

Extensive Reading: A Success in Reader Autonomy

การอ่านแบบกว้างขวางนำไปสู่ความสำเร็จในความสามารถ ในการควบคุมการอ่าน

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ความสามารถในการควบคุมการเรียนหมายถึงความสามารถของบุคคลในการมีความรับผิดชอบต่อกระบวนการเรียนของตนเองอย่างอิสระ ดังนั้น ความสามารถในการควบคุมการอ่านจึงหมายถึงความสามารถของบุคคลที่จะดูแลกระบวนการเรียนของตนผ่านการอ่านด้วยความรับผิดชอบและความเป็นอิสระ เพื่อให้ได้ประโยชน์จากการอ่านมากที่สุด หลักการพื้นฐานของการอ่านแบบกว้างขวางซึ่งสนับสนุนให้นักเรียนอ่านเพื่อความเพลินเพลินมากเท่าที่จะทำได้ สามารถนำมาใช้เพื่อช่วยให้นักเรียนพัฒนาความสามารถในการควบคุมการอ่านในห้องเรียนทางภาษา โดยมีหลักการสำคัญสามประการที่ต้องคำนึงถึง ได้แก่ การมีส่วนร่วมของนักเรียนในกระบวนการเรียน การสะท้อนกระบวนการเรียนของนักเรียน และการใช้ภาษาเป้าหมายอย่างเหมาะสม

คำสำคัญ: การอ่านแบบกว้างขวาง ความสามารถในการควบคุมการเรียน
ความสามารถในการควบคุมการอ่าน

Abstract

Learner autonomy is the ability of a person to be responsible for his or her own learning process independently. Therefore, reader autonomy is defined as the ability of a person to take care of his or her own learning

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process through reading with responsibility and independence in order to gain the most benefit from the reading. The basic principle of extensive reading, which is to encourage students to read with the focus on reading for pleasure as much as possible, can be used to promote reader autonomy in a language classroom. There are three important pedagogies to be concerned when extensive reading is used to promote reader autonomy in a language classroom: involvement of students in their learning process, reflection of students through their learning process, and appropriate target-language use.

Keywords: Extensive reading, learner autonomy, reader autonomy

Introduction

As books are considered the windows to the world, students who do not spend their time reading books miss the chance to explore the world. Furthermore, reading is a key basic skill for students to become successful in their higher academic and future career. Janet (2010) mentions that there are findings presenting the connection between reading and a success in workplace and academic skills. Reading a lot in variety and more complex topics can prepare students to be ready to encounter new knowledge (Associated Press, 2006) so that they can better adopt new ideas.

However, many studies have revealed that Thai people still lack a love for habitual reading. According to the survey of National Statistical Office (2014), Thai people spent 37 minutes reading books, Facebook, Line and newspapers. This is a big improvement when compared to the previous survey results (5 lines per year). Nevertheless, it is not a good statistic comparing to our neighboring countries of Vietnam, Singapore

and Malaysia where people read more than 40 books a year (Quality Learning Foundation, 2012). Thailand, where people read only 5 books a year, holds the 55th rank of 60 countries in total in English Proficiency. Thailand is categorized in the very low proficiency in English group while Singapore and Malaysia are ranked in high proficiency group and Vietnam is in moderate proficiency group (Education First, 2014).

Since students nowadays are more distracted by various entertaining activities, they have less time to read books. Students are more likely to spend most of their time with smart phones or in front of computer screens. They tend to read only when they are assigned to or when they have to review the books for an exam. Surprisingly, some of them do not even read when they are assigned to. To solve the problem, teachers need to assist students to become autonomous learners so that they can direct their learning by themselves. The concept is to promote learner autonomy which is key in signaling successful learning and teaching.

Reading, as well as other language skills, needs to be practiced as often as possible in order for students to perform fluently. Since learning a language will never end in the classroom, students need to apply the useful knowledge learnt in class to different kinds of text in order to improve their reading skills. To encourage students to read more is the concept of extensive reading. Although the basic concept of extensive reading is to encourage students to read a variety of topics for enjoyment as much as possible, many studies have confirmed that extensive reading activities provide various advantages on language skills. Consequently, extensive reading will give students positive results after practice and can be used effectively to promote reader autonomy.

Learner Autonomy in Language Learning

1. Definitions and terms related to learner autonomy

Holec (1981), known as the father of learner autonomy defines the term as “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning”. It means that one can control one’s learning and be responsible for making any decision related to learning aspects. Scharle & SzabÓ (2000) regards such a person as a responsible learner who always consciously monitors and grabs all opportunities to make a progress on his or her own learning. Benson and Voller (1997) also state that learner autonomy is the ability to take charge of personal learning issues. They also purpose that learner autonomy needs self-regulation and it can predict one’s academic performance. They also mentioned that the ways to develop learner autonomy can be different from person to person.

