

# ENGAGING STUDENTS IN 15-MINUTE SILENT READING IN ENGLISH CLASS: STUDENTS' PERCEIVED BENEFITS 

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#### Abstract

Grounded from the input hypothesis proposed by Krashen in language learning, a plethora of studies has been addressed to investigate the role of extensive reading which is generally done as an outside classroom activity. However, the integration of similar activities as a part of teaching procedures in the classroom is inadequately explored. Therefore, to fill this lacuna, this article briefly chronicles the enactment of 15-minute silent reading as the adoption of extensive reading in an English class. 32 freshmen were recruited on a voluntary basis. Nested in action research, students engaged in five activities: 1) building knowledge and tutorial,2) material self-selection, 3) silent reading, 4) short sharing session, and 5) individual and collective reflection within 5 weeks of time frame. Findings from the classroom observations, students' reflective journals, and oral collective reflection indicate that the participants responded positively and acknowledged some valuable benefits. Overall, the empirical evidence suggests that 15-minute silent reading can be one of alternative activities to be integrated in the classroom instruction.


## (C) Introduction

The impetus to help learners to either acquire or learn a new language has led teachers and researchers to revisit the concept of reading as one of measures to provide students with the exposures of targeted language. Theoretically speaking, exposure to language input has been sufficiently proven as a central feature in language learning or acquisition (Renandya \& Jacobs, 2016). In this respect, reading is considered as one excellent way of providing language input (Day and Bamford, 1998; Maley 2005).

Anchored from the principle of input hypothesis by Krashen, Extensive Reading (henceforth, ER) has been proven by myriad empirical studies to have better impacts on students' language development. However, the onus of reading practice in English language classrooms in Indonesian context is more focused on reading for comprehension in which students are much driven to do a series of pedagogical tasks (Widodo, 2015; Widodo, 2016). On the other hand, the idea of ER focusing more on getting general understanding or meaning is much operationalized in the context of out-of-class activity (Renandya and Jacobs, 2016). Not many did practitioners bring it to the classroom context. This condition may affect students' understanding about reading. The
nature of reading in the classroom that is designed more to answer comprehension questions correctly might burden students to find reading as something enjoyable, flexible, and beneficial. Having this in mind, there is an urgency to explicitly nurture students to be more aware about ER as one key to help students with their language development. Therefore, this study aimed to paint the portrait of the adoption of ER in the form of 15-minute silent reading as one of English classroom rituals before the main lesson.

## Theoretical Support

In literature, various terms are associated with ER in practice as the way to facilitate learners with language input such as; narrow reading (Krashen, 2004b), series reading (Chang \& Renandya, 2017), independent reading (Cullinan 2000), reading for enjoyment (Clark and Rumbold 2006) pleasure reading (Cremin, Mottram, Collins, Powell, and K. Safford, 2014) or voluntary reading (Krashen 2004). Even though each of them has specific characteristic(s), in particular they share a similar viewpoint. The idea of ER and the like is rooted from the principle of Input Hypothesis proposed by Krashen emphasizing on the importance of exposing learners to the vast amount of language inputs in language acquisition. In selecting the inputs, it is also advisable to ponder the notion of comprehension in which the learners get exposed to the inputs within their language repertoire.

ER in practice is commonly termed by Renandya (2007, p.135) as sustained silent reading or voluntary free reading. Specifically, Renandya and Jacobs (2016, p. 98) characterise ER as a series of activities that covers a great number of reading in particular long periods, is aimed at getting general understanding and focusing only on meaning. Krashen (2016) and Nation and Waring (2019) call ER as vocabulary enhancement pedagogy for either in the context of first language or in the context of second language. It usually requires students to self-select the reading passages and facilitates voluntary reading (reading for pleasure) in which the students are not assigned to do some pedagogical tasks such as answering comprehension questions, writing summary, and the like. Specifically, Day \& Bamford (2002) consider ten principles of teaching ER: 1) the text should be easy, 2) ER should cover various reading topics, 3) learners have the right to choose what to read, 4) learners read as much as possible, 5) the purpose of reading is for pleasure, 6) reading is not followed by comprehension test, 7) reading is usually faster in speed, 8) reading is individual and silent, 9) teacher plays as the guider and scaffolder, and 10) teacher is also as a role model.

