Do Vietnamese people love reading?" that most of Vietnamese people do not consider reading as a habit or as an indispensable need.

Besides, Vietnamese students work with books only for examination, and consequently they have restricted their reading so that it would fit to the requirement set by the examiners. This goes oppositely with the main characteristic of a real reader as an independent thinker with a nonstop desire for knowledge. Without a strong habit of reading, the implementation of extensive reading would be very challenging.

2.3.2. Promising

Day and Bamford (1998) believe that "attitude is that subjective to change". If there were some ideas of Vietnamese poor attitude toward reading, people now should know that Vietnam is making progress on changing reading attitude. Nowadays, Vietnamese Government has started to pay attention to develop reading habit among Vietnamese people, particularly among pupils and students. Tran (2019) states that it was necessary to develop the reading culture and promote publishing network of the reading works to serve all levels of the individuals and organizations in the society.

Accordingly, Strategy for Cultural development till 2020 by Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism aims to develop reading habit on Vietnamese society, firstly for students. This strategy has been concretized by many activities. Not only the big cities, provinces and local authorities have built and opened libraries but individuals who have huge book collection have also formed private libraries to serve readers.

All these activities and other efforts in the whole country show that Vietnamese people are aware of the importance of reading and Vietnamese students

are interested in reading - good attitude. Day and Bamford (1998, p. 220) say that “In short, students with positive attitude toward reading in their own language are likely to begin with a positive attitude toward second language reading”. Therefore, Vietnamese students with reading positive attitude will take the extensive programs with positive attitude.

2.3.3. Suggestion for implementing the programs of extensive reading in Vietnam

The most important thing teachers need to do is to change Vietnamese students' attitude towards reading and to motivate them to read more and more. In order to do so, it is recommended that teachers should instruct and organize effectively the activities of extensive reading in learning both inside and outside the classroom.

According to Day and Bamford (1998), integrating the programs of extensive reading into foreign language teaching and learning can include at least four broad ways:

- As a separate, stand-alone course
- As part of an existing reading course
- As a noncredit addition to an existing course
- As an extracurricular activity.

In the Vietnamese context, the first two ways seem not to be suitable because of the already hard and heavy curriculum and a bunch of study work as a burden for students. Instead, we need to carefully carry out the activities in the way that it would not create any pressure on students but eagerness and enthusiasm. For this purpose, the last two ways seem to be more ideal in our context.

In organizing and evaluating the activities of extensive reading, teachers can ask them to write reports citing the source and types of the material as well as expressing their feedback on the material including what kind of knowledge they have learnt, what specific reading skills they have earned or need to improve more from the reading and what they expect to share with their teacher and classmates about the reading.

3. Conclusion

In brief, the objective of applying the program of extensive reading in English language teaching in Vietnam is to help learners acquire the proficiency of the language. As discussed above, the implementation of the Program in the Vietnamese context would give many promises, thanks to the awareness of Vietnamese educators of extensive

reading's role in language learning. However, if Vietnamese educators and teachers do not carefully and appropriately consider the way of integrating extensive reading program into English language teaching and learning, it would take a long time to reach the final objective.

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