

Integrating Technology into Extensive Reading Activities for University Students

DodiSettiawan
dodisettiawan@gmail.com

Abstract

Extensive reading can be the best way for the students to develop their language competencies. However, most of them do not read in English extensively. They do not read English books, magazines, and other materials once they leave the classroom. The unavailability of reading materials written in English that well within their linguistic competence and low motivation to read impede them to read extensively. That means the instructors have to introduce suitable reading materials to them, motivate and support them to read extensively, and monitor and evaluate their extensive reading activities in order to help them read in English and enjoy it. This article presents an alternative way to the teaching EFL reading that can help university students become readers of English.

Key Words: Extensive reading, web-based virtual storage system, technology in ELT

Introduction

EFL instructors who work in Islamic universities have to integrate the Islamic teachings into English Language Teaching (ELT). It is an easy job because Islam is the religion of knowledge. The first aayah (verse) of the Al Qur'an to be revealed enjoined reading which is the key to knowledge. In consequence,

for the students studying English as a foreign language, reading is the key to knowledge of language. This is not an opinion. Research studies show this. Bamford and Day (2004) state that based on research studies, students who read extensively in the new language become better and more confident readers, they read better, their listening and speaking abilities improve, and their vocabulary get richer. That means, being the instructors, it is a good idea for helping the students to be readers of English.

However, the students generally do not enjoy the process of learning to read. Moreover, they do not read in English once they leave the classroom. One of the problems is the unavailability of reading materials written in English. Thus, they often find that it is difficult to find reading materials written in English. Besides, they do not know how to find the materials that are interesting and well within their linguistic competence. They have to struggle with difficult materials. These conditions impede them to read extensively. Regarding the benefits of reading, inspiring the students to be readers of English is the main thing in ELT. But how do the instructors do that? That is where the creativity in designing extensive reading activities comes into play. This article presents an alternative way to the teaching of EFL reading that will help the students read in English and enjoy it.

Introducing Extensive Reading to the Students

Bamford and Day (2004) write that extensive reading is a language teaching approach in which learners read in quantity easy materials written in the new language. Besides, Mikulecky and Jeffries (2007:3) take note on what the experts say about extensive reading as follows:

“Extensive reading is the most efficient way to help students change old habits and become confident second language readers.” Prof. Mary Lee Field, Wayne State University, Michigan

“... reading for pleasure (extensive reading) is the major source of our reading competence, our vocabulary and our ability to handle complex grammatical construction.” Prof. Stephen Krashen, University of Southern California

“Extensive reading may play a role in developing the capacity for critical thinking so important for success in higher education.” Prof. Richard R. Day, University of Hawaii and Prof. Julian Bamford, Bunkyo University, Japan

“It is clear from these studies that Extensive reading can be a major factor in success in learning another language.” Prof. I. S. P. Nation, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

The statements above imply that extensive reading is an approach for teaching language in general, and for teaching reading in particular. However, the EFL students in my class are not familiar with the extensive reading. But many of them are familiar with the intensive reading. Thus, in order to introduce

them, it is effective to contrast extensive reading and intensive reading. Welch (1997) suggests using the following chart to introduce the concept in a way that is easy for them to understand.

Extensive	Reading	Intensive
Get information; Enjoy	Purpose	Answer questions (100% understanding); translate
A lot	Amount	Not much
Read fluently	Speed	Read accurately; slow
Student chooses	Selection	Teacher chooses
Students may read different things (something interesting and easy to them)	Material	All students study the same material (often difficult)
Mostly outside the class	Where	In class
Checked by report/summaries	Comprehension	Checked by specific questions
Students are free to stop reading a text; they are encouraged not to use their	Method	Students must finish the text; they often use their dictionaries.

dictionaries		
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(Adapted from Welch, 1997)

As can be seen in the chart, there are striking difference between intensive and extensive reading. Day (2002) states that the comparison between intensive and extensive reading shows students how reading easy and interesting materials can help them becomes better readers. Thus, with this comparison chart the students come to understand that extensive reading is intended to help them develop into more fluent foreign language readers.

In everyday life, to read extensively means to read widely and in quantity (Bamford and Day, 1997). To read extensively in English is regarded as the best choice for language learners who cannot live in English speaking country. According to See (1993:4), “The best way to improve your knowledge of a foreign language is to go and live among its speakers. The next best way is to read extensively in it.” Therefore, the instructors have to motivate their students to read extensively in English.