The benefits of ER either in language acquisition or language learning have been well documented in the literature. Cognitively, it is uncovered that students who extensively read language texts outperform the students who do not read on a regular basis (Krashen, 2004a; Krashen, 2011). Additionally, Jeon \& Day (2016) and Nakanishi
(2015) geared from meta-analysis research confirm that ER helps students in various aspects of the L 2 learning landscape.

Therefore, a plethora of studies has been enacted to investigate the impact of ER in various contexts. Hafiz and Tudor (1989) conducted an experimental research in ESL class with students aged 10-11 years old to find out the impact of ER towards students' language skills. The findings report a significant improvement in the experimental group in terms of language skills performance especially in writing. Similarly, in almost three decades later, McLean \& Rouault (2017) in their experimental study assert that ER could facilitate students to have better reading rate. The similar conclusion was also found in Bell (2001), Beglar, Hunt, and Kite (2012), Day and Bamford (1998). Taguchi, TakayasuMass, \& Gorsuch (2004) with the similar research design in Japanese context found ER helped students develop their reading fluency. Some other studies report that ER also facilitated students gain vocabulary acquisition improvement (Pigada \& Schmitt, 2006; Mason (2004); Nation, 2015), reading comprehension (Bell, 2001), reading skill and overall English language proficiency (Chang \& Renandya, 2017), motivation to read (Ro, 2016), confidence and motivation, positive attitude towards reading, healthy reading habit (Renandya \& Jacobs, 2016), and grammatical structure (Aka,2020). Additionally, the ER in the context of online learning using digital tools was proven to trigger students' motivation and interest to read (Arnold, 2009; Lin, 2014). Practically, Arnold's program provides an opportunity for the students to self-select authentic online materials in their ER.

While the above mentioned previous studies showcase the benefit of ER for students, the crucial discussion on helping students to establish self-motivation to engage in reading activities is worth highlighting. Having this in mind, Reading Engagement Theory (hereafter, RET) first developed by Guthrie and Wigfield (1997, 2000), has commonly been adopted as the framework for studies in examining students' motivation in reading (Unrau, Ragusa, \& Bowers, 2015). This concept of RET affirms that the primary force to establish students' reading engagement is motivation. Mori (2015) also suggests the similar thing accentuating the role of motivation in ER. In this respect, RET explains how instructional processes covering nine attributes such as teacher involvement, evaluation, rewards and praise, collaboration, strategy instruction, interesting texts, realworld interactions, autonomy support, and learning and knowledge goals impact on students' engagement in reading that ultimately play a contributing factor for reading outcome. In relation to the concept of RET, Unrau, Ragusa, \& Bowers (2015) found relationship building as the biggest force of motivation. Furthermore, grounded in qualitative study, they also present a model of teacher-student interpersonal relationships as the way on how to engage students in reading activity.

From the previous studies in the literature albeit the vast amount of empirical studies informing about positive impacts of ER and how to foster students' interest to do ER, little attention has been put to scrutinize the adoption of ER in the classroom practice. Therefore, this study is an attempt to paint the portrait of students' engagement in an

English class through 15- minute silent reading adopted from the principles of ER as an activity before the main lesson. Specifically, this study is designed to answer the following question:

1. In what ways do students engage in 15 -minute silent reading?
2. What are the students perceived benefits from doing 15-minute silent reading?

## Q. Method

In addressing the two research questions mentioned earlier, an action research framed by Kemmis, Mc Taggart, and Nixon (2014) was enacted. This research design was considered appropriate to carry in this present study inasmuch as it aims at "changing people's practices, their understanding of their practices, and conditions under which their practices are carried out" p .51 ). This is in congruent with the objective of this study to facilitate students to raise their awareness on the benefit of short silent reading using self-selected materials and to engage them in the process of it.

## Identify Subsections

This 15-minute silent reading activity was enacted to facilitate students to raise their awareness on the benefit of short silent reading using self-selected materials and to engage them in the process of it. By exposing students to this particular activity, students were expected (out of this study's queries) to experience the joy of reading and later on hopefully have better reading habits. Following this project, the students engaged in the following activities.