“Autonomy” is related and seems to be the same term as “responsibility”. These two words are defined differently according to the theory. According to Oxford Dictionaries (2015), “responsibility” means “The state or fact of having a duty to deal with something or of having control over someone” while “autonomy” means “Freedom from external control or influence; independence”. While responsibility focuses on taking charge of something because of duty, autonomy rather emphasizes on being independent. Although these two words are theoretically defined to have different meanings they are very much interrelated especially when in practice (Scharle & SzabÓ, 2000). For example, a student asks a question in the classroom because they do not understand the lesson. This shows that the student behaves responsibly (trying to understand the lesson) and independently (without the command of the teacher).

However, the term “learner autonomy” can, sometimes, be confused with the notion of “independent learning”. According to Najeeb

(2012), “independent learning” is related directly to the individual learning preference of each student. Therefore, independent learners will be able to interact with and gain benefits from learning environments which are not under the control of teachers. In language learning context, Wright (2005) clearly states that independent language learners can develop their language skills as often as they can by interacting with other people or individually. He further explains that one can possess this ability by nature or by formal study.

It can be concluded that learner autonomy is the ability of a person to take care of his or her own learning process with responsibility and independence. Therefore, reader autonomy is the ability of a person to independently take charge of his or her own reading in order to gain benefits from their reading as much as possible. If not by nature, learners can be trained to obtain this ability through the environment that allows them to have freedom in controlling their own learning progress through their reading activities.

2. Learner autonomy in reading classroom

In general, reading is important for students’ everyday and academic life. Reading is an excellent source of information. When students have a problem (both everyday life and academic), it is possible that they can get the solution by reading from various sources. It is the basic skill that helps students expand their knowledge on any subject. Without reading skills students would not be exposed to other ideas and opinions to gain new knowledge.

Reading requires interaction between the reader and the written message (Rumelhart, 1977). Students need to have both knowledge and experience to understand those messages. In order to understand the messages, students need to use their language knowledge like syntax,

grammar, and vocabulary to decode the messages and to use their personal experiences such as culture to interpret the decoded messages.

Reading is considered a receptive or a passive skill because students need to understand the messages after receiving them, yet it does not require them to produce language. However, this does not mean that students need to be passive in the reading classroom. This implies that the teacher-centered approach is not working well in promoting learner autonomy in a reading class. Students need to depend more on their own, but it does not mean that teachers have nothing to do during class reading hours.

Although learner autonomy aims to foster students to be independent on their own learning, teachers cannot be excluded from the process (Little, 1991). Instead, students and teachers need to work cooperatively in order to earn the most for students. According to Little, teachers in language learning classrooms where learner autonomy is promoted should use the target language as a communication medium, involve students to participate in collaborative learning activities, help them set their own learning goals, select appropriate activities, encourage them to keep their own learning record, and engage them in regular learning progress evaluation.

The important requirement for students to occupy learner autonomy in a modern communicative language teaching is to be active and able to manage their own learning (Ellis & Sinclair, 1989). Matsubara and Lehtinen (2007) explain that there are three levels of learner autonomy in a reading classroom. The first level requires students to control the way to read (pace and comprehension tasks). The second is related to their psychological issues (reading experiences). The final one deals with learning contents (reading subjects students select to read).

Therefore, students in a reading classroom should be allowed to choose their own reading resources and activities according to individual interests and language ability. The concept of learner autonomy in a reading classroom is divided in two levels: proactive and reactive (Hart, 2002, & Sinclair, 1996). At the reactive level, students are guided to access the target language by setting the goals of reading and plan to reach them. At the proactive level, they have to be responsible for their own learning through reading.

Extensive Reading Roles in Reader Autonomy Promotion

1. Definitions

There are two reading subskills presented in foreign language teaching which are extensive reading and intensive reading. Day (2011) defines extensive reading as a reading approach which aims to encourage students to read easy materials in the target language with the focus on reading for pleasure as much as possible. However, intensive reading is based on three teaching approaches which are grammar translation, comprehension questions and language analysis, and comprehension work and strategies. In other words, extensive reading focuses on the literal meaning of the text and analyzing the language such as defining unknown words and analyzing grammar structures.

2. Benefits of extensive reading on language learning

Many studies have confirmed that extensive reading can give benefit to foreign language learners in one or another way. Davis (1995) confirms that without an extensive reading program, students in any first, second and third language classes will perform worse and there will be no signs of development in all aspects of language learning as they appear in language classroom where extensive reading is used. The following includes some advantages of extensive reading in language learning.

Bamford and Day (2003) mention that in language classrooms, extensive reading can be used to focus grammar structure, listening, speaking, writing or reading of first, second or foreign language. Furthermore, it can be used in any kind of class and with any age or language level of students. Extensive reading can be used in an intensive program or as a once a week class with any age and language level of students. However, it can only be used if students have a basic knowledge and are literate in the target language.

