THE EFFECTS OF EXTENSIVE READING ON ENGLISH READING ABILITY AND ATTITUDES OF BUSINESS ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS

ผลของการอ่านแบบกว้างขวางที่มีต่อความสามารถในการอ่านภาษาอังกฤษ ของนักศึกษาวิชาเอกภาษาอังกฤษธุรกิจ

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Abstract

This study aimed to develop business English Major Students' English reading ability through extensive reading and investigate their attitudes towards autonomous learning after exposure to extensive reading. The population consisted of fourteen second year students studying in the academic year 2017 in Faculty of Liberal Arts, Southeast Bangkok College. The researcher tested all the samples before the experiment taken place on June 13, 2017 and kept records of their scores. Then, the project based on extensive reading was started for the total of 12 weeks from June 20 to September 5, 2017. The research instruments included a pre-post-test for testing students' reading ability with the total of 20 items and a questionnaire investigating students' attitudes toward autonomous learning. The analysis of quantitative data revealed the following findings. First, the post-test mean score of reading ability was significantly higher than the pre-test mean score at the 0.05 level. In addition, the students had positive attitudes toward autonomous learning. The findings contribute to a better understanding of extensive reading and support the belief that extensive reading can be employed as a part of teaching activities to improve learners' reading ability and self-directed learning skills.

Keywords : Autonomous learning, Extensive reading, Reading ability

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัย เรื่องผลของการอ่านแบบกว้างขวางที่มีต่อความสามารถในการอ่านของนักศึกษา วิชาเอกภาษาอังกฤษธุรกิจ มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อ พัฒนาความสามารถในด้านการอ่านของนักศึกษา

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วิชาเอกภาษาอังกฤษธุรกิจด้วยกลยุทธ์การอ่านแบบกว้างขวาง และศึกษาทัศนคติของนักศึกษาที่มีต่อ
การเรียนรู้ด้วยตนเองด้วยการอ่านแบบกว้างขวาง กลุ่มตัวอย่างที่ใช้ในการวิจัยครั้งนี้เป็นนักศึกษา
วิชาเอกภาษาอังกฤษธุรกิจชั้นปีที่ 2 คณะศิลปศาสตร์ วิทยาลัยเซาธ์อีสท์บางกอก ปีการศึกษา 2560
จำนวน 14 คน นักศึกษาได้ทำแบบทดสอบเพื่อวัดความสามารถด้านการอ่านภาษาอังกฤษก่อนเริ่ม
การทดลอง หลังจากนั้นให้นักศึกษาได้ฝึกอ่านด้วยตนเองเป็นเวลา 12 สัปดาห์ เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการ
วิจัยประกอบด้วย แบบทดสอบความสามารถด้านการอ่านก่อนและหลังการทดลอง และแบบสอบถาม
ทัศนคติเกี่ยวกับการส่งเสริมการเรียนรู้ด้วยตนเองด้วยการอ่านแบบกว้างขวาง ผลการวิจัยพบว่า
ค่าเฉลี่ยคะแนนทดสอบความสามารถในการอ่านหลังการทดลองสูงกว่าก่อนการทดลอง โดยมีความ
แตกต่างกันอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติที่ระดับ 0.05 นอกจากนั้นยังพบว่ากลุ่มตัวอย่างมีทัศนคติที่ดีต่อ
การเรียนรู้ด้วยตนเอง ข้อเสนอแนะจากการวิจัยครั้งนี้คือ ผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษควรใช้กลยุทธ์การอ่าน
แบบกว้างขวางเพื่อพัฒนาความสามารถด้านการอ่านและเสริมสร้างทักษะการเรียนรู้ด้วยตนเองให้กับ
ผู้เรียน

คำสำคัญ : การเรียนรู้ด้วยตนเอง การอ่านแบบกว้างขวาง ความสามารถด้านการอ่าน

Introduction

The 21st century brings significantly advanced and innovative changes (Roy Singh, 1991). This results in a tremendous amount of change in our society. To succeed and get along with the changes, learners need to know how to learn by themselves and they have to be responsible for their own learning. Autonomous learning or self-directed learning is one of the most suitable approaches for this age. To become autonomous learners, students must have good reading skills since reading is important for independent learning. Moreover, autonomous learning is a good way to learn because it meets the needs of students. Learners can choose to study the subject of their interest at the time they need and at the place that suits the life of each person. If instructors can stimulate self-learning among students, they will be successful in study for the rest of their lives.

