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Web-based extensive reading: A learning model for university students

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to develop a web-based Extensive Reading (ER) model tailored for English Department students at Universitas Bengkulu. The study addressed the gap between the expectations of an extensive reading program and its practical implementation in higher education. Employing a Research and Development (R&D) design, the study involved needs analysis, product development, and evaluation phases to ensure the practicality and effectiveness of the proposed model. The developed web-based ER model provided lecturers with a comprehensive collection of reading materials, engaging and interactive post-reading activities, and an integrated platform for managing and storing students' reading reports. The model was designed to enhance students' reading engagement and promote autonomous learning. The findings indicate that the web-based ER model effectively supports extensive reading activities, offering flexibility for adaptation by other ER lecturers. It can be customized to align with specific learner interests and needs, ensuring a more personalized learning experience. This research contributes to the field by providing an innovative and replicable tool for enhancing extensive reading programs in tertiary education.

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1. Introduction

Extensive reading (ER) is an approach to reading that involves independent reading of a large quantity of material for information or pleasure (Renandya et al., 2018). It is also described as free reading of books and other written material that are neither too difficult nor too easy. In an extensive reading activity, students read a substantial amount of material that matches their linguistic competence. Students independently select reading materials based on their interests and read at their own pace.

According to (Macalister, 2019), extensive reading involves students reading self-selected materials at their own pace, with minimal or no testing or evaluation afterward. Reading is done primarily for pleasure, often outside the classroom, without comprehension tests. Students are encouraged to read more texts, fostering good reading habits that help them become skilled and independent readers.

ER plays a crucial role in exposing students to large amounts of target language input, significantly contributing to developing reading fluency. This exposure aids in building a large sight vocabulary, expanding general vocabulary, and enhancing knowledge of the target language, the world, and text types (Castles et al., 2018). Therefore, extensive reading serves as a critical tool in helping students improve their reading abilities.

Based on principles proposed by Day (2015) and supported by Renandya et al. (2018), a successful Extensive Reading program includes several key criteria. First, reading materials should be at an appropriate difficulty level and encompass a wide range of text types, allowing students to read as much as possible based on their interests and levels. Second, post-reading activities should be varied, engaging, and motivating to develop students' English skills and encourage their willingness to continue reading and actively participate in class discussions. Third, ER activities should not focus on comprehension questions, as the primary purpose of reading is for pleasure and general understanding. Finally, teachers should guide students to share their personal experiences of what they read.

Despite the benefits, challenges in implementing a successful Extensive Reading program remain. One significant challenge is the availability of suitable reading materials. Another challenge involves the activities within the program, as traditional ER courses are often conducted in a conventional manner, where students and lecturers meet in classrooms for in-class discussions, summaries, and presentations (Akkerman et al., 2021).

Given these limitations, there is a need to introduce a new model of Extensive Reading for English Department students at Universitas Bengkulu. A promising approach is the use of technology, specifically a web-based Extensive Reading program (Puspita et al., 2021), to provide students with greater flexibility, access to diverse materials, and interactive activities.

The integration of online or web-based instruction into Extensive Reading (ER) courses has become increasingly urgent for several reasons, reflecting both pedagogical and technological advancements. First, the nature of ER itself necessitates significant reading outside the classroom. Students are expected to read a substantial amount of material, which is difficult to achieve solely within the constraints of face-to-face classroom sessions. Online platforms provide the flexibility to access diverse reading materials anytime and anywhere, supporting the core objectives of ER programs.

The rapid evolution of literacy in the 21st century has fundamentally transformed how young people interact with information. The rise of digital technologies and information and communication technology (ICT) has shifted traditional literacy into what Hung (2009) calls "electronic literacy." This transition presents a unique opportunity to integrate ICT into ER programs, enabling students to engage with texts in a modern, digitally mediated environment. Hung argues that incorporating electronic literacy modernises ER instruction and enhances students' confidence in navigating and comprehending digital texts.