Extensive reading increases students' exposure to how the target language is actually used in different contexts. In order to gain new language input, it is necessary that students make use of the target language as much as they can. Krashen (1982) states that extensive reading has a connection on language acquisition when a language learner is exposed to the target language under the right conditions. The right conditions include reading materials that the reader is interested in and reads with no stress. That is to say students develop the target language acquisition when they use the target language skills more often under the most convenient conditions.

Apart from target language acquisition, extensive reading can increase knowledge of vocabulary in terms of word recognition and retention. Atilgan (2013) reveals that with the extensive reading approach, students can write better in terms of vocabulary and content. Students pick up words subconsciously when they see words constantly and repetitively and this results in the contribution to vocabulary growth. Chun, Choi and Kim (2012) indicate that word repetition without context (i.e., traditional vocabulary instruction) can result in short-term retention but not long-term detention. To illustrate, words are more meaningful to students when they appear in different contexts not by direct vocabulary instruction where words are presented in related sets.

The next expectation of using extensive reading in a foreign language class is that students perform the target language with fluency. Speed is the requirement of fluency; therefore, the first major principle of extensive reading, easy reading materials, can promise reading fluency. With no struggle on difficult vocabulary, students read and comprehend reading materials fast. Fujigaki (2012) claims that students need to develop reading speed for four reasons: story recognition, pleasure, time control and strategies, and fluency building. Extensive reading can promise students to achieve these results.

Last but not least, extensive reading does not only help improve students' reading, writing, listening and speaking skills, and vocabulary knowledge but also enhances the positive attitude towards the target language and motivation to learn the language (Bamford & Day, 2003). In the study of Rodrigo, Greenberg, and Segal (2014), the statistical results suggest that the participants in extensive reading group were more motivated to read than those in the direct instruction group. Their findings also confirm that the reading habit of the extensive reading group changes in a positive way and the change lasts over time.

3. Principles of extensive reading to promote reader autonomy

Both of the subskills benefit students in different aspects, but in term of learning autonomy, intensive reading seems meaningless as compared to the benefits of extensive reading. There are ten principles that Bamford and Day (2003) suggest to maintain the extensive reading approach. However, in this paper, the principles are categorized into four main principles according to the focus of reader autonomy promotion.

The first principle, which is the most important, is that the reading material is appropriate to the level of students in terms of unfamiliar vocabulary and grammar. For example, one or two unfamiliar items for beginners and no more than five for intermediate students. Since students

do not have to struggle with difficult grammar structure and vocabulary, they can finish the books by themselves fast and without any problems. When students have the feeling of being successful in their own reading, they will be more confident and independent in reading and want to read more.

Second, reading materials should be of various types with a wide range of topics, so students can find what they want to read according to their interests. They may have different reasons to read and they can use different reading approaches to read different kinds of materials. It is a good chance for them to develop the ability to control their reading skills by trying different reading techniques with different kinds of reading materials they are interested in. This also gives them a chance to make a decision upon their own interests and be responsible for taking charge of what they read.

The third principle is to read as much as possible. The main variable to the efficiency of this approach depends on the quantity of reading. Since extensive reading requires students to read for pleasure, information and general understanding, not for a comprehension test, students can read for their own reward. They can work on some follow up activities after reading, which aims to discover what they understand from the text. The activities encourage students to grab all opportunities to read and to monitor their own reading and learning progress.

The last principle deals with the roles of teachers in extensive reading approach. Teachers need to make sure that students understand what extensive reading is and why and how to deal with it. Teachers need to guide them how to make the most out of their reading. Furthermore, they must be a good role model by reading along with students and sharing ideas with those who read the same material. In class, a teacher is a facilitator to encourage students to develop learner autonomy by using the target language to communicate with them and by giving them a model of what it is to be an autonomous reader.

Implication of Extensive Reading for Reader Autonomy Promotion

The variety of students is an enormous obstacle reading that teachers need to deal with. Each student can possess different personalities, experiences, language knowledge backgrounds and learning styles which make it hard for teachers to satisfy everyone's needs. Therefore, extensive reading whose basic principles are to give freedom to the readers can be an efficient practice to solve the problem. The following presents the ways to apply extensive reading in a reading class in order to foster reader autonomy according to Little's (1991) three basic pedagogies for fostering learner autonomy in foreign language classrooms and related studies.

First, students must be involved in sharing responsibility for their learning process. They need to depend more on themselves rather than on their teachers in selecting the books to read and what to learn from their reading. A teacher should advise his or her students to choose the reading materials according to their interests and language knowledge level. When the students find out that the selected materials are not interesting or too difficult, they should be advised to change the reading materials immediately to maintain pleasure in their reading.

