EFL Students' Perceptions on the Benefits and Challenges in Joining an Extensive Reading Program

Marlinda Ristya Budi

ABSTRACT

The current reading approach introduced by experts is extensive reading. The aim of this approach is to build reading fluency. It suggests students to improve comprehension by reading in enjoyment and processing language faster. Therefore, an extensive reading program called Reading Date was implemented at an Islamic private university in Yogyakarta. This research was aimed at investigating the students' perception on the benefits and challenges in joining the program. Descriptive qualitative was applied in this research in which the data were collected from four participants. The participants were one male student and three female students of English Language Education Department batch 2017 at an Islamic private university in Yogyakarta. Interview was used in this research to collect the data. The findings showed that there were eight benefits and five challenges in joining an extensive reading program revealed by the participants. The benefits include increasing reading interest, making new friends, strengthening friendship, learning to manage time, increasing reading speed, increasing vocabulary mastery, improving grammar knowledge, and getting new knowledge. The challenges include the challenge in time management, crowded situation, lack of language skills, book choosing, and reading mate.

Keywords: extensive reading, extensive reading program, benefits, challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the essential activities in students' life. It is a source of information and a source of learning for them in studying. However, they do not intentionally learn how to read. It is because not all of them are aware that reading is something they need to learn. Reading has to be learned and taught for the better understanding in reading since the early age. The environment of a child is

an important role in developing the reading habits. Furthermore, encouragement from parents, teachers, and people nearby are also the essential things in conducting a child's reading habits.

The current reading approach introduced by experts is extensive reading. Bamford and Day (2004) addressed that extensive reading is a reading to practice the skill of reading by reading the context with pleasure and not under the pressure to read. It implies students to improve comprehension by reading in enjoyment and processing language faster. The aim of this approach is not necessarily to learn new knowledge, even though they may gain some, but to build reading fluency. In addition, extensive reading must be done in a condition where a learner chooses their own interest of text, enjoys the reading, feels no pressure, and reads whenever he or she wants to.

Nowadays, the increasing popularity of extensive reading program in the hope for enhancing reading habit has been implemented with different characteristics. Despite the common characteristics of the extensive reading, one of the ten characteristics is that "reading is individual and silent" (Bamford & Day, 2004). One program with another program has different characteristics and different contexts. A basic implementation of extensive reading is done by learners individually and only for themselves. A research study conducted by He and Green (2012) has shown the benefits and challenges of an extensive reading program in a Shanghai senior high school. This program was aimed to engage students in a large number of exposure. They found that through this program, students improved their reading interest and reading speed. However, the challenges were also found in this program because this approach is not common for Chinese students. They are unwilling readers, the role of the teachers change, the classroom behavior changes, and there is a pressure on the academic context.

An extensive reading program is currently running at a private university in Yogyakarta. The teacher who organized the program said that the program is called Reading Date which required students to read silently, to have reading mates, and to share their thoughts on the book they read. It is implemented for students from batch 2017 in an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context. The

Reading Date was conducted in the campus environment or wherever the students prefer to read. The Reading Date has nine weeks in a semester and five minutes in the first meeting then plus five minutes in the next meeting and every meeting. Despite the different characteristics in the implementation, the benefits of this extensive reading program may be shown differently from the other extensive reading programs. However, the implementation of extensive reading program is still uncommon in Indonesia. That is why this research is conducted to explore the students' perception on the benefits and challenges in joining an extensive reading program.

LITERAURE REVIEW

In this research, the focus is on the students' perceptions on the benefits and challenges in joining an extensive reading program and it is also based on the theory of Extensive Reading.

Extensive Reading

Extensive reading can be defined in many point of views. Extensive reading can be defined as "an approach to language teaching by learners doing a lot of reading on easy materials in the new language" (Bamford & Day, 2004). Extensive reading is sometimes referred to as a reading with pleasure and not under the pressure to read (Bamford & Day, 2004), or sustained silent reading (Krashen, as cited in Boakye, 2017).

Before planning the program, there are some important terms that should be considered in conducting an extensive reading program. There are ten principles in teaching extensive reading purposed by Bamford and Day (2004). The ten principles are categorized into some aspects (Mori, 2015). Principles 1, 2, and 3 require students to freely choose the easy and a wide range of available materials. Other than that, extensive reading allows students to read in large quantities (principle 4), to read for pleasure (principle 5), to read for reading in its joy (principle 6), to read at a faster speed (principle 7), to read in silence and individually (principle 8), and to read with the teacher as the guide and the role model in reading (principles 9 and 10).