As a teacher in higher education institutions, the researcher thinks that it is necessary to develop a teaching model by using extensive reading approach. Generally, the methodology of teaching English reading in classes in Thailand is teacher-centered. This method of teaching makes students lack enthusiasm and feel tired when studying reading in class (Chandavimon, 1998). In addition, teaching this

way also leads to the lack of participation in the classroom because the teacher monopolizes classroom activities. Although many more modern teachers focus on student-centric teaching, they cannot make students participate as much as they should. This is because the content of the course does not meet the students' preferences or it may not be as up-to-date as the interest of young students. In this research, the researcher chooses to use reading media from the internet because there are many advantages. One advantage of using the internet is that students can read from their personal electronic devices, such as notebooks, tablets, and smartphones. The freedom of choosing the topics from various websites allows students to read the materials of their own interests at their convenient time and place with no cost of buying books. In the age where everyone has access to information on the Internet anytime and anywhere like this, instructors should recommend interesting websites to their students so each learner can find the content which suits their preferences and abilities.

Based on these factors, I think that autonomous learning should be promoted through extensive reading. I encourage students to read a lot of materials according to their interest and their level of ability in English. They can choose from many websites I recommend such as www.manythings.org/voa/stories/. Learning with interesting content from the websites is probably the best way to promote autonomous learning through extensive reading. As Godwin-Jones (2011) said, "Learning by using the Internet is very useful for promoting self-learning."

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. Does extensive reading enhance students' English reading ability?

2. What are students' attitudes toward autonomous learning after exposure to extensive reading?

Literature Review

1. Extensive Reading

1) Definition of Extensive Reading

Extensive reading has been studied for some time. Many researchers agree that extensive reading is very beneficial for studying a foreign language. Some educators have defined extensive reading similarly. Harold Palmer (cited in Kelly,

1969) firstly applied the term "Extensive Reading" to foreign language pedagogy. In addition, Day and Bamford (2004) state that the word "extensive reading" is similar to the terms that have been used before, such as "abundant reading", "supplementary reading", "sustained silent reading", "pleasure reading", or "free voluntary reading". Day et al. (2016) state that extensive reading means a teaching method that encourages students to read as much as possible to be fluent in English and other foreign languages. This approach is based on the principle that reading is the best way of learning how to read. Other researchers, Grabe and Stoller (2002) define that extensive reading is an "approach to the teaching and learning of reading in which learners read large quantities of materials that are *within* their linguistic competence" Nation (2009) also comments that extensive reading makes readers focus on the meaning of the content being read. It helps to improve language fluency through reading.

2) Research Related to Extensive Reading

Effects of extensive reading on English proficiency have been studied for decades. Recently, Chantakloi (2017) studies enhancing positive motivation in EFL reading class using self-selected online reading texts. The results of the study indicate that the motivation in reading English of EFL learners significantly increased when using self-selected reading texts. Also, Wisaijorn (2017) investigates effects of extensive reading on the proficiency in and attitudes toward reading English on Thai university students. Results of the pre- and post-test of reading ability in English show little change in the performances of the more able students but students who perform at a lower level in the pre-test improve considerably. Results of the pre- and post-questionnaire and evaluations show an overall positive development of attitudes to reading in English. Additionally, Iwahori (2008) reports on the efficiency of extensive reading for the development of reading fluency. There are some studies in Japan that reveal the same results. A study by Beglar, Hunt, and Kite (2012) find that students in Japanese universities who are encouraged to use extensive reading strategy significantly improve reading speed. In contrast, students who study reading in the classroom alone cannot do so. The study also emphasizes that reading outside the classroom improves reading comprehension. In addition, Imamura (2012) finds

that students in Japan assigned to read outside the classroom as homework can read faster. According to a comparative study of Huffman (2014), it is found that the first year Japanese nursing college students applying extensive reading activities for one semester have much higher reading speed than those in the classroom. There are also other studies finding that when students have more opportunities to read, bigger size vocabulary is a by-product. (Horst, 2005; Pigada & Schmitt, 2006) Another researcher, Guo (2012) studies using authentic materials for extensive reading to promote English proficiency of students in Taiwan. This study intends to discover the effects of extensive reading using online materials on students' language proficiency, and students' attitude towards the extensive reading activity. The study results indicate a strong relationship between extensive reading and vocabulary development. Students agree that extensive reading also enhances their overall English ability and knowledge.

