INVESTING IN ACADEMIC SPEAKING THROUGH GUIDED EXTENSIVE READING
A CASE STUDY IN EXTENSIVE READING CLASS AT ENGLISH DEPARTMENT
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Abstract: One principle of Extensive Reading (ER) as Day and Bamford (2002) have pointed out is that ER should be oriented to help students to be self-motivated readers by giving them freedom to choose reading materials that interest them. In institutionalized setting such as in my class, ER is incorporated into curriculum where the intent of ER is to have students read more in order to increase their exposure to English vocabulary, sentence structures and cultural insights which in turn will develop their academic skills. As an instructor of ER in that context, I tried to convince that the ER class could be a source of language development through guided extensive reading (GER). In this program I helped the students in selecting books (i.e. less academic and academic) based on their interests and language competency level. I also provided them with guided reading tasks which gave them a lot of opportunities to produce English through speaking academically. In this way the students would invest in academic speaking skill. This study reports how three different students use their potentials to invest in academic speaking in English through GER. The data of this study was obtained from observation and interview related to their reading motivation and investment strategies.

Keywords: Guided Extensive Reading, Academic speaking skill, investment

Introduction
One principle of Extensive Reading (ER) as Day and Bamford (2002) have pointed out is that ER should be oriented to help students to be self-motivated readers by giving them freedom to choose reading materials that interest them. In institutionalized setting such as in my class, ER is incorporated into curriculum where the intent of ER is to have students read more in order to increase their exposure to English vocabulary, sentence structures and cultural insights which in turn will develop their academic skills. This intent seems well-supported by research evidence on the benefits of extensive reading.

Numerous studies with different research designs report that extensive reading benefits learners in different contexts. The benefits of extensive reading include gains in their language proficiency. Krashen (1993), based on the result of an examination of research on in-school reading and “out of school” self-reported free voluntary reading conducted in many different countries, concludes that free voluntary reading or sustained independent reading results in better reading comprehension, writing style, vocabulary, spelling, and grammatical development. A study by Hayashi (1999) of the effects of extensive reading on Japanese university students' proficiency in English found that students who reported reading more English books experienced significantly greater improvement in reading ability and vocabulary knowledge than those who reported reading less, as measured by pre- and post-tests. Yamashita (2008) examined the development of general reading ability and lower-level linguistic ability. Improvement from a pretest to a posttest was found to be significant for reading ability, but not for linguistic ability. The results suggest that the effects of extensive reading might be manifested more quickly in general reading skills than in L2 linguistic ability, at least for adult L2 learners. However, recently, Alqadi and Alqadi (2013) in his experimental research found that extensive reading had a positive impact on enhancing the grammatical accuracy of the EFL freshmen at Al al-Bayt University in Northen Jordan.

These studies provide valuable insights and pedagogic implications for educators who want to implement extensive reading in their classrooms. However, the majority of these studies are quantitative with a focus on whether a particular extensive reading program is beneficial to learners. Very few of them provide a clear picture of the efforts that the students make to achieve the language learning goal as well as their strategies to respond textual factors (i.e. types of reading materials, teaching-learning process and evaluation procedures). This individual learners’ effort and strategies, currently has been seen as personal investment, determine success in learning a target language (Pierce, 2000). Motivation, passion, enthusiasm, interest and desire all increase when a student makes an investment in his or her learning and learning related activities. A study is therefore required to identify the factors facilitating students to personally invest in their learning. The purpose of this paper is to explore how guided extensive reading allows the students to make an investment in academic speaking and how they use their potentials to invest in academic speaking in English through guided Extensive Reading.
Investing in Academic Speaking Through Guided Extensive Reading

