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Extensive Reading Program: Its Impacts on Students' Vocabulary Size and Reading Comprehension

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Abstract

Extensive Reading (ER) Program in English Department, Petra Christian University used to be taken by first year students in their second semester. It was a one-semester program and integrated in the Reading class. The students had to read 3 level-3 graded readers for one semester. However, since early 2000, this program has been deleted. Moreover, the Reading class is now being integrated with the Writing class. This semester ER program is being reestablished as part of Written English 1 class. In this class the students have low English proficiency level. They lack of vocabulary and have difficulty in understanding reading comprehension. Moreover, their lack of vocabulary affects their writing. All of them have failed Written English 1 twice or thrice. Due to these conditions, the teacher of Written English 1 is integrating ER program in the classroom. The students must read level-1 graded readers provided by the teacher. They read the books outside the classroom. Within one semester they must finish at least 20 books if they want to get points for the program. Since the level-1 books are limited, the students must exchange the books with their friends. After they finish all level-1 books, they can read level-2 books. This paper aims to discuss the impacts of ER program on the students' vocabulary size and reading comprehension.

Keywords: extensive reading, vocabulary size, reading comprehension

Introduction

Extensive Reading (ER) Program in English Department, Petra Christian University used to be taken by first year students in their second semester. It was a one-semester program and integrated in the Reading class. The students had to read 3 level-3 graded readers for one semester. This program was run in the 1990s. Since early 2000, this program has been deleted. The students were not asked to read books outside the class as part of activities in the Reading class. Moreover, the Reading class is now being integrated with the Writing class.

This semester ER program is being reestablished as part of Written English 1 class. In this class the students have low English proficiency level. All of them have failed Written English 1 twice or thrice. They lack of vocabulary and have difficulty in understanding reading comprehension. When observing the classroom activities, the teacher found that these students lacked of vocabulary because they did not like reading. It could be seen from the activities. They never read the texts before the class. When it came to reading activities, it took a long time for them to read because they did not know the meaning of most vocabulary. They were busy asking their friends the meaning or searching the meaning in the dictionary. Moreover, their lack of vocabulary affects their writing. When writing, they have difficulties in expressing their ideas because they do not know the words in English. Due to this condition, the teacher of Written English 1 is integrating ER program in the classroom.

Implementation of ER

There were 12 students joining this program. Their level is lower-intermediate. They had to read level-1 graded readers provided by the teacher for 5 months. The teacher chose level-1 graded readers because these books are within their level of comprehension. This idea follows the characteristics of successful ER program (Renandya, 2007). They read the books mostly outside the classroom. However, there were times when they read the books as the classroom activity. Within one semester they had to finish at least 20 books if they wanted to get full points for the program. This activity was graded because it was part of activities in the Written English 1 class. Since the level-1 books were limited, the students had to exchange the books with their friends. The teacher collected all the level-1 books from the library so that it was easier for the students to borrow and read the books. After they finished reading the book, they had to return the book to the teacher so that other students could borrow the book. There were 20 books for level 1. If they could finish all level-1 books, they could read level-2 books. They could get additional points for each level-2 book they read. These additional points were used as the tool to motivate them to read more. In ER, students are encouraged to read a lot of books (Renandya, 2007).

After reading the book, they ² were asked to record new words that they did not know the meaning in their index book. They had to write the part of speech, the definition and the example. Moreover, they were also asked to write journals. The length of each journal is 1-2 pages. There were several questions that could be used as their guidance when they wrote their journals. The journals were used by the teachers to assess their ER activities. Besides recording the new vocabulary and writing journals, they had vocabulary size tests before they read, after they read for 2 months and a half, and after they read for 5 months. They did the vocabulary size test online. The test is taken from my.vocabularysize.com.