Table 1. 15-minute Silent Reading Activities and Procedures

| Time | Activities | Details |
| :--- | :--- | :--- |
| Week 1 | Building students' <br> understanding and <br> tutoring on basic <br> skills to do the <br> silent reading. | In this stage, the students were invited to the discussion on <br> the benefits of self - exposing to the language environment <br> and the benefits of ER. In addition, they were also explicitly <br> tutored on navigating reading resources and selecting <br> comprehensible text. |
| Week 2-5 | Building <br> motivation | Students were exposed to related empirical studies, success <br> stories, personal experiences, dialogues, and the like to <br> build their interest and motivation to engage themselves in <br> the silent reading process. |
|  | The students had the privilege to self-select the materials <br> that interest them within their language competence level. |  |
|  | To do so, it was advisable for them to use their smartphone. <br> And practically, all of students equip their smartphone to <br> do the silent reading |  |

- Short sharing After having silent reading, the students were set to do a session
sharing session in the form of pair sharing (week 2), group
sharing (week 3), or collective classroom sharing (week 4). Due to time constraints, there was no sharing session in week 5.

In the sharing session the students were encouraged to tell what they had read, what was the most interesting thing, the resources, and the other information they like to share.

- Reflection

The teacher invited students to do short oral reflection and assigned students to write their personal reflective journal.

## Participant (Subject) Characteristics

This study is situated in an English class in a state university in West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. 32 of freshmen, participating in Basic Oral Communication course, aged between 18 to 20 years old, were recruited in this study. They were majoring in English and coming from different socio cultural and language backgrounds. Having been recruited purposively, their participation was fully voluntary. They consented to participate in the activities of 15 -minute silent reading covering tutorial, materials selfselection, series of silent readings, sharing sessions, and writing weekly reflective journals and participating in oral collective reflection. Since the nature of participation is voluntary, there was a written guarantee stating that no academic or other consequences for withdrawing from this study. Also, for the sake of participants' safety, their personal data were kept confidential.

This study is a part of a larger study under the frame of reflective teaching to construct a more effective EFL teaching learning praxis. The author of this study played as the teacher who enacted this 15-minute silent reading in the classroom. Observing the students' inadequate ability to express their ideas in English revealed some presuppositions such as they had limited lexical resources, they had limited ideas, or they were not comfortable to speak up. Having this in mind, the teacher had the curiosity to explore some new techniques to help the students get exposed to language inputs. This technique was used in the first 15 minutes of 90 minute-instruction within 5 weeks. In the outset, this study had been planned to be in a whole 16-week instruction of the course. Unfortunately, an urgent need to instantly migrate the instruction into an online platform due to a coronavirus outbreak had made the investigation suspended.

## Research Design

To answer the research questions in this action research, the data were gleaned from a 5-meeting observation, students' individual learning reflections, and oral collective reflection. In the observation, the researcher took some important notes on relevant critical incidents. Whereas, students' reflections were captured from students' written reflective journals that were collected on a weekly basis. In addition, a short oral collective reflection was enacted at the end of every meeting.

Following the work of Hedlin (2019 in her action research, this present study analysed the data thematically. The findings were presented by highlighting the emerging themes. The themes were constructed based on several steps. First, the researchers read carefully and repeatedly the reflective journals, observation notes, and collective reflection notes. In this phase, the researcher used the research questions as the guideline to map the data. The relevant data were marked and stored to be coded. Whereas, the irrelevant data were dropped. All data then carefully analysed considering the similarities and differences. This comparison was followed by grouping data. In this step, the themes emerged (Braun \& Clarke, 2006; Bryman, 2008).

## Result and Discussion

Based on the analysis of data in the form of observations notes, students' individual learning reflections, and oral collective reflections, six vocal themes were identified. These cover 1) building on fundamental understanding, basic skills, and motivation, 2) materials self-selection, 3) silent reading, 4) short sharing session, 5) self and collective reflection, and 6) perceived benefits of 15 minute-silent reading reflecting the two above mentioned research questions.