Besides, one of the reasons for motivating the students to read extensively in English is to establish a culture of reading. A culture of reading helps language learners to develop writing, listening, and speaking skills. Mikulecky and Jeffries (2007) point out, reading a lot (extensive reading) increase vocabulary, improve grammar and writing skills, gain broad knowledge of the world, and succeed in academic course in English. In addition,

Nelson (2009) writes that reading strengthens writing, listening, and speaking. Thus, it can be inferred that reading is as a basic skill that improves other language skills. For that reason, extensive reading is the way for the students to establish a culture of reading or reading habits.

It is true that not all students have good reading habits. Reading is not the norm for many students. Not many students enjoy reading. Therefore, every instructor must know how to develop students' awareness of the role of reading in their lives. To do this, Bamford and Day (2004) suggest the teachers to introduce extensive reading in a positive way, encourage, and support their students so they will discover the enjoyment of reading and reap the language learning rewards.

Integrating Technology into Extensive Reading

Nowadays, almost all students in higher education are familiar with cell phones, mp3 players, laptops, and the Internet. They cannot live without cell phones, the Internet, and other digital tools that help them communicate with their friends and family. It is because technology and digital media are everywhere and integrated into every aspect of their lives. Thus, today's students tend to be savvy about multimedia. This condition insists today's instructors to integrate technology into the classroom (Shelly et al., 2010). Consequently, integrating technology into

extensive reading is the solution for helping today's students to read extensively.

For designing extensive reading activities or for putting extensive reading into action in the language classroom, Bamford and Day (2004) have drawn up the characteristics of an extensive reading approach as a theoretical framework as follows:

1. 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.
2. A variety of materials on a wide range of topics is available so as to encourage reading for different reasons and in different ways.
3. Students select what they want to read and have the freedom to stop reading material that fails to interest them.
4. Students read as much as possible, perhaps in and definitely out of the classroom.
5. Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower as students read books and other material they find easily understandable.
6. The purposes of reading are usually related to pleasure, information, and general understanding. The purposes are determined by the nature of the material and the interests of the student.

7. Reading is individual and silent, at the student's own pace, and, outside class, done when and where the student chooses.
8. Reading is its own reward. There are few or no follow-up exercises after reading.
9. The language instructor orients students to the goals of the activities, explain the methodology, keep track of what each student reads, and guide students in getting the most out of the activities.
10. The instructor is a role model of a reader for the students. S/he is an active member of the classroom reading community, demonstrating what it means to be a reader and the rewards of being a reader.

A good way to design extensive reading activities is by looking at the ten principles above. There are many activities that have been contributed by teachers and professionals for putting extensive reading into action in the language classroom since extensive reading should be an indispensable part of any English language program (Waring, 2006). The activities have a variety of purposes. Introduced here are two concurrent flows of extensive reading activities which have been successfully used with university students. The activities have purposes to help the instructors introduce suitable reading materials to students, motivate and support students to read extensively, and monitor and evaluate students' extensive reading activities. Technology

is integrated into the activities in order to meet today's students' needs. The framework of this technology integration is as follows:

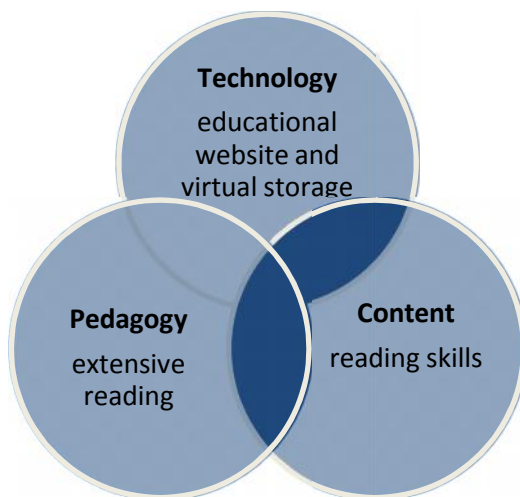


Figure 1. The framework of technology integration into extensive reading activities

The figure above is based on the technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge (TPACK) framework. TPACK is considered as a framework for instructors to produce effective teaching since it reconnects their technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge (Harris & Mishra, 2009). Thus, the primary reason for integrating technology into the activities is to produce effective teaching. The effective teaching, sometimes it is equated with successful teaching, is the students learn what is intended. In short, the activities are:

1. Activity 1

Aims: To introduce reading material by helping students find things to read on the internet that they can understand and to motivate and support students to read extensively

Preparation: The instructor should:

- 1) Familiarize himself with the URLs (Uniform Resource Locator, or Internet address) for Websites he plans to introduce; create list of useful websites for finding things to read on the Internet.
- 2) Create an educational website (or website for the class) that provides the information about this activity (for example, create a free website on www.weebly.com); upload list of useful websites to the site.
- 3) Create virtual storage account for the class that is useful for swapping reading materials. Virtual storage is a web based tool that both instructor and students can swap large files. Share the link to the students on the class website. Manning & Johnson (2011) create the following decision matrix for choosing and using the right virtual storage tools.