The internet has become a dominant medium for delivering educational content (Jones et al., 2019). As students become increasingly adept at using digital tools, they gain competencies that extend beyond reading skills for ER courses. According to Eagleton and Dobler (2012), web literacy fosters broader learning outcomes, equipping students with the ability to access, analyze, and synthesize information across various content areas. This aligns with the interdisciplinary demands of contemporary education, making web-based ER an effective tool for developing both linguistic and cognitive skills.

Additionally, web-based ER programs are more cost-effective and resource-efficient compared to traditional classroom-based ER approaches. Teachers can curate and upload extensive reading materials directly to course platforms at little or no cost, eliminating the need for expensive printed materials. This accessibility democratizes learning, allowing students to access a wide array of texts suited to their interests and proficiency levels. Inherently, the collaborative nature of online learning environments fosters stronger interactions between teachers and students. Bruno et al. (2012) highlights that web-based learning encourages collaborative engagement, creating opportunities for students and instructors to work together on reading activities, discussions, and progress tracking. Such interaction enhances the overall effectiveness of the learning process, promoting both autonomy and guided support.

Finally, the increasing adoption of online learning platforms, such as the Learning Management System (LMS) at Universitas Bengkulu, further supports the feasibility of web-based ER programs. With the institution's infrastructure enabling online instruction, implementing a web-based ER program becomes not only viable but also highly relevant in meeting the growing demand for digital literacy integration in higher education. Although research on the use of the internet for ER is still limited, existing studies offer promising insights. Derewianka (2019) outlines strategies for sourcing ER materials online and discusses techniques for utilizing internet resources to enhance ER activities. Bruno et al. (2012) investigated the effectiveness of web-based ER programs and demonstrated their positive impact on students' reading abilities. Similarly, Bui and Macalister (2021) designed and implemented the Extensive Reading Online (ERO) program for EFL learners in Taiwan, showcasing how tailored online reading platforms can address the specific needs of language learners while fostering motivation and engagement.

In conclusion, the shift toward web-based ER programs is not only timely but essential for adapting to the technological and educational demands of the modern era. These programs provide flexible, cost-effective, and pedagogically sound solutions for enhancing students' reading skills and overall learning experiences.

2. Research Methodology

After each step of research and development had been accomplished, the initial product was produced as e-learning for Extensive Reading course (Sugiyono, 2013). Two experts validated this prototype theoretically to ensure its quality. The result of expert validation showed that the web-based course for Extensive Reading was already good and proper to be used. This validated product was then tried out to some students to see how the product worked out in the real implementation. The tryout result revealed that this web-based instruction for Extensive Reading was very interesting and good. Students said that the reading materials were interesting and they agreed to recommend the lecturer to give these reading materials to the students in the future. They found the tools easy to use. They did not have to waste much time searching for appropriate reading materials themselves since they could find what they needed and liked on the course site.

3. Findings

Extensive Reading (ER) (Bui & Macalister, 2021) has long been recognized as a valuable approach in language education, promoting reading fluency, vocabulary acquisition, and

overall language proficiency. With the advent of digital technology, there has been a growing interest in developing web-based models for ER to enhance accessibility and engagement.

a. Research and Development (R&D) in Web-Based ER Models

Integrating technology into ER has led to the development of various web-based platforms to facilitate extensive reading practices. For instance, Sarivaara et al. (2021) introduced an experimental web-based system called Extensive Reading Online (ERO), designed to provide learners with a diverse range of reading materials and interactive activities. This system aimed to address the limitations of traditional ER programs by offering a more flexible and accessible platform for learners. Similarly, Chena (2020) investigated the effectiveness of using the internet in ER classes through a web-based extensive reading program. The study demonstrated that integrating web-based resources into ER programs could enhance students' reading abilities and motivation.