Based on the results of all studies about autonomous learning and extensive reading mentioned above, in this research, students are encouraged to choose texts that match their reading competence and preference from the Internet. Currently, there are many websites providing various topics for students to read anytime and anywhere. This is consistent with one of the features of extensive reading. That is, students can read alone quietly at their favorite time and place. In addition, many websites provide a variety of interesting activities. It can be said that extensive reading through online media not only help students develop their reading and other language skills but it also makes students read happily and learn without boredom. The activities also stimulate curiosity among students. In the long term, students become self-taught and obtain life-long learning. This will give them the knowledge they need to remain competitive and to be able to adapt to the world that is changing continuously.

2. Autonomous Learning

1) Definition of Autonomous Learning

The concept of autonomous learning has been used in teaching for a long time in many countries, but it is not very popular among teachers in Thailand. Many gurus have given similar definition of the word. It means that the learner needs to

know his or her learning goals and they have a responsibility to achieve that goal. To do this, students need to know how to use effective learning strategies and they can make their own decision freely. (Holec, 1981) Little (1991) states that autonomous learning is the psychological reaction of learners to learning process. Learners have ability to think creatively, make decisions, and express ideas freely. An expert on language teaching, Richards (2016) defines that autonomous learning is a learner's responsibility for what he or she learns and how to learn. Learner autonomy is an individualized learning which results in better learning outcomes since it is a learning based on the needs and satisfaction of each student. In addition, Richards (2015) also notes that the current use of the Internet, online media technology and face-to-face communication, including virtual social networks help increase the opportunity to use the language for communication instead of being provided for promoting self-directed learning outside the classroom. As a result, teachers should encourage students to take advantage of these technologies for self-learning. Si (2014) in his article "The Teaching Mode of Autonomous Learning in University English Teaching" states that autonomous learning is not a stereotype. It is a combination of modern teaching ideas, ways of study, and learning activities. One more important thing is that learners must participate enthusiastically in the learning process to develop their abilities and self-learning habits. Benson (2011) discusses the meaning of autonomous learning as follows. Autonomous learning refers to the ability to take responsibility for one's own learning and it is necessary to learn effectively. Self-learners are more responsible for their own learning. Moreover, they have better analytical thinking skills because they have to decide on self-study. In Littlewood's point of view (1966), self-learners must have ability and willingness to choose freely. Therefore, the heart of autonomous learning is "ability" and "willingness". With more knowledge and skills, students will have more confidence in independent study. Being capable of deciding makes students more motivated to learn. This will affect learning efficiency. (Dickinson, 1995) Therefore, autonomous learning has a clear relationship to learning effectiveness.

2) Research Related to Autonomous Learning

Researchers in many countries are interested in autonomous learning. In China, Yao (2016) conducts a research to investigate the current situation of web-based autonomous English learning of engineering students in particular and current problems in their process of learning. It is found that engineering students in Luoyang Institute of Science and Technology can surf the Internet conveniently after class. They can log into the web, watch a movie, use social media to talk to their friends in English, and use online translation tools and more. Although some students say their teachers do not give much advice on how they can improve their English language skills through the website, they believe that teachers play an important role and can help students improve their ability to learn English through the Internet. Another researcher from China, Zhao (2014) studied students' English autonomous learning strategies based on digital instructional platforms. The university has prepared various things to facilitate students in self-study. However, from the questionnaire and interviews, it is not satisfactory to learn English autonomously through digital instructional platforms. Some students are not aware of the college English autonomous learning strategies and their application. Recently, Srisermbhok (2017) conducted a research on Fostering English Literacy for Autonomous Learning through IT. The results of the study show that Information technology is not only good for students' English language development but students also know how to learn English by themselves. Some other researchers in Thailand have conducted studies on autonomous learning. For example, Swatevacharkul (2010) studied Thai students' readiness for self-learning in English. The results show that on average, the level of students' readiness for self-study in English is high. To illustrate, the willingness to learn, motivation to learn and the ability to self-learning is high. Nevertheless, self-confidence in learning is moderate. In addition, studies and compares the level of English language autonomous learning of Thai higher education students enrolled in English for communication and learning skills of Suan Dusit Rajabhat University. The study is to find out how to develop English autonomous learning. The results show that, overall, students have low levels of self-learning in English before using the student handbook. However, the level of students' English language autonomous