## Building fundamental understanding, basic skills, and motivation

Expecting students to do uncharted series of pedagogical activities requires the teacher to first provide insight and understanding about why and how students should do the activities. This phase plays as a point of departure to help students have intrinsic force to do the activities. Informed by the importance of motivation in ER (Mori, 2015; Unrau, Ragusa, \& Bowers, 2015), the teacher used the first meeting to deeply cultivate students' interest towards silent reading. Students were exposed to some empirical studies about the benefits of pleasure reading in helping them acquire a foreign language. Students were also invited to reflect their reading habit. Out of 32 students, only 7 students reported that they had specific time to read English text on a daily basis. Whereas, the rest of them recounted their difficulty to have sustained reading due to various reasons. They reflected that they had not a big intention to read and only did reading limited to the materials instructed by their teachers. This indicates that most students were still struggling to find the joy of reading English text. Then, some stories of successful learners who employed ER were narrated to encourage them to have a better view on reading as a self-initiated pedagogical tool.

In addition, students were also tutored on how to self-select appropriate materials. They were introduced to some websites and apps providing authentic reading materials such as bbc.com, learnenglish.britishcouncil.org, oxfordonlineenglish.com, elllo.org, learningenglish.voanews.com, 6 minutes English, and the like. They were also tutored on how to select reading materials within their level of English repertoire. In this segment, the teacher used principle \# 9 of ER (Day \& Bamford (2002) by which she
played her roles as the scaffolder and guider.
In response to this, the students were so enthusiastic. Many of them directly searched for English text using their smartphone in purpose of demonstrating what they learned from the tutorials.

## Materials self-selection

In this phase, students used their smartphone to self-select materials (ER principle \#3) they think are easy or require no or minimum assistance to understand the content meaning (ER principle \#1). They were also encouraged to select the topic that really appeals their interests (ER principle \#2 and \#5). In the outset, the researcher witnessed that they needed some time to find the appropriate materials and then could focus on silent reading. The condition began more automatic for the following meetings as they had already been more familiar. Since the situation was set in silence and everyone was urged to drop anything but silent reading, then everybody in the classroom was likely trying best to really engage with the materials being read. Running this activity, the teacher used her agency to be the guider (ER principle \#9) guiding students to find the appropriate materials.

Deep analysing students' reflective journals, it was uncovered that $56,6 \%$ of the students like to read short articles, $36,6 \%$ of them read short stories, $3,3 \%$ read conversation, and another $3,3 \%$ was into video caption. While the topics they read are listed in the following table.

Table 2. Topics of Students' Materials Self-Selection

| Theme | Sample Topics | Quantity in \% |
| :--- | :--- | :---: |
|  <br> Motivation | Living with weakness, pursuing happiness, in anger, <br> healing personal pain, living a better life, self-care and <br> self-love, chicken soup for the teenage soul, etc. | 64.3 |
| Current Issues | Coronavirus, case of Rwanda, equality and gender, <br> discrimination against Indian muslim, etc. | 21.4 |
| Education | Education in Finland, skill and ability, etc. | 7.1 |
| Sport and health | Football, visiting doctors, etc. | 7.1 |

As seen from the table above, students were in favor of reading materials related to building motivation and self-growth in the form of short articles. This might be due to the relevance in which students found the materials were related to themselves and interest them (ER Principle \#3). They might feel there was an urgency to develop themselves in some particular aspects. However, since the data were only gleaned from a limited number of participants and from a short period of time (5 meetings), it might
not be used as a common insight stating that self-growth and motivational text are the most favorable topics to read. The study recruiting more participants with longer intervention might result differently.

## Silent reading

In the silent reading process, the class was set in a really quiet atmosphere. Everybody was asked to drop everything but silent reading. No student talked or initiated conversation with the neighbouring classmates. Even the teacher, while observing the situation, she also read some English texts from her smartphone. The teacher played as the role model (ER principle \#10) giving the example to the students.

It was observed that everyone focused on reading the text from his/ her smartphone except for meeting 2 . Two students looked a bit worried because they were not able to access reading text through their smartphones due to the absence of Internet connection. Then, seeing this, the teacher asked them to read along with their next class mate and also reminded everybody to prepare for unforeseeable emergency situations by downloading at least one reading material for the alternative.

## Short sharing session

Short sharing session was the time for students to express and freely share their experiences in silent reading. In this activity, students were encouraged to share their experiences in reading covering interesting aspects from their reading, lesson learned, resources where they took the text from, reflection, and any additional information they might want to share. To establish a more dynamic and lively atmosphere, the teacher designed a distinct sharing form in every meeting.

