

Reading Station: An In-Class Extensive Reading Activities to Improve Reading Motivation for Vietnamese Students

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Abstract

Extensive reading (ER) is a pedagogical method, which has steadily attained recognition in second language (L2) reading teaching and learning. Even though much research has conducted to claim the impact of ER on L2 development, few studies have addressed the important aspect of reading motivation among university students in Vietnam. The current study helps fill this gap by examining the uses of Reading Stations – an in-class extensive reading on EFL/ESL learners' reading motivation and suggests using Reading Stations (RS) as an in-class activity for motivating learners in extensive reading courses. 36 students who are currently first-year students at SFL-TNU participated in the study and were asked to collect and share English books or articles to each other during the class time. Focus-group interview and classroom observations were two key research instruments used in this study to collect empirical data to investigate into the use of RS in improving learners' intrinsic reading motivation which involves their persistence with the learning task, attention, enthusiasm and enjoyment, reading involvement, curiosity and preferences for reading challenging texts. Analytical data revealed students were engaged in the activity and claimed to see certain impacts of this activity on their English reading motivation.

Keywords — *Reading Stations, extensive reading, reading motivation, second language reading, intrinsic motivation*

I. INTRODUCTION

Students at the School of Foreign Languages, Thai Nguyen University (SFL-TNU) have been observed to suffer from frustration in reading English textbooks. It is the fact that a typical ESL reading class at SFL-TNU still put much focus on commanded, assigned reading textbooks, which involve many reading texts followed by comprehension and vocabulary questions. According to [1], the so-called reading classes involve very little reading because students spend most of their time analysing and memorizing key grammatical structures and complicated vocabulary or interpreting the texts from L2 to their L1.

It is true to the SFL-TNU setting where students' main job in a reading class is to answer comprehension questions in various forms; the lectures also focus on the reading skills and strategies to help students technically deal with the text in order to overcome the reading tests and examinations.

Having a strong desire to help the 1st year students at SFL-TNU improve their motivation to read texts in English, the researcher is urged to come up with a more meaningful approach using Extensive Reading (ER) which allows an easy and interesting ways of reading. The significant benefits of ER have been verified through enormous research of [2], [3], [4] and many others in which students are exposed to target language in the real context with easy materials; thus enable them to understand how the language is used among natives and develop higher interest in reading. Implementing ER, however, means high cost of library investment, lack of class time, large class size, and difficulties in supervising and administrating the study process [5]; all of which prevent ER to be applied into reading curricula worldwide despite its significant advantages.

To overcome the obstacles, there comes the need for a new introduction of ER in ESL classroom in which both teachers and students are able to take the advantages of it while diminishing many other constraints correlated with this new approach. The author conducted an experimental research into the application of Reading Stations as an in-class ER activity that allows teachers and students to become habituated with a more ER-inclined studying environment; thus to motivate students to read effectively.

Accordingly, the research question is:

To what extent does the use of Reading Stations motivate first year students at School of Foreign Languages, Thai Nguyen University to read English?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *The Concepts of Extensive Reading: Opportunities and Challenges*

In an ER approach, students read ample quantities of comprehensible input that are well within their EFL/ESL proficiency [6]. Students make their own choice of books and materials they are interested in and read at their own speed. By reading widely and easily primarily for information and pleasure, students develop their interest and motivation, thus gradually adopt the habit of reading [7], [8]. Reference [27] posit top ten ER principles as the basis ingredients and encouraged teachers to use them as a way to examine their beliefs about reading in general and extensive reading in particular, and the ways they teach foreign language reading.

1. *The reading material is easy*
2. *A variety of reading material on a wide range of topics must be available*
3. *Learners choose what they want to read.*
4. *Learners read as much as possible.*
5. *The purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information and general understanding.*
6. *Reading is its own reward.*
7. *Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower.*
8. *Reading is individual and silent.*
9. *Teachers orient and guide their students.*
10. *The teachers is a role model of a reader.*

Currently, extensive reading (ER) is one reading approach that is being studied by most reading experts. The fact of promoting autonomous and self-selected readings extensively makes this reading approach suitable for both L2 and EFL learners [9]. ER has been positively correlated to learner gains in reading comprehension [10], [6], [11], word recognition [8], [11], reading speed [10].