Students' Benefits in Joining an Extensive Reading Program

A number of benefits experienced by the students are shown through joining an extensive reading program. Extensive reading has many benefits including improvement of learners' reading fluency. Therefore, extensive reading can be beneficial for affective, social, and cognitive developments.

Affective Benefits. Extensive reading is being practiced in many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms as an effective way in developing learners' reading as well as other related skills. In the affective benefit defined that it increases students' habit in reading. Improvement in learners' reading habit is the result of extensive reading (Boakye, 2017). It is possible for a positive attitude towards reading to create more reading interest and give the readers benefits for themselves (Quadir & Chen, 2015). Someone who likes to read tend to achieve higher learning effectiveness than those who lacks in reading.

Social Benefits. Joining extensive reading programs also affects the social aspect of the students. The social benefits can be shown when a student reacts to his or her reading environment to other readers. Kirchhoff (2015) found in a research that extensive reading triggers students to practice talking with their friends through sharing their ideas about the books. This research also revealed that students gain friends from the program. Therefore, when a student is given an opportunity to talk to others, it can lead to other positive effects. In addition, extensive reading programs allow students to interact with their friends and share their thoughts to practice their community skills.

Cognitive Benefits. The meaning of cognitive here is limited to learners' cognition which is related to knowledge including the content and linguistics for new language learners (Ellis, 2005). One of the influences of extensive reading is a wide range of linguistic and grammatical knowledge through a repetition of the same word that has several meanings and put in different sentences (Fourault, 2015; Banno & Kuroe, 2015). When students face the same words at a time, they gain the opportunity to enrich their sight of vocabulary.

Students' Challenges in Joining an Extensive Reading Program

   Many studies show the challenges of using extensive reading approach. Having no interest in reading can be resulted as a challenge in running an extensive reading program. Takase as cited in He and Green (2012) said that the readers who do not have the interest in reading is the third biggest concern in the term of extensive reading theorists. Some students do not like to share their feeling to others in the sharing session (Ro, 2016). It is stated in a study that it demotivated students who are not good in English speaking skills. Another thing which is found in this study is that extensive reading is too stressful for them and it makes them reluctant to participate in extensive reading program. Therefore, if the students themselves have no interest in reading, then there is a struggle to encourage them to do so.

METHODOLOGY

   This research is descriptive qualitative research which is supported by the past studies in extensive reading program. One male student and three female students of English Language Education Department batch 2017 at an Islamic private university in Yogyakarta were involved in this research and all their names are in pseudonyms. Interview was used in this research to gather the data. Each interview lasted for ten to twenty minutes. Transcription of the interview and coding analysis were done to analyze the data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

   This research aims to investigate students' perceptions on the benefits and challenges in joining an extensive reading program. The following sections describe the findings with detailed explanation.

Students' Benefits in Joining an Extensive Reading Program

   The first question which is about benefits of the implementation of Reading Date covers three aspects which are affective, social, and cognitive

benefits. The researcher found eight benefits revealed by the participants through analyzing the interview data.

Affective benefits. Affective benefits could be related to feelings or emotion. The further discussion of these affective benefits is explained more below.

Increasing reading interest. The first affective benefit was found during the implementation of Reading Date in term of increasing students' reading interest. Students are given the chance to increase that aspect through extensive reading program because they are required to read with pleasure and by their preference on the books. The result showed that a participant, Michael, found through joining Reading Date could increase his reading interest. He stated, "I came to like reading, really". It was also stated by him that he did not like reading before joining the program. He then continued that he was motivated to save money to buy books. It was because after the program, he liked to read more.

Based on the data above, increasing students' reading interest was one of the benefits in the implementation of Reading Date. Michael mentioned that he saved money to buy books because he wanted to read them. It could be assumed that his attitude towards reading increased by saving money to buy books. According to Boakye (2017), by joining an extensive reading program, students' reading attitude, reading interest, and reading motivation are increased. Similarly, Quadir and Chen (2015) said that when individual's attitude towards reading is increasing so their behavior will influence their frequency and regularity of reading. In conclusion, joining an extensive reading program can increase students' interest in reading and that influences their attitude towards reading.

Social benefits. Social benefits here are gained by students through the involvement in socializing with their friends. At this point, the four participants stated that they got social benefits through joining Reading Date. These social benefits include making new friends and strengthening friendship.