The Findings

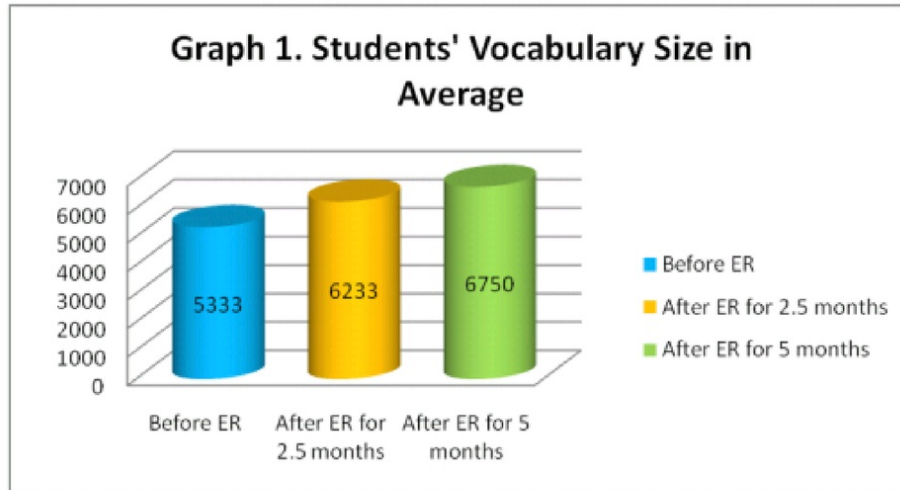
The ER program has impacts on the students' vocabulary size. The following table shows the students' vocabulary size.

Table 1. Students' vocabulary size

Student	Before ER	After reading for 2.5 months	After reading for 5 months
1	6,000	6,600	6,700
2	3,800	5,000	4,900
3	5,900	7,100	7,300
4	4,800	5,800	7,800
5	6,600	7,500	8,200
6	4,800	5,400	5,400
7	6,200	6,900	6,600
8	5,300	6,600	6,500
9	3,800	5,700	5,200
10	6,800	7,800	7,000

11	6,300	5,900	7,700
12	3,700	4,500	7,700

It can be seen from Table 1 that before the ER program, the lowest one is 3,700 and the highest one is 6,800. After they read the books for 2.5 months, the lowest score is 4,500 and the highest one is 7,800. The progress continued after they read for 5 months; the lowest score is 4,900 and the highest one is 8,200. The following graph shows the improvement of the students' vocabulary size in average.



The graph shows that in general the students' vocabulary size is increasing after 5 months. Besides that, there were 5 students whose vocabulary size kept increasing (1, 3, 4, 5, 12). The significant improvement is shown by students 3 and 12. Their vocabulary size increased at least 100% at the end of the program. Furthermore, some students showed an increase after they read for 2.5 months but their score decreased slightly at the end of the program (2, 7, 8, 9, 10). The improvement in the students' vocabulary size supports the idea that ER "allows students to expand their knowledge of general vocabulary" (Domenica, 2010) and "leads to substantial vocabulary learning" (Pigada and Schmitt, 2006).

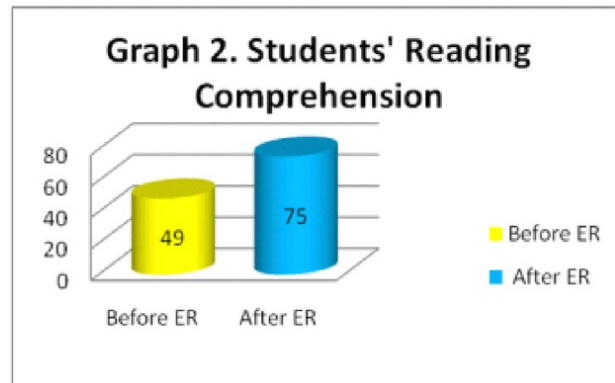
From this action research, it is found that when the vocabulary size increases, the reading comprehension improves. It is shown from the following table.

Table 2. Students' Reading Comprehension

Student	Before ER	After ER
1	50.5	71
2	49	76
3	48.5	78.5
4	62	76
5	50.5	82
6	49	82
7	45	76
8	36	76.5

9	45	57.5
10	60.5	76
11	37	79.5
12	49.5	73.5

The table shows that before ER, 83% of the students got below 60. After ER, 92% of the students got above 70. The following graph shows the average score of the students' reading comprehension.



The graph shows that in average the students had better reading comprehension after joining ER program. This result supports Bell's study (2001) that also showed that learners in the extensive group achieved significantly higher score.

Limitations

In this action research, there are several limitations. First, the reading materials do not vary in topics and genre since the resources in the library are limited. This makes the students expose mostly to fictions. Second, the students cannot choose what they want to read due to limited resources. Third, the data is not analyzed using statistical analysis since it is still a preliminary research.

Conclusion

ER program that has been run for 5 months has positive impacts on the students' vocabulary size and reading comprehension. Students' vocabulary size increased and their reading comprehension improved. Therefore, ER helps students to gain more vocabulary and understand texts better.

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