Table 3. Students' Comments on Short Sharing Sessions

| Activities of <br> Sharing <br> Session | Students' Comments |
| :--- | :--- |
| Pair Sharing <br> (week 2) | Positive Comments: |
|  | - I felt great because it helped me to be braver to talk with other people to |
| discuss something that we know. |  |

## Negative Comments:

- I felt nervous. The activity made me blank when I had to speak up before a friend. It's hard for me to do it
- ..., but sometimes it did not work when we met an introvert.
- I don't really like pair sharing sessions, because I am such an awkward person when it comes to a face to face conversation with one person. Back then I felt really nervous and awkward.

Group Sharing
(week 3)

## Positive Comments:

- Group discussion is the best thing we did in the class! We could share our stories, know other stories, and feel free to tell about ourselves. It obviously helped me improve. I can know others' points of view. I like it and I need it more.
- I felt group sharing was also interesting, it improved my confidence to talk in English and share ideas.
- I was more relaxed because I did it with two other students, not like in the pair sharing. I think this session has a big impact on my English improvement.


## Negative Comment:

- If there were more people in the group, I think it did not improve me because I was really shy to be in front of people


## Collective

Classroom Sharing
(week 4)

In this collective classroom sharing, not all students were willing to orally share their experiences. Only some students who seemed more confident gave their oral presentation. However, the other silent students gave non-verbal language such as nodding and expression of excitement in response to their counterpart oral sharing. In response to this situation, the teacher urged students to voluntarily share their experiences and for several times assigned some particular students to come up with their information to share.

No sharing activity for week 5 due to the time constraints, the students were only engaged in weekly reflective journal writing.

The students' reflections on their short sharing sessions showcase their attitude in joining short sharing sessions. Many of them commented positively on the activities. Pair sharing and group sharing offered them an opportunity to enhance their confidence and bravery in speaking with others. They also could exercise their sense of community in conversing about one particular topic. To the extroverts, pair sharing and group sharing session would be a force to accelerate their communication skills. In contrast, the introverts acknowledged pair and group sharing session differently. They were anxious and nervous to speak before their colleagues. Even though the number of introverts was not many, teachers should find a way to help in this condition.

The teacher also played a pivotal role in the process of collective classroom sharing to maintain the lively condition, student participation, and classroom interaction. In this condition, the attributes of instructional processes framed in RET by Guthrie and Wigfield $(1997,2000)$ in an attempt to build students' engagement were operationally worked.

## Self and Collective Reflection

On a weekly basis, students did written self and oral collective reflection. Students, therefore, were facilitated to learn how to be more reflective on their learning. In this process they were asked to reflect on their feelings and the process of participating in 15minute silent reading. Purposefully, the researcher acting as the teachers did not direct them to learn how to self-assess their result of learning. This was due to the understanding; first, the result of ER will not easily identified for a short term period ( Renandya and Jacobs, 2016) more over this silent reading was not situated as the main activity of a set of language instruction and; second, assessing learning outcome is not the main focus of this study.

Drawing on the result of observation and students' reflective journals, it is seen that students were felt stressed in the outset since this process was the first time for them to do so. No course has trained them to write reflective journals earlier. Practically, oftentimes they asked for confirmation whether they did correctly indicating their lack of confidence. However, by the third week and so forth, they showed their improvement in reflecting their activities and felt more free in expressing their feelings.

## Perceived Benefits of 15-minute Silent Reading

Referring to the analysis of reflective journals, the prevalent perceived benefits can be drawn in the following table with some samples of vignettes.

Table 4. Students' Perceived Benefits of 15-minute Silent Reading.
Perceived Sample of Vignettes
Benefits

It improves
students'
concentration

- When I read the article, it made me more focused, it can improve my concentration...
- ...it improves focus level in reading... because nobody spoke...
- It calms me down...easy to catch value.
- Silent reading makes calm and relaxed ... we need some silent time to study and understand

It improves their reading skill
and
comprehension

- It could help me make progress because it helped me to read faster, so it could help me to make faster connections with the words.
- I tried to recognize the meaning by myself . I could know the meaning of a word
- I like silent reading because I can understand what I read easily
- I felt good, I think silent reading helped me to try to understand the text. Thank you for making this for me.
- I found new vocabulary that I don't know before
- I got a lot of new vocabulary

It enriches their lexical resources

- I feel great when we do silent reading, it helps me know about new things around the world by reading.