Making new friends. By joining an extensive reading program, the two of four participants admitted that they gained new friends. This benefit was found when the participants had group members from different classes. This made the

participants can exchange information outside their classes. This statement was proven by Becky who said that "Reading Date has gotten me many friends because we were from different classes. It was like we could share our opinion on the books". Further information was also stated by her that she could share information about the books that she or her other group members have read. She also stated that she could get information about the college information from her group members who were from different classes. Another statement was mentioned by Michael who said that "I came to have acquaintance. I mean even though it was from different classes thus that gave me some friends outside my class". He also mentioned that he became close to a girl because of the extensive reading program.

Based on the finding above, it could be explained that making new friends was one of the benefit of an extensive reading program. Furthermore, by getting new friends, they were allowed to share opinion in sharing the books. According to Kirchhoff (2015), an extensive reading program gives students practice in talking with their friends by sharing their ideas on books.

Strengthening friendship. Strengthening friendship was included to the social benefit in joining Reading Date. Strengthening friendship here means that they have more emotional closeness between each other. This benefit was found from the interview with Ellie that in her reading group she and her friends could help each other in the reading. As explained by Ellie, "I liked my group members in this Reading Date. I mean if I met difficult words in the book, I could ask them without opening the dictionary". This kind of action could overcome her difficulties dealing with unfamiliar words found in the novel. Furthermore, by helping each other in the reading, Ellie could get closer to her friends.

The finding showed that strengthening friendship was considered as the benefit of an extensive reading program. By helping each other in a group, Ellie admitted she could be closer to her friends so that they could learn together. Jacobs and Renandya (2015) confirmed that an extensive reading program can give students an opportunity to learn with others. It was also in line with a research on an extensive reading program by Youn (2015) who stated that reading

in a group allows students to help each other by sharing their experience of their reading.

Cognitive benefits. Reading Date required students to read books in English. As a result, the students have a big chance to increase their cognitive improvement which is related to the knowledge of the content and linguistics of the target language (Ellis, 2005). Based on the interview, all the participants admitted that they achieved cognitive benefits through joining the program.

Learning to manage time. An extensive reading program gave a chance for students to learn to manage time. The benefit was found when the participant managed time for her group members to meet to read together. The participant did not have the same schedule with her group members. It was agreed by statement from Becky that "… my group members were from different classes and it was so difficult to make time for reading together, it was like learning to manage time". She also mentioned that because of the different schedules, she and her group members often read together in day that near on the weekend. This made her gain a chance to learn to manage time because she tried to spare her time despite her university schedule for reading together with her group.

It could be assumed that learning to manage time was one of the benefits of an extensive reading program. Becky stated that getting used to manage the limited time to read with her friends made her learn to manage time. By admitting that she could learn to manage time, it showed that she had a positive perception of the Reading Date. This notion was in line with Morgado (2009) who stated that students would like to be engaged in an extensive reading program because they have a positive impression of the extensive reading program.

Increasing reading speed. The sixth benefit of joining an extensive reading program was increasing students' reading speed. Reading speed is related to the students' ability to read in specific time. Therefore, reading speed is also determined by the students' ability in processing the text. This benefit was found by Nicki who mentioned that the rule of Reading Date influenced her in getting this benefit. The time of reading was added with five minutes of timed reading in

every meeting. She said that "the longer the timed reading, the longer we read the book. It was like we got used to reading and then it increased our reading speed".

Based on the data above, it was shown that increasing reading speed became one of the cognitive benefits of Reading Date. It was supported by a research on an extensive reading program done by Ro (2016) that extensive reading program improves students' reading speed and that makes them to increase their reading skills. This is in line with Iwahori (2008), who mentioned that when students often read the amount of text extensively, reading speed is needed and thus it makes students' reading fluency increased.

Increasing vocabulary mastery. This benefit was found from four participants that their vocabulary mastery increased after joining the extensive reading program. In Reading Date, students were required to read in English and they might find new words in their reading. Michael, Nicki, and Becky admitted that they would open dictionary when they did not know meaning of words they found after they read books. As mentioned by Michael who said that "after I read for the second time with the help of dictionary, I could understand the words in the third time without dictionary, and I gained new words". Similarly, Nicki also agreed on that by stating "… after reading a page or something, I searched the meaning of words that I did not know, thus that made me know the new meaning of those words". These were in line with the statement of Becky, who said that "when I did not know the meaning, I could ask to my friends or open the dictionary, that way I learned new words".