To let students choose the materials by themselves results in good motivation, which has a positive correlation to students' high autonomy (Zarei and Gahremani, 2010). In addition, to finish the reading materials whose language level is not difficult, students feel successful in their reading. Dickinson (1995) implies that this feeling leads students to become autonomous learners as they are more motivated to learn. Therefore, a well-equipped library, convenient access to reading materials, encouragement, and time to read are required in reading motivation promotion (Rodrigo et al., 2007).

Rodrigo et al. (2007) suggest that access to books must be easy and they should cover a variety of topics, genres, and reading levels.

Reading interests of the target group must be researched beforehand in order to make sure that the provided books meet students interests. Students tend to choose books to read according to their physical appeal such as interesting pictures, easy-to-read prints and appropriate length of books. Therefore, the books should be displayed in an appealing way with apparent levels and genres.

Second, students are required to carefully plan, monitor and evaluate their learning process. Leon (2010) recommends that students should have the opportunity to make a decision not only on what they are going to learn, but also on how they are going to learn in order to achieve their learning goals. Teachers need to explain what extensive reading is and what it is for and how it works as the prime goal of the course. Then, students need to set their individual reading goals and plan how they are going to reach their goals. Teachers need to involve students in sharing, discussing, analyzing, and evaluating their learning progress individually and with the whole class.

Instead of taking comprehension tests on what they read, students are required to monitor and evaluate their reading. According to Nation (2009) in a reading program, students should spend most of the class hours for reading only. It is not necessary for students to take comprehension tests or work on exercises. Instead, students are subjected to write short records of their reading which include the titles, details about the date, the time spent, comments on how good or bad the reading materials are, and how they enjoyed their reading.

Matsubara and Lehtinen (2007) insist with their long-term study that students can learn to develop learner autonomy gradually when they are equipped with proper guidance to manage and take control of their own language learning. They reveal in the study that in the first semester of the Basic Reading course, students worked on modified texts and completed

comprehension and vocabulary activities with the teacher's instruction. In the second semester, they accessed a mixture of modified and authentic resources. They were required to read a story episode and complete a comprehension activity. Then, they were free to decide to continue reading the next episodes or to complete the whole set of activities for the first episode. After the whole year of the Basic Reading course, students continued another year-long Advanced Reading course which required them to take control of planning and managing their reading.

Furthermore, the target language must appropriately be used as a medium for classroom communication. Illés (2012) points out that learner autonomy nowadays also needs to focus on communication process, so autonomous learners are those who can successfully use the target language in real-life communication. Therefore, teachers need to become language managers, facilitators, and counselors for students in class (Yan, 2012). Besides teaching students how to read, teachers need to encourage students to read in order to learn how to read by themselves.

Lastly, teachers should set written work or presentations based on the reading to check if students really spend time reading outside class. Bowler and Parminter (2011) say that students do not like taking formal written tests or writing a summary report on their reading, so teachers need to provide them other options. Furr (2011) recommends reading circle activities, which consists of small groups of students discussing the stories they have read. This activity provides them the opportunity to have a real discussion about the reading materials which are both comprehensible and interesting to talk about.

Among studies, Mede, İnceçay and V. İnceçay (2013) have introduced a good practice of using oral book reports in fostering learner autonomy through extensive reading. Instead of reading a selected book and writing a book report as in the previous course, each student chose

a graded reader upon their interests to read and prepared an oral book report to share the information with their classmates. According to the reflective papers written by five-randomly selected students, the results showed that the students reflected positive ideas and feelings towards their presentations namely fluency in speaking and body language use, criticisms on reading, as well as reacting and responding critically. Students also mentioned that the opportunity to select the book to read enhanced their motivation because it was more enjoyable to prepare the presentation. The researchers concluded that oral book reports can be used to promote learner autonomy through extensive reading because it can enhance students' intrinsic motivation so they become more independent in taking care of their own learning.

Conclusion

Through time, the language learning and teaching trend has changed, and this requires teachers and students to adjust their roles. Students need to depend more on themselves in order to be successful in their language learning and teachers are not the main directors anymore. Instead, teachers need to become good language mangers, facilitators, and organizers of the language classroom.

The main cause of these changes is that students in a classroom are varied. Each has his or her own values, interests, styles, and experiences, so it is difficult for the teacher to design the course materials, activities, and ways to evaluate his or her learning progress that meet the need of each of them. Therefore, students need to become autonomous learners who can control their own learning process independently.

In a language classroom, teachers and students need to work cooperatively to help students develop learner autonomy. Teachers need

to make sure that students are involved in making the decision of what and how they are going to learn, and the target language is always used to communicate in the classroom. With these requirements, it is strongly believed that extensive reading is a potential reading approach to promote reader autonomy in a reading classroom.

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