Although teachers have been held strong belief in the promotion of ER as a method of increasing reading motivation, comparatively few research have investigated the relationship between motivation and reading in a second language. Also, for years the benefits of extensive reading have been proclaimed to the ELT community, but ER appears to be surprisingly missing in higher educational and English for Academic Purposes settings [12]. ER as a component of an English language-teaching program continues the exception rather than the rule. It tends to be present as a recommended, extra-curricular activity without being incorporated as part of a class program; thus, there have been some challenges associated with this approach. The syllabus requirement, the time limitation, the competition

from other activities, and some possible doubts about the impact of ER in a reading course may constrain teachers with the concerns that silent reading is not perceived as ‘teaching’ or that reading can only have a limited role in an integrated four-skill class [13].

B. *The Concepts of Intrinsic Reading Motivation*

Intrinsic motivation is necessary for learning, and is also an identified goal of education in general [14]; because intrinsically motivated readers read for the enjoyment, interest, or excitement of reading; when readers are willing to read with their own curiosity, efficacy readers can challenge themselves, they can spend more time on the reading activities meanwhile they can improve their comprehension skills [15]. Also, reference [16] defines intrinsic motivation as interest in and enthusiasm for the materials used in class; persistence with the learning task, as indicated by levels of attention or action for an extended duration; and levels of concentration and enjoyment. In other words, learner enthusiasm, attention, action, and enjoyment are referred for and are components of motivation, which is an important factor in language learning success. Reference [17] calls this view of motivation ‘practitioner-validated’, and adds that enhanced learner participation and enthusiasm are significant outcomes in themselves.

Reference [18] maintained that students, who recognize the value of reading, perform well and enjoy many facets of literacy. Intrinsic motivation “is positively associated with reading more regularly, fluently, and with greater comprehension” (p. 93). When being faced with challenges in reading, intrinsically motivated students are likely to embrace the challenges and seek various methods towards the resolution of any related problems [19]. They are persistent and skillful in their reading skills due to their effective application of reading strategies. As a result, engagement with a variety of reading materials increases and reading skills continue to develop [20].

Another source of intrinsic motivation is an educational environment that gives students the freedom to take ownership over their learning by offering them choices [21], [22], [23]. Students are empowered when they take ownership of their learning, are allowed a “voice” in selected classroom activities, and are able to decide which type of book to read and projects on which they work. Students must be encouraged whenever possible to choose books they will enjoy so they will view reading as an integrated facet of daily life [24]. The importance of providing students with choice (i.e., control) over what they read cannot be overstated because it will encourage them to read more, as well as increase their intrinsic motivation.

This study advocated for intrinsic motivation because the readers with higher intrinsic motivation are more likely to be deeply engaged in the reading activities and make various effective strategies for better reading performance [25]. In

addition, this form of motivation is essential to the promotion of lifelong, voluntary reading [14]. Based on the research from [26], [25], [16], this research investigates into seven components of intrinsic motivation, namely (1) learners' attention; (2) persistence with the learning task; (3) enthusiasm; (4) enjoyment; (5) reading curiosity; (6) reading involvement; and (7) preference for challenge in reading. In other words, the study investigated whether students' level of each of these seven components increased or decreased after they were exposed to Reading Stations in classroom.

III. METHODOLOGY

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A. Research Participants and Scope

This research involved an experiment, which was concerned with the introduction of RS in a 40-student class over a 12-week term (with 12 reading lessons delivered by the same English language teacher at SFL – TNU on 12 different days over 12 weeks). Each weekly lesson lasted two study periods of 90 minutes long; Students practice reading extensively through Reading Stations in the first period of the lesson and fulfil all the requirements relating to this activity. The second half of the lesson, students study the curriculum textbook and do tasks required in it.

B. Reading Stations Organization and Operation

Reading Stations (RS) was introduced to apply in the participant class according to the ten principles set by [27]. In RS, students are supposed to bring to class at least one English article or book (both online or offline) that they find both interesting and easy to read in any topics; also, teacher provides a number of available books and articles that students can make a choice. Then, all collected reading materials are divided into 3-4 reading stations where students come and find any material that suit their taste and level of proficiency, then read individually for knowledge or leisure. After reading, students can draw or take note their emotion or opinion to the content or the difficulty of the reading, then share it with other students. They may be encouraged to express their thinking or reflection of the reading. Teacher also acts as a reading model that chooses her book of her own and shares her thoughts with the class.