learning after using the student manual lifts up to medium. Moreover, the research confirms that the level of students' English autonomous learning before and after using the student handbook is significantly different at the 0.01 level. In conclusion, teaching self-learning strategies to students can develop the students' ability to learn English by themselves.

In summary, teachers should promote students' capacity of autonomous learning by educating students on the importance of self-learning, self-knowledge, and self-improvement. Self-study does not mean totally free study. Actually, learners must be responsible for themselves under the guidance of the instructor.

Research Methodology

Participants

The samples used in the research were 14 second year business English major students studying Reading Skills for the first semester of 2017 academic year.

Data Collection Procedure

This classroom action research was conducted as follows:

1. To start the research, the students were asked to do the pre-test.

2. The researcher explained the characteristics of autonomous learning and extensive reading thoroughly so that students understood what to do clearly.

3. Students were encouraged to select the materials from the recommended websites. They could read any topics that suit their interests and English ability.

4. Each week students reflected what they read briefly and shared their most favorite story with their classmates. (Mistakes were recorded for improvement later.)

5. The researcher provided extra classes for teaching grammar and vocabulary.

6. Students took the post-test which is exactly the same as the pre-test after week 12.

7. Students completed the questionnaire that asks about their attitudes toward autonomous learning through extensive reading.

The process of creating a pre-post test

The pre-test and post-test for this study consisted of 4 short paragraphs with 20 items. The questions focused on understanding the story in general topics, finding main ideas and important details, and looking for specific information. The test was taken from English books and examined by a native speaker who is specialist in teaching English and language testing.

Data analysis and statistics used in data analysis

This study aimed to investigate whether the extensive reading promote students' autonomous learning and improve students' reading ability. The results answered the two research questions. The data collected as discussed above was quantitatively analyzed as follows:

To examine the students' attitude towards promoting autonomous learning through extensive reading, the ratings from the questionnaire was calculated by using descriptive statics to determine the Mean ($\bar{x}$). The results indicated the level of attitude students possess towards the autonomous learning through extensive reading. The statements in the questionnaire is five-point Likert scale, comprising items, to allow the sample group to rate the level of their opinions.

Table 1 Interpretation of attitudes

Scale	Mean range	Attitude level	Score range
5	strongly agree	very positive	4.50-5.00
4	agree	positive	3.50-4.49
3	moderate	average	2.50-3.49
2	disagree	negative	1.50-2.49
1	strongly disagree	very negative	1.00-1.49

Research Findings

The Improvement in the Students' Reading Ability

To investigate whether the extensive reading improve students' reading ability, the overall mean of scores of the pre- and post-test were compared using paired t-test. The results showed that the post-test reading score increased after using extensive reading approach.

Table 2 the Overall mean, Standard Deviation, and the Mean Differences of Students' Scores before and after using Extensive Reading Strategy

Students (n)	Before using Extensive Reading strategy		After using Extensive Reading strategy		Difference of $\bar{x}$	t-value	p
	$\bar{x}$	sd.	$\bar{x}$	sd.			
14	7.714	3.338	9.786	3.468	2.071	2.838**	.007

**Significant at the 0.05 level (p<0.05)

As shown in table 2, the overall mean scores of the post-test was significantly higher than that of the pre-test at the 0.05 level (t=2.838). Before the experiment, the overall mean score of the students' pre-test was 7.714 with the standard deviation of 3.338, but after the experiment, the overall mean score of the students' post-test was 9.7857 with the standard deviation of 3.468. The latter overall mean score was significantly higher than the former. That is to say, the results of the paired t-test indicated that overall the students have made a substantial improvement in their reading ability as a whole. The improvement in the reading ability of students was a result from their participating in extensive reading program.