English Department of Mataram University have decided to implement an extensive reading program for its students based on consideration that the program can be the best means of helping the students increase their proficiency in English. The issue of English proficiency has always been of concern among Indonesian teachers, academics, and Ministry of Education officials because students’ lack of proficiency in English deprives them of the social and economic advantage of English. Many students of the English department have difficulty using English in formal conversation and presentation. This low proficiency in English, based on my knowledge of the learning situation obtained through my experience as a teacher educator, is primarily due to their lack of exposure to the language. The language is mostly limited to classroom. Low motivation of the students to practice using English also contributes to this lack of proficiency. Learner's motivation has been claimed as a key factor in the language learning. However, despite being highly motivated, a learner could be excluded from the language practices of a classroom or community, which may, for example, be racist, sexist, or elitist and in time positioned as an unmotivated language learner; therefore, students need to make an investment in order to be successful language learners (Pierce, 2000). This is because investment emphasizes the students’ contribution of interest and passion in their learning. Students who are invested more strongly in learning an SL will have more interest, particularly in oral communication, than students who just want good grades who will be pretty happy just doing reading and writing activities.

As an instructor of Extensive Reading class in that context, I tried to convince that the Extensive Reading class could be a source of language development through guided extensive reading. In this course I helped the students in selecting books (i.e. less academic and academic) based on their interests and language competency level. I also provided them with guided reading tasks which gave them a lot of opportunities to produce English through speaking academically. In this way the students would invest in academic speaking skill. The following are the key features of my GER adapted from Mikulecky& Jeffries (2007):

- GER is conducted in a relaxed, informal, classroom atmosphere, where the teacher focuses on helping students read for pleasure.
- The reading materials should be within the students' level of competency.
- Students are given the opportunity to choose the books and journals that are interesting to them to read.
- Students are encouraged to meet regularly to talk about their extensive reading books and compare reading experience in groups. Students' reading progress is monitored and reinforced by giving words of praise and encouragement or rewards.
- Students are encouraged to have a book Presentation which is a brief (about five minutes) oral report to the class about book that they have finished reading.
- Students are encouraged to have a book conference, that is, is a one–on- one conversation about the book they have read with the instructor. The instructor may ask various questions related to critical reading.

Academic speaking skills are different from regular speaking skills. While in general English contexts students need informal discussion skills, everyday transactional skills, in an academic context, these general skills are still important, but specifically, there are two key areas which require focus, namely: participating in seminars and giving academic presentations. Therefore, teachers should help students participate in the academic speaking tasks. For seminars, there should be activities raising an awareness of, and practicing group discussion conventions. For presentations, students need help in planning, and then in organizing the content.

This descriptive study was thus aimed at investigating the extent to which the students were willing to “invest” in academic speaking in English through guided extensive reading in my Extensive Reading class and not to examine their success in achieving the objectives of extensive reading lesson.

The subjects

The first of the three subjects was Muji, a 19-year-old male student from Ampenan Mataram West Nusa Tenggara. His latest ITP prediction score was 519 and his GPA was 3.50 out of 4. His purpose of learning English was to be accepted as a postgraduate student in an Australia university. To do this he had to achieve TOEFL ITP score of at least 580 or IELTS score of 6.5.

The second was Nabila, a 18-year-old female student from Jember East Java with current ITP prediction score of 497 and GPA of 3.14 out of 4. Her purpose for learning English was to get a job in a prestigious bank in Mataram for which she needed to be effective communicators in English.

The third subject was Zaenal, a 20-year-old male student from Praya, Central Lombok whose latest TOEFL prediction score was 450 and GPA of 2.80 out of 4. His propose for learning English was to be an English teacher.
Research methods

Firstly, and primarily, data were gathered from classroom observations of the Guided Extensive Reading activities in Extensive Reading sessions, carried out once a week, every week, over the course of 16 weeks of the semester. During these sessions, the students’ reactions to these classes were noted. Each of these weekly sessions was videotaped to provide me with the details as to how the sessions were conducted and how the students reacted during the session.

The in-depth, semi-structured interviews were also used to obtain data about students’ learning and coping strategies in relation to their commitment to “invest” in academic speaking and they were conducted with each of the three subjects separately about a month after the 16-week English course had ended. This was done to minimize the feelings of constraint that the students may have experienced as a result of the teacher-student power dynamics if they had been conducted during the course. Each session lasted about an hour and was recorded with the students’ permission. The interviews were then transcribed and coded for analysis.