Following the top ten principles of Extensive Reading [27], Reading Station is an ER activity. These principles are:

1) The reading material is easy

The activity made use of the large number of students (40) who selected their own comprehensible reading materials. Students of the same proficiency levels would bring materials of the same grade of

difficulty; thus, the larger the class, the more diversity in the level of reading difficulty. Technically, students of any level could always find themselves suitable materials.

2) A variety of reading material on a wide range of topics must be available

Students are supposed but not obligated to bring at least one English material for each lessons; therefore, the number of materials increases by time. In addition to the teacher's available sets and the department's bookshelf from which students are free to borrow, the large class size shows its advantages when students could generate almost unlimited number of topics, ranging from everyday news to science, business, entertainment, history, technology, short stories, culture, fashion and sport, etc. With over 40 books and articles on the first day, the number was multiplied per day.

3) Learners choose what they want to read.

During RS activity, students moved around to different stations and picked the reading they like. Students are encouraged to choose whatever suits their taste and reading level, of any topic and length. They are free to change the chosen one to another one right after reading several pages if they found it uninteresting or difficult.

4) Learners read as much as possible.

Students are encouraged to read as many materials as possible during RS time. With an average length of 500-700 words per material, it is obvious that the total number of words a student would be exposed to over a Reading Station time well exceeded that from a typical reading text in one unit of the course book, which normally includes roughly less than 500 words.

5) The purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information and general understanding.

During RS time, students selected the reading materials according to their own interest and read for pleasure, information and general understanding without any follow-up comprehension questions. However, students were asked to share their reflection of the most impressive reading text to other students.

6) Reading is its own reward.

With the large number of books and articles in many different topics, students have opportunities to read about various fields they want. Reading is its own reward because students were not "learning to read" anymore; they were "reading to learn" about the world and to get the better of themselves.

7) Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower.

Students were free to choose the length and the level of difficulty suitable to themselves; they are encouraged to read for overall content but not for vocabulary. This helped to increase their fluency.

8) Reading is individual and silent.

After moving around the stations and picking up the materials, students were asked to sit down and read individually and silently. This silent reading has been said to help structural awareness develop, build vocabulary, and to promote confidence in the language.

9) Teachers orient and guide their students.

At the beginning of each Reading Station activity, teacher introduced briefly in class about books or articles of that day by stating some “exciting titles” and giving some genuine recommendations about some materials or topics that students were about to read. This pre-reading activity helps motivate students about what sounds interesting to them just through the titles. During the reading time, teacher went around and participated with students, discussing with them about the texts if they were willing to talk.

10) The teacher is a role model of a reader.

Teacher also acted as a reader of the Reading Station, picked a material of her own and read silently before going around and share her thoughts of the reading with the students.

C. Reading Stations Organization and Operation

The data collection procedure was to adapt and pilot the three data collection instruments, namely, *Classroom Observation Checklist 1*, *Classroom Observation Checklist 2* which were used to measure seven components of students’ reading motivation and *Student Interviews* which were used to collect data on their perceptions after the intervention.

1) Classroom Observation

The purpose of the classroom observations made in this research was to observe the extent to which the introduction of RS helps improve participating students’ reading motivation, as reflected in their reading persistence with the learning task, reading attention, reading enthusiasm and reading enjoyment which comprise intrinsic motivation to read.

The Observation checklists were adapted from [28], [29]. Observation Checklist 1 was used to quantify learners’ on-task behaviour (levels of students’ attention and persistence with the learning task which is one component of motivation). Observation Checklist 2 was used to assess the overall class reading motivation, as manifested by levels of learner enthusiasm and enjoyment during class.

2) Student Interviews

The data collection process of the study was conducted by employing focus group interviews to explore the introduction of RS in improving learners’

reading engagement, involvement, curiosity and preferences for challenges in reading, which are all related to intrinsic motivation to read.

In particular, the interview questions numbered 1 to 6 were planned to seek answers for Research Question 1 (To what extent does the introduction of Reading Stations (RS) motivate first year students at School of Foreign Languages, Thai Nguyen University to read English?). Therefore, the purpose of the first seven interview questions was to search for the student’s reading involvement in the content of the texts; the students’ reading curiosity towards the texts; and students’ preference for challenge in reading when encountering long and difficult texts.