Web-based ER Models offer several advantages, such as accessibility and convenience, because learners can access a vast array of reading materials anytime and anywhere, facilitating continuous and self-paced learning. Secondly, diverse reading materials where online platforms can provide a wide range of texts catering to different proficiency levels and interests, thereby enhancing learner engagement. This model has interactive features that includes interactive activities and immediate feedback mechanisms, which can reinforce comprehension and retention. Furthermore, it benefits students and teachers because it features tracking and assessment using digital platforms to monitor learners' reading progress, allowing for personalized feedback and targeted interventions.

b. Challenges and Considerations

Despite the many advantages of implementing web-based Extensive Reading (ER) models (Day, 2015; Yakut, 2020), several challenges must be addressed to ensure their success in educational settings. One of the primary concerns is digital literacy, which refers to the ability of both instructors and learners to effectively navigate and utilize the online platforms where ER activities take place. Instructors must be proficient in using the platform themselves and capable of guiding students in its use. For learners, digital literacy is essential for engaging with the various tools and features available on these platforms, such as interactive reading materials, quizzes, and progress-tracking systems. If either group lacks sufficient digital skills, the potential for online ER models to enhance learning could be significantly reduced. Therefore, adequate training and support for teachers and students are crucial to overcoming this barrier.

Another challenge is the development of resources. A wide range of engaging and appropriate reading materials must be available to students for a web-based ER model to be effective. Creating and curating these materials requires considerable time, effort, and expertise. Instructors or content developers must select texts suitable for the students' proficiency levels while ensuring that the materials are interesting and varied to sustain student engagement. This task can become particularly challenging when catering to diverse learner interests and reading abilities. Furthermore, the materials must be formatted in a way that is accessible and easy to navigate on digital platforms. Thus, the need for high-quality, well-curated digital reading materials represents a significant hurdle in the successful implementation of web-based ER programs.

In addition to digital literacy and resource development, maintaining learner motivation and self-discipline in a web-based ER environment presents another challenge. Unlike traditional classroom settings, where structure and face-to-face interaction help keep students on track, online learning environments require a higher degree of autonomy and self-regulation. Learners may struggle with staying motivated and managing their time effectively when working independently on digital platforms. The lack of immediate oversight from instructors can lead to procrastination or disengagement, particularly if students do not receive timely feedback or if the reading materials fail to capture their interest. To address this issue, instructors may need to provide additional support, such as regular check-ins, motivational strategies, and personalized feedback, to encourage learners to stay committed to their reading goals and ensure continued progress.

Overall, while web-based ER models offer numerous advantages in terms of accessibility, personalization, and engagement, addressing challenges such as digital literacy, resource development, and learner motivation is essential for their successful implementation. By overcoming these obstacles, educators can better harness the potential of technology to enhance the extensive reading experience and improve language learning outcomes.

4. **Conclusion**

The development of web-based ER models through R&D initiatives has the potential to significantly enhance language learning experiences by making extensive reading more accessible, engaging, and effective. However, successful implementation requires careful consideration of the associated challenges and a commitment to continuous improvement based on empirical research and the learner feedback model of the web-based Extensive Reading course was developed in the form of an e-learning site and can be accessed at e-learning. unit.ac.id. It is considered very useful for Extensive Reading lecturers as it serves as a new alternative model for them to run a good Extensive Reading course. It provides the lecturers with a wealth of reading materials, various interesting interactive post-reading activities, and also a place to keep and manage the student's reports in the Extensive Reading course as the basis for the assessment. This product can be copied to other ER lecturers who are interested in conducting web-based learning; in fact, they can further modify the content of the course to suit the learners' interests and needs.

Some suggestions are offered for using the product effectively. First, the lecturer should give an orientation in the first meeting to the students giving them information of what they will deal through the semester with the web-based course. The information include the username and password the students should have, the guide on how to navigate through the site, and the syllabus guiding the participants of what to do during the semester using the web-based instruction.

Second, trying out the whole part of the product with larger subjects in one semester is suggested. The appropriate syllabus and lesson plans need to be developed to guide the implementation of web-based learning. It is expected that the result of the large scale try out will give clearer information of which part of the product really needs to improve or even changed. Updating and modifying contents regularly are also suggested.

Further, the web-based learning is possible not only for Extensive Reading course, but also for other courses. Eagleton & Dobler (2007) say the successful implementation of web-

based Extensive Reading may develop their reading intention from reading for pleasure to reading for knowledge; making reading their life habit. Thus, the dissemination of this web-based instruction to other educational practitioners in other content areas is also strongly suggested.

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