	DriveHQ	YouSendIt
Type of Tool	Organization	Organization
Problem It Solves	This tool solves the problem of storing large files that you need to share with others.	This tool solves the problem of storing large files that you need to share with others. After

		the file is sent, the recipient receives a link from which he or she can download within a week.
Cost	Free or inexpensive	Free or inexpensive
URL	www.drivehq.com	www.yousendit.com
Description	A free account allows for 1 GB of file space. You can upload and store any kind of file and organize it so that others can have access and download the content. This service allows you to establish groups and manage access.	A free account allows you to send files up to 100 MB, which are then available for download for one week.
Platform	Web	Web
Best Used For	Transferring huge files, either from instructors to students or students to instructors	Transferring large files whenever e-mail clients and course management systems cannot handle them
Level of Expertise	<i>Teacher:</i> Basic <i>Student:</i> Basic	<i>Teacher:</i> Basic <i>Student:</i> Basic
Cautions	In the free version of this tool, you cannot delete top-level folders that you may not need (for example, MyMusic). This doesn't affect functionality, only the look of the product. It is a little tricky to get groups set up. You need to be careful that you	Downloads expire after a week.

	have the file permissions set correctly so students can see what you want.	
Overcoming Cautions	Spend the time to test! If you are using this to share information with your students, create a dummy account and log in so you can see how it behaves. While you're there, take some screen shots to help your students visualize what they should do.	Because downloads expire after a week, be sure to independently alert the recipient that the file has been sent and give them the download link directly.
Accessibility Concerns	Because you can change the view from thumbnails to lists, an individual with a screen reader can access the information and navigate the site. It is a fairly accessible tool with no major limitations.	YouSendIt offers a variety of methods for using the service, providing multiple-browser support and desktop clients for multiple operating systems.
Special Equipment	None	None
Additional Vocabulary	None	None
Training and Resources	www.drivehq.com/help/help_frame.aspx	www.yousendit.com/support

Procedure:

- 1) Tell the students that they are going to explore Internet search engines to find things to read on the Internet. Explain that they will read extensively (self-selected reading materials) for homework. Introduce extensive reading to the students.
- 2) Give them list of URLs for Web sites they can find interesting and useful materials to read. Ask them to visit the class website for further information about list of the URLs.
- 3) Ask them to choose a favorite passage from what they have enjoyed on the Internet, save the passage as word document or .pdf. Then, upload the document to the class virtual storage account. The purpose of uploading the file is to keep track of what and how much students read. Besides, the instructor and the students can swap their favorite reading materials. Swapping reading materials is a good way to motivate and support the students to read extensively (Boon, 2007)

Tips:

- Have students work on computers in pairs. A more capable student who knows basic computer skills may be paired with less capable students.
- If students find other useful website that is not in the list, have them keep or add the URLs.

The idea of this activity is modified from Helgesen (2004) who contributes extensive reading activity with title “Sheltered Reading on the Internet”.

2. Activity 2

Aims: To monitor and evaluate students’ reading

Preparation: Before class, tell the students to choose a favorite passage from what they have enjoyed on the Internet. Ask them to make a copy of the passage to bring to class as reading report.

Procedure:

- 1) Ask the students to use the passage that they have reported having read recently. Tell them they have a short time (four or five minutes) to write one-sentence summaries of what they have read.
- 2) Collect the summaries and evaluate. It is rather easy to determine if a student has not read.
- 3) Ask the students to tell their classmates the summaries in front of the class.

The idea of this activity is modified from Day (2004) who contributes extensive reading activity with title “One-Sentence Check” and Makaafi (2004) who contributes extensive reading activity with title “One-Sentence Summary Test”. Day (2004) who has used this activity writes, “When I

evaluate my students' summaries, I look only to see whether the students have actually read. I don't grade the content. If it appears as though a student has not read, I ask the student to read again and then write a one-sentence summary."

Conclusion

As the technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge (TPACK) are three major focuses of ELT reform in higher education, EFL instructors have to cope with the challenge of technological shifts occurring in the teaching profession. The two concurrent flows of extensive reading activities in this article are designed by integrating technology in order to produce effective teaching. The activities can be a good start to any new language class in higher education. The activities are aimed to introduce suitable reading materials to students, motivate and support them to read extensively, and monitor and evaluate their extensive reading activities. But, introducing suitable reading materials to the students, motivating and supporting them to read extensively, and monitoring and evaluating their extensive reading activities are not the main thing in these activities. The main thing is inspiring the students to be readers of English.

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