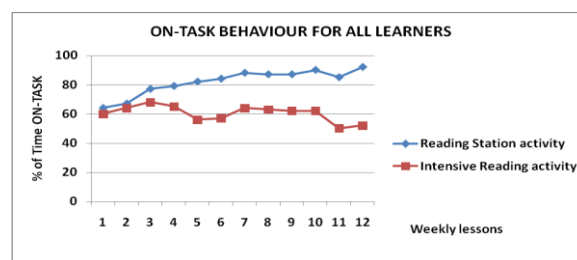
As for Research Question 2 (What are the recommendations for English language teachers at SFL – TNU to introduce of RS to motivate their second year students to read English?), the interview questions numbered 7 to 10 were designed to seek answers for this research question: students’ preference between individual reading and group reading (Q7); students’ preference between in-class reading and homework reading (Q8); students’ self-determination in choosing their own materials (Q9); and students’ points of view on how scoring motivate their reading (Q10).

IV. FINDINGS

A. Participating Students’ Observed Attention and Action

Figure 1 shows the percentage of time in which students are on task when doing Reading station activity and intensive reading activity On-task behaviour includes levels of students’ attention, persistence with the learning task, as one component of motivation.

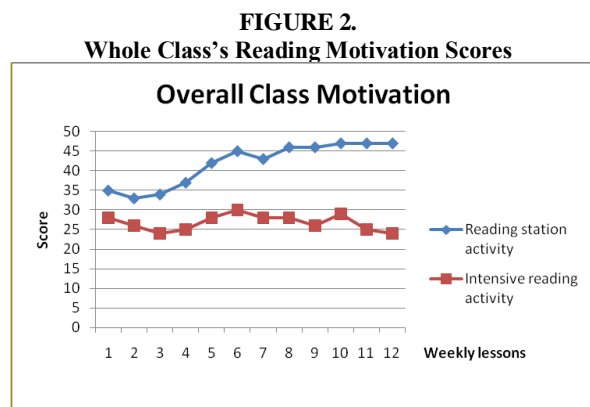
FIGURE 1.
Individual Students’ On-task Behaviour



The participating students’ on-task behaviour eventually increased eventually from over 60% to 96% during the RS time. In lesson 12, there is an obvious gap in the percentage of students’ on-task between RS reading and intensive reading which were 96% and 53% respectively. It indicates that students show their higher levels of attention for an extended duration and more persistence with the reading during RS.

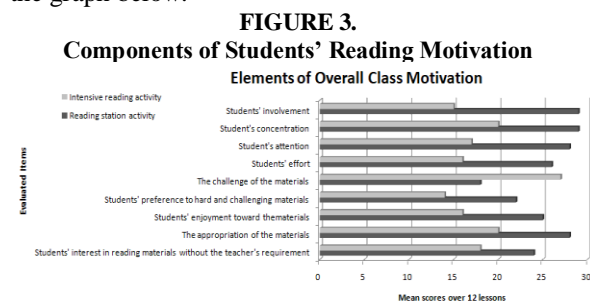
B. Participating Student’s Observed Enthusiasm and Enjoyment

The overall class motivation was to evaluate the overall of the students’ enthusiasm (the level at which the students performed their involvement, concentration, effort and their preference to the hard and challenging texts and activities) and the students’ overall enjoyment over the reading materials and the follow-up activities.



As can be seen from Figure 1 and Figure 2, there was a clear difference by types of reading activities (RS vs. Intensive reading) showing that the class was more motivated by RS, but only adjusted in the third week and got familiar with the idea of doing it.

Specifically, the Observation Checklist 2 consists of 10 items which the researcher-observer used to evaluate the overall class motivation. The specific data collected from each item is presented in the graph below:



Generally the introduction of RS had much stronger and more positive effects on each component of the students’ motivation on the day, compared to the intensive reading. It was observed that students showed more enjoyment towards the reading materials and the follow-up activities during RS. Moreover, the level of students’ attention, concentration and effort they made on the task in RS were significantly high, correspondingly 28, 29 and 26 (in comparison with 17, 19 and 16 in intensive reading lessons). It can be inferred that the more students enjoyed the reading, the more they pay persistence attention and concentration to the task, and they also made more effort on the set task of the day. Besides, the researcher observed that students also appeared to be interested in challenging texts

which were personally chosen by them. They also were more likely to actively do the reading even when it was not required by the teacher.

C. Participating Students’ Perceived Reading Involvement, Curiosity and Preference to Challenge

The responses from interviewed students were coded as HRM (Low Reading Motivation) if the interviewed student made a positive statement to show their reading motivation as high, and LRM (Low Reading Motivation) if the statement conveyed a negative point of view.