The Students'Attitudes toward Autonomous Learning through Extensive Reading

This section presents the students' attitudes toward developing autonomous learning through extensive reading. To investigate whether participants were satisfied with the strategy, the questionnaire was distributed. The results showed the mean scores of each item of attitude toward the strategy. The analysis of the students' attitudes from the questionnaire showed the level of students' attitudes as presented in Table 3.

Table 3 The Level of Students' Attitudes after Participating the Experiment

No.	Items	$\bar{x}$	Level of Attitude
1	Autonomous learning leads to clear understanding.	4.28	High
2	Autonomous learning improves reading ability.	4.14	High
3	Autonomous learning techniques align with students' learning objectives.	4.14	High
4	Content from various websites helps students learn in response to their purpose.	4.35	High
5	Autonomous learning emphasizes the thinking process and the student's individual differences.	4.14	High
6	Autonomous learning focuses on students to practice and build their own knowledge.	4.35	High
7	Students have opportunity to think and solve problems themselves.	4.07	High
8	Extensive reading activities encourage students to take responsibility.	4.2	High
9	Students are satisfied with autonomous learning.	4.0	High
10	Students are happy with extensive reading.	4.07	High
	Total	4.17	High

As the result shown in table 3, the students had positive attitudes toward autonomous learning through extensive reading ($\bar{x}$ = 4.17). When looking at each item, it was found that the items with the highest mean score was no.4 (learning in response to their purpose) and no.6 (practicing and building their own knowledge). Interestingly, all items in the questionnaire demonstrated positive attitudes.

Discussion

The Improvement in the Students' Reading Ability

The first research question studied the effects of extensive reading on the students' reading ability, and the findings revealed that the overall mean score of the post-test was significantly higher than that of the pre-test. This indicates that

extensive reading can improve students' reading ability. This is probably because this strategy encourages students to read as much as possible to be fluent in English and other foreign languages (Day et al, 2016). This is in accordance with Grabe and Stoller (2002) who state that when learners read large quantities of materials, they tend to improve their linguistic competence. The findings of this study correlated with the results of previous studies (Levy, 2017; Wisaijon, 2017) which found that the students' reading ability has been improved through extensive reading. Moreover, the study of Guo (2012) supported the findings of this study that extensive reading enhance students' English competency.

The Students' Attitudes toward Autonomous Learning through Extensive Reading

The following discussion is presented to answer the second research question. The findings in the students' attitude questionnaire showed that the students had overall positive attitudes toward autonomous learning through extensive reading. The levels of all items were also positive. Several reasons might be used to explain these findings. First of all, students preferred autonomous learning because they could determine when and what to read. They have more decision on their study. Autonomous learning is a kind of learning based on the needs and satisfaction of each student (Richards, 2016). Secondly, the students also enjoyed extensive reading because they had a chance to read a lot of interesting materials that suit their English ability and they could read at their pace. During the 12 weeks of the experiment, the students were asked to read any topics they liked at least 1 story a day and reflected what they have read and commented about this reading activity once a week. Some students wrote that they enjoyed reading more and more. A few of students who read about 10 stories a week promised that they would continue reading because they learned many new things from the reading materials. Many students found that this activity made reading in English easier. As it is claimed in Levy's study (2017), extensive reading creates a positive attitude towards reading amongst students, while motivating them to learn more without necessarily being asked to do so. Maley (n.d) states that extensive reading is the cheapest and most effective way of building learner autonomy. Lastly, with the

current use of the Internet and online media technology, students can gain more sources of self-learning (Richards, 2015).

Recommendations from the Studies

1. Teachers need to prepare interesting and meaningful activities to increase motivation level of students.

2. Online materials are good options for using in a reading class since they are abundant and free of charge.

3. Autonomous Learning should be applied in a language class to nurture life-long learning.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to investigate whether extensive reading can improve students' reading ability and study their attitudes toward autonomous learning through extensive reading. The study revealed that students' ability in English reading improved significantly, and students had positive attitudes toward autonomous learning. According to the results, it can be concluded that extensive reading is beneficial to students' improvement in their reading ability and can be employed as a part of teaching activities to promote self-directed learning skills.

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