Findings and discussion

This section draws from all three sources of data and discusses significant aspects of the learning experience of the three subjects and their perspectives of why it was important for them to learn academic speaking through guided extensive reading, what encouraged them to persevere when they felt anxious or dominated, and how they overcame this.

Muji

Muji expressed that he needed to learn academic speaking so that he could continue his further study to an Australian university for his MA degree with Australia Awards scholarships with the expectation of being an English lecturer at his alma mater after completing his postgraduate study. He knew that in order to get the scholarship she had to obtain an outstanding GPA and minimum IELTS of 6.5 in which academic speaking is one of the skills tested. Thus he expressed that his need to learn academic speaking English was urgent as it would decide his future.

I noticed that initially, Muji did not seem to be motivated to join ER class as he thought that he would only be assigned to read fictions and then reported it individually to the lecturer. However, after GER activities were introduced he looked very interested and eager to participate. Although he was an introvert, Muji did not mind engaging in a general discussion on academic topics just to improve his academic speaking in English. “I would prefer to speak English to all my classmates every time, sharing ideas and even arguing.”

During the guided reading activities he explained that he had not only changed somewhat since through participation in group discussion, book presentation and conference in the ER class and through discussion in English with the lecturer and his fellow learners he had come to “know more about the world.

Muji also explained that he organized his ideas before speaking as suggested in the guided reading tasks. He also claimed that apart from utilizing every opportunity to speak English with the lecture or with his classmates, he spoke to himself and tried to correct his mistakes in grammar and vocabulary.

Nabila

As a person coming from different culture, Nabila was, initially, observed to have limited opportunities to interact and speak English with her classmate. This was not as much a consequence of her limited vocabulary, which she did try her best to improve, but rather her own perceptions of people and environments. It is possible that as a result of this, Nabila was rather slow to gain confidence in speaking English. She was aware that this could be a big obstacle for her to gain his future career as a bank staff whose responsibilities are dealing with customers’ inquiry or even complaints.

However, in subsequent class meetings I could observe her greater willingness to speak English in group discussion. She said that “I love the way Extensive reading class is conducted. The activities are varied and communicative, the teacher encourages the students to ask her for the meaning of any word they could not understand, and not feel bad about asking”. With guided reading tasks she was not afraid to start a conversation or discussion in English, even with lecturers, just to practise her English. “You have to be brave to learn,” said Nabila in the interview.

Zaenal

Zaenal was no different from Nabila in that he, initially, was not confident in speaking. Different from Nabila, however, the inhibitors that prevented him from speaking English was the fear of making mistakes in vocabulary and pronunciation resulting in his being judged and feeling humiliated by his fellow learners.

However, after three times participating in guided extensive reading activities he showed greater confidence and enthusiasm in speaking, despite some grammar mistakes and informal vocabulary. He said “I
think the activities and exercises in the guided extensive reading are useful for learning a language simply because students will practice the language and will apply what they have learned.” “Although I know I am making not some but a lot of mistakes, but my classmates understand me, so no problem.” Also no choice—I have to speak in English in the class, that’s the rule. “Zaenal revealed in the interview that to improve his proficiency he even spoke aloud to himself. Thus Zaenal’s determination to succeed in his academic speaking coupled with his need to overcome a feeling of inferior among his classmates.

Conclusion
Although all three students clearly recognized the benefits of GER to gain their English academic speaking, their individual learning experience were essentially different. Despite Muji’s explanation that he neede English to further his studies in an international university; Nabila’s rationale that she needed the language to get a job as a Bank staff while Zaenal as an English teacher, their investments in academic speaking in GER differed. In short, their paths to success in language learning were varied, largely social, and not merely motivational. These differences in their investment in English were evident in spite of their competing for the same “symbolic capital” (Bourdieu, 1991). Therefore, the differences in learners’ investments in a target language, which are based largely on the individual’s social identity must be acknowledged.

References