TABLE 1.
Codes for Participating Students’ Reading Engagement/Involvement

Activity type	HRM	LRM
Reading Station	67	29
Intensive reading	24	54

TABLE 2.
Codes for Participating Students’ Perceived Reading Curiosity

Activity types	HRM	LRM
Reading Station	72	34
Intensive Reading	42	65

TABLE 3.
Codes for Participating Students’ Perceived Preference for More Challenging Reading materials

Activity types	HRM	LRM
Reading Station	63	30
Intensive Reading	18	78

In general, the participating students expressed their high perceived levels of reading involvement since the materials in RS were their choice and of their interests.

Example response 1: “...this is the first time I have taken part in this kind of reading activity in class in which I can choose my own books...”

Example response 2: “...I like it because I don’t have to rush to catch up the time...”

Example response 3: “...there is no questions so I don’t have to be afraid of giving wrong answers...”

Similarly, mentioning RS, the students perceived their high level of curiosity as they stated that they wanted to “read more” and “to learn more

about the fields rather than focus on comprehension questions”.

Example response 4: “...when I finished one book about snakes’ life, I want to find more books about other reptiles and animals...”

Other students also shared the same idea that “by learning to read English through this kind of activity, I hope I will be able to read English books, newspapers or magazines” Most of the students found the materials in RS “relaxing to read” and “exciting to know”. RS could indeed help them to understand better and they felt eager to learn new information that they had never known before by stating that the articles (in RS) ‘expanded my views of society’ (the student), and ‘had meanings’ to them. Many students even described their willingness to read more with RS no matter how hard they were to them and they found it interesting to discover new things.

V. CONCLUSIONS

A. Students’ English Language Reading Motivation

The findings of the study, as reported earlier, suggests that RS have good effects on improving students’ motivation as they are useful for unmotivated readers who lack effective reading skills. The study revealed that those students who are intrinsically motivated to read tend to participate more in the observed reading lessons. The more intrinsically motivated they are, the more they read for their enjoyment and with their own curiosity. Therefore, the students like to challenge themselves by spending more time on reading activities meanwhile they can improve their comprehension skills. This finding correlates to the suggestions made by [25], emphasizing that intrinsically motivated learners could get engaged in learning because of the task itself, not for the external rewards or satisfaction from something other than itself. In addition, students are at the center of a reading teaching and learning process. Thus, they are supposed to take the active and positive roles in improving their reading performance while teachers should play their facilitating roles. Therefore, in order to be an active reader, students need to be provided with opportunities to determine their own purpose of reading, which is not only for academic purposes but also for becoming better readers.

B. Effects of RS on Students’ Reading Motivation

The findings showed participating students’ reading motivation were very strong or at least stronger when they get exposed to RS compared to when they read intensively, as reflected in all the seven components of intrinsic motivation such as reading involvement, curiosity, preference to challenge. These findings suggest that participating

students in RS were more intrinsically motivated to read.

In particular, the 12 observed reading lessons demonstrated that after participating in RS in the 12-week reading course, the students have increased their attention and persistence with the learning task, they paid more time on-task when practicing RS, compared to when they were asked to read intensively. Their high levels of enthusiasm and enjoyment towards RS were also indicated in the observation data analyses. The more students enjoyed the reading, the more they paid persistent attention and concentration to the task, and they also made more efforts to do the set task of the day. Besides, the results revealed that students were actively involved in doing the reading even when it was not required by the reading teacher.

Another important finding was that there were positive changes on the mean scores of other three domains of intrinsic reading motivation after the practice of RS. The results indicated a dramatic increase on the mean scores of reading involvement. After each RS section, students became more motivated to read about their own favorite topics at their own pace. Reading curiosity is another domain of motivation which witnessed an increase. These findings re-affirm the fact that readers not only read the minimum number of materials which are required by the teacher but also prefer to read further and more extensively similar reading materials to satisfy their own pleasure and curiosity. The remaining domain of reading motivation which is related to students’ preference for reading challenging texts, also increased since the students showed their eagerness to read difficult texts, stating that they know how to use contexts and inputs to understand the meanings of unknown words. The students did not only read for themselves, but also had motivation to deliver the new information they got from the texts to other people by sharing them among their friends in reading lesson. Here, the focus of reading is on the content through which readers make an interaction with the reading materials, and not on the linguistic features of the reading materials. Intermediate level language learners who could get exposed to RS could improve their intrinsic reading motivation which in turn can make contribution to improving their reading performance and their English language learning.

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