The idea of increasing vocabulary mastery was also stated by Ellie that "English was not my passion and my vocabulary was so poor, but now it is not that bad". She continued, "I wrote the words that I did not know in a book, that way in the sharing session I could tell about the book by remembering the words that I wrote". She also mentioned that getting used to read and finding new words can help her in translating into Bahasa Indonesia.

Based on the data above, the term of having new vocabulary appeared from reading with the help of dictionary that made it easier for the participants to understand the content. That statement was supported by Walker (2015) who said

that extensive reading can be meant as reading in order to improve a general understanding in what is read. Therefore, it is intended that extensive reading helps to develop knowledge of vocabulary that helped the participants to understand what was being read. Becky once said that, "When reading, we tend to meet the exact words again and again, it is possible for us to understand the words by heart". This notion is in line with the statement of Yamashita (2008) who said that when students face the same words at a time, it is possible for them to gain some exposure and their sight of vocabulary.

Improving grammar knowledge. This finding showed that improving grammar knowledge was considered as one of the benefits of extensive reading program. When students read in a wide range of materials, their grammar mastery might be increased. Michael and Nicki admitted that they had a chance to analyze tenses when they read. Michael mentioned that "… it affected my grammar. For example, stories are usually written in past tense, that, I could analyze more and understand it". In the same question, Nicki also agreed that analyzing grammar in the reading made her to memorize the structure of sentences. She added, "I did not that understand about grammar, but when I read it was like I needed to analyze the structure of the sentence. It affected my grammar knowledge".

The finding above proved that extensive reading program can affect students' grammar mastery. The two participants agreed that they are interested to analyze grammar when they read. The finding was supported by Banno and Kuroe (2015) who claimed that the result of extensive reading is shown by students' interest in reading and then they can practice grammar. Fouralt (2015) also stated that one of the effects of extensive reading is a repetition of the same word that has several meanings and put in different sentences will provide students with a wide range of grammatical knowledge.

Getting new knowledge. The last benefit was extensive reading could make students to getting new knowledge for sharing with others. This benefit was found from Michael who said that he could develop knowledge to tell his friends about books. It was because he got new information from the books he read. In this case, Michael gave an example that he could tell his friends about what was

on the book he read or became interested on his friends' books. He then continued by giving an example of telling his friends about novels, "… have you read this book, eh? How was the book? …"

Based on the data above, it was shown that getting new knowledge became one of the benefits of an extensive reading program. By getting new knowledge, students can exchange information not only about the books, but it can be beyond that. It was supported by Yamashita (2013), who mentioned that the result of an extensive reading program is that students may gain about any new knowledge and information.

Students Challenges in Joining an Extensive Reading Program

The collected data showed that there were five challenges faced by participants who joined Reading Date.

Time management. Time management could be assumed as one of the considerations whether or not the reading could be done. When students in a group were not able to manage time well, the reading activity would not be done and their task in Reading Date could not be completed. However, in the end, the challenge of time management could be beneficial for the students. Based on the interview, two out of the four participants stated that managing time to meet up with their group members for reading activity was included as a challenge in Reading Date. Nicki and Becky admitted that they had difficulty in managing time for their group members to meet up for reading together. It was because their group members were not from one class and that they had different schedules. It was stated by Nicki who said that "The biggest challenge was managing time to meet up with my friends". Similarly, Becky also agreed with that statement who said that "the challenge was that it was because my group members were from different classes and it was so difficult to manage time to meet up with them".

The finding above showed that time management was considered as the challenge in joining an extensive reading program. According to the two participants, the different schedules of their group members appeared to be a challenge in managing time to read together. Therefore, they had to use the available time wisely to enable them to gather to read in the groups. A research on

an extensive reading program has the same result about this challenge which stated that the students did not have time to do the reading of the program as much as they could because of their heavy university schedule (Mežek, 2013).

Crowded situation. In reading, there are people who can focus in reading together with their friends, but some people cannot read or even study in crowded situations. It is because people have different abilities in processing something. Furthermore, it became a challenge faced by two participants in this research. Ellie admitted that she did not like to mingle with others and did not like noisy situation. She stated "actually I could not read with my group, I could not focus on my reading, I just do not like crowded, noisy situation". She then continued that she preferred to read or study by herself. Becky, another participant, also mentioned the same challenge. She said that "if reading in a group, it was like we could not focus on our own reading. It was because sometimes our friends wanted to talk or something, while if we read alone we could enjoy reading with ourselves".