It brings sense

- I felt more independent, meaning I did not need someone to help me , all I
of independent, confident, satisfaction and motivation
did by myself, then I understood and felt proud about it. ...we can't depend on somebody all the time.
- I felt like I had been fed with new interesting knowledge that opened my mind. I learned that there is nothing impossible in this world...it really helped me to make progress in my learning outcome. I love the way it is.
- It helps me a lot, it makes me more motivated

It facilitates reading habit formation

- I feel very interested about what I read and it helps me want to read more about the news and vocabulary.
- ...but also creates a better habit of reading. I like this idea.

As highlighted in excerpts above, students positively valued the 15-minute silent reading before starting the main instruction of the "today's class". They felt empowered by doing so. First, 15-minute silent reading was perceived can help them to foster their concentration. This is plausible since the nature of reading process was set in quiet atmosphere where the teacher along with the students co-construct the situation of dropping everything but reading. Also, albeit its short enactment in the classroom (taking only 5 weeks), the students' reflective journals accentuate the virtue of ER in helping language learners. It was pronounced that 15 -minute silent reading improved students' reading skill and comprehension. It helped students to read faster, to guess the word's meaning from the context, and to give meaning to the text. This perceived benefits confirm what Bell (2001), and Chang and Renandya (2017 found in their empirical studies. The feeling of at ease in reading will gradually spark their curiosity to read more. This is where the seed of reading habit starts. Therefore, it was not surprising when the students perceived that 15-minute silent reading had the potency to be the inner force of having better reading habit (Arnold, 2009; Lin, 2014; Renandya and Jacobs, 2016; Ro, 2016;).

The students also sensed the benefit of 15-minute reading as the vocabulary enhancement pedagogy (Krashen, 2016; Mason. 2004; Nation and Waring, 2019; Nation, 2015; Pigada and Schmitt, 2006) in which it provided them with ample lexical resources that can endorse their confidence to better perform in related skills of English language. This would ultimately help them foster a sense of satisfaction and motivation (Renandya and Jacobs, 2016). Furthermore, the reading granting students the opportunity to selfselect the materials will help students to be more aware about their personal needs and intentions towards what is happening in the world and then construct connections. Also, from the limitless choices of reading materials in their smartphone, the students had more opportunity to be connected to the world. However, the benefits of ER in helping students have more ability in writing and grammatical structure were not identified in students' reflection. The duration of ER adoption in this study that was quite brief might insufficiently reveal these two more technical benefits.

## 잌 Conclusion

This study aimed to chronicle how students engage in 15-minute silent reading as the classroom rituals before main instruction in an English classroom and their perceived benefits towards its enactment. The findings signify that 15-minute silent reading experienced students in a series of activities, such as; 1) building knowledge and tutorial; 2) material self-selection; 3) silent reading; 4) short sharing session; and 5) individual and collective reflection exceling their sense of reflection. They perceived that 15 -minute silent reading accorded them with the positive awareness acknowledging that silent reading advocated them to have more motivation in reading as the force of reading habit, more lexical resources, better reading comprehension and skills, better motivation and confidence, to connect them to the world, and to exercise their concentration.

In the process, it was well depicted that the teacher had a central role in the enactment of 15 -minute silent reading. Teacher's skill and ability to build the conducive atmosphere, build students motivation, and design dynamic activities awere seen as the key factors contributing to students' positive attitude and perception of this mini adoption of ER in a language classroom. Thus, this backdrop, in addition to the endorsement of 15- minute silent reading in the classroom, brings implication to teacher professional development program developers to examine and enhance teachers' agency as a classroom manager, motivator, and activity designer.

Despite the beneficial findings of this study suggesting the enactment of ER adoption in the classroom, the researcher admits that this study covered shortcoming and limitation. The short duration and small size of participants, by nature, could not place the findings for generalization. The study set in a longer period of time recruiting more participants might result differently. Thus, some future studies using longitudinal experiment methods comprising larger participants are encouraged to enrich the body of literature in ER landscape. Also, some case studies digging on a particular phenomenon to understand teachers or students' emotions in the adoption of ER in the classroom would be worth investigating.

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