This finding showed that the crowded situation was considered as a challenge of the implementation of extensive reading program. It was proven that there were participants who could not focus on their reading when reading together with their groups. Further explanation was stated by these two participants that they preferred to read by themselves. According to Ro (2016), some students do not like to share their feeling to others in the sharing session. It showed that the situation where students need to share their feelings make them feel uncomfortable in the reading session. Thus, crowded situation was a challenge in Reading Date.

Lack of language skills. In learning foreign language, it can be difficult to understand the term in the first language. It is because the students were probably not getting used to the language or having the lack of language skills. The language skills here include grammar knowledge and vocabulary mastery. The three of the four participants agreed that the lack of language skills became their challenge in this program. Michael said, "At first I was struggling in reading English books, it was because this is not my first language". He did not elaborate

more on this, but it could be assumed that English books made him struggle in this extensive reading program.

While Nicki mentioned that she should reread when reading English books. She stated that "if reading in Bahasa Indonesia I just need to read once then I could understand, but if it is in English, I need to read it twice or three times to understand the book". Agreeing with Nicki's statement, Ellie also admitted that English books became a challenge when joining this program. She then explained that, "I needed to read slowly. I needed to reread again for me to understand".

The finding above proved that the lack of language skills can be a challenge for the participants. In fact, students need to reread the text a couple of times and read slowly to understand what is on the book. It was confirmed by Mežek (2013) who stated in a study that the challenge in extensive reading program in EFL context was understanding the correct terms in students' first language by focusing more on the text and read more slowly. Therefore, this study also revealed that this challenge was related to students' English reading ability.

Book choosing. Choosing book materials can be a challenge for students in joining an extensive reading program. This challenge appeared when students were confused to choose what to read based on their preferences. Two participants, Michael and Nicki agreed that it was their challenge in joining Reading Date. Michael stated that "because I read on Wattpad, there were so many stories that were confusing for me to choose based on my favorite genres, which are romance and comedy". He also mentioned that what stories he exactly wanted to choose, which were appropriate with the genre content made him confused. Similarly with Michael's statement, Nicki said, "I like romance books but then I chose history books, that did not in line with my preference, and that made me did not enjoy in reading based on my passion".

Based on the finding above, it showed that choosing books was considered as one of the challenges in the implementation of extensive reading program. Michael and Nicki said that choosing the books based on their favorite genre made them confused. Yamashita (2013) stated that this challenge appears when

students have a lack of knowledge of choosing what books would be interesting to be read.

Reading mate. The last finding was related to friends that became a challenge in Reading Date. This challenge was found when participants were not comfortable or agree with their friends. It could be seen from Michael's statement who said his group members were all boys, they tended to be lazy to read and he, as the leader of the group found challenge in asking them to read together. Furthermore, when they were already in a place to read, they did not read but were just talking about something else. Nicki admitted to the same situation, that she did not like it when her group members were lazy to read while she was the only one who did the reading. She said, "that is, my friends were annoying". She continued that she did not really know her friends when choosing the group members, that is why her friends did not meet her preference.

However, such thing like the reading mate can be one of challenges in joining an extensive reading program. Friends who do not like to read can be unbeneficial for those who are excited with the reading. These kind of students, who do not like to read maybe the ones who are lacking motivation in reading. Extensive reading required students to read with pleasure and not under pressure. However, there are students who still do not want to read even though it is for pleasure, thus they lack of motivation in reading and causes them reluctant to read. This finding was supported by Stoller (2015) who explained that motivation is the core in developing positive reading attitudes and reading habit.

CONCLUSION

Extensive reading program must be done in a condition where a student chooses their own interest on books, enjoys the reading, feels no pressure, and reads whenever he or she want to. Regarding to the students' perceptions on the benefits and challenges in joining an extensive reading program, it was revealed that overall, students gained multiple benefits through joining the program if they really apply what extensive reading is. Besides achieving multiple benefits by joining an extensive reading program, this study also found some challenges. The

challenges appeared when the extensive reading cannot be applied as in the idea of extensive reading. In conclusion, extensive reading program can beneficial for some people who can adjust the idea of extensive reading that are fun, pleasure, and not under pressure. However, if these things are not entirely applied, challenges may appear in the program.

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