

# EFFECTS OF ADDITIVE EXTENSIVE READING ON STRUGGLING THAI UNIVERSITY LEARNERS

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**Abstract:** Extensive reading with graded readers has been proved to be an approach that helps learners improve their reading ability. However, only a few studies have explored the effects of additive extensive reading with other types of reading materials on struggling EFL learners. This study investigated the effects of Science and Research Association Reading Laboratory (SRA) and Reading Reflective Journals (RRJ) as additive extensive reading activities on struggling EFL tertiary students' English reading ability and performance. This study was a comparative mixed-methods approach conducted at a Thai university over 15 weeks. The students were two intact groups enrolled in a reading course taught by the researcher. One group was assigned to SRA, and the other to RRJ. Data were collected by means of English reading pre- and post-tests, students' reflective journals, and an open-ended questionnaire. Both quantitative and qualitative results indicate that SRA and RRJ positively impact students' reading ability, their attitudes towards English reading, and their knowledge. Since SRA and RRJ are based on different theories, each has its limitations. The combined activity of SRA and RRJ features is suggested. The factors affecting the use of additive ER should also be considered when implementing any type of ER.

**Keywords:** EFL, extensive reading, Reading Reflective Journals, SRA Reading Laboratory, struggling learners

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At all levels of education in Thailand, English is considered an important subject because it is an essential tool for international communication, particularly within the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). Reading is considered an important source for EFL learners to acquire language and gain knowledge (Dawadi, 2017; Hedgecock & Ferris, 2018), and its importance is emphasised across all levels of education, including universities in Thailand (Ministry of Education, 2008, 2015).

According to Wisaijorn (2017), Thai students have considerable difficulties with English when they enter university; therefore, they should read extensively to succeed in learning English as reading will expose them to English more than any other modes (Wisaijorn, 2017, p. 31). Meanwhile, extensive reading (ER, hereafter) has been introduced to reading research in Thailand and is gaining greater attention. Research to date on ER in EFL contexts, including in Thailand, reveal its benefits on reading comprehension, reading speed and fluency, vocabulary, grammar, writing, and attitude to English reading (Chang & Hu, 2018; Chang & Renandya, 2017; Maneekhao & Tepsuriwong, 2016; Nutalak, 2019; Puripunyanich, 2021;

Pongsatornpiat, 2021; Shih, 2019; Wisaijorn, 2017; Yilmaz et al., 2020, and Yoshizawa et al., 2020).

However, the studies on ER have tended to focus on exploring ER for general students with either book reading or collections of graded readers. In fact, other ER activities besides graded readers or books can be used for ER activity. Additionally, Robb and Kano (2013) pointed out that studies on the effectiveness of ER in EFL contexts have not been concerned with the timing of the ER activity itself, that is, either as *replacement* or *additive* activities (p. 234). Replacement refers to the ER used to replace another classroom activity, while additive is additional reading done outside the classroom. One of the factors contributing to lesser use of ER in many EFL classrooms is finding time based on the class schedule (Robb, 2015). So, he suggested doing ER outside the classroom. Therefore, to better understand ER activities in EFL contexts and to provide alternative additive ER activities with follow-up tasks, this study investigated the effects of two different ER activities outside the classrooms, namely Reading Reflective Journal (RRJ, hereafter) and Science and Research Association Reading Laboratory (SRA, hereafter), and the students' perceptions of the activities

RRJ is an ER activity based on self-regulation or metacognition. In L2 reading, Koda (2005) explained that through self-regulating or metacognition, students, while reading, think and control their reading process by consciously selecting the appropriate reading strategies to comprehend the text. Singhal (2001, as cited in Liu, 2013) pointed out that self-regulation helps L2 learners comprehend English reading better because it "indicate[s] how learners conceive of a task, how they make sense of what they read, and what they do when they don't understand" (p. 64). Self-regulated strategy has been proved to enhance ESL/EFL students reading comprehension skills (Maftoon & Tasnimi, 2014; Nosratinia et al., 2014; Roohani & Asiabani, 2015).

SRA has been used to help many students including ESL/EFL students around the world to improve their reading skills for many years. SRA (2020) materials include: (1) Power Builders: The core materials of SRA, consisting of interesting stories arranged in color-coded levels with comprehension questions and vocabulary exercises; (2) Skill Builders: Self-directed reading materials with skill exercises such as word-study skills; and (3) Rate Builders: Selected reading materials for improving reading fluency.

RRJ and SRA can provide students with opportunities to have beneficial ER experiences. In Paksasuk's (2013) study, most students reported that practicing reading through RRJs based on self-monitoring can enhance their reading skills, reading comprehension, and positive development of attitudes towards reading in English. Concerning SRA, according to McGraw-Hill Education's studies (McGraw-Hill Education, 2008, 2016, 2017), SRA has contributed to learners' success in reading. A few other studies have also been conducted on SRA in EFL contexts (Hiser & Swan, 2006; Tantarangsee, 2012; Vaai & Heem, 2014). Tantarangsee (2012) studied SRA's impact on Thai university students' reading proficiency. His results show that SRA helped improve students' reading proficiency, and they were satisfied with SRA in terms of their learned vocabulary and improved reading speed. Similarly, Vaai and Heem (2014) introduced SRA at the National University of Samoa to promote success in literacy. They suggest using SRA through primary, secondary, and tertiary levels because "the SRA

laboratories can be an important tool to provide vital cumulative assistance in building increasing competencies in reading and writing in English” (p. 16).

Apart from the benefits, there are some challenges in implementing RRJ and SRA. RRJ may increase the workload for the teacher and students, which may lead to unsatisfactory outcomes and reduce the positive effects on students’ reading ability. Meanwhile, since SRA is intended for first language learners, there is some concern that it may not always be appropriate for ESL students (Hiser & Swan, 2006). Hiser and Swan pointed out that SRA might not match the context of non-native speakers, such as the Japanese.

The majority of ER studies have focused on in-class ER activities with graded readers or Xreading (a subscribed-online graded reading platform), rather than additive ER with different materials and activities. Additionally, many of the studies focused on good readers (Milliner, 2021) and general students. Despite many benefits of ER, the implementation of ER in EFL contexts with struggling students appears to be rare in many classroom settings due to students’ and teachers’ difficulties (Chang & Renandya, 2017; Hedgecock & Ferris, 2018). According to Chang and Renandya (2017), the students’ difficulties included “lack of interest in reading, not used to doing independent reading, and reluctance to do voluntary reading,” while teachers “were mostly concerned with the difficulty of monitoring the type and quantity of books that students actually read” (p. 40).

This study therefore explored how the struggling Thai university students perceived the two additive ER activities, namely RRJ and SRA, and how the activities affected their reading performance. The results of this study can promote the use of additive ER through SRA and RRJ to enhance the EFL students’ reading ability, and to encourage teachers with low budgets to use reading materials they have as an additive ER activity.

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. Do RRJ and SRA have any significant effect on EFL students’ reading comprehension?
2. Is there any significant difference in the effects of these two additive ER activities on EFL students’ reading comprehension test scores?
3. How do the students perceive each additive ER activity?

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

This study employed a mixed methods approach using two intact English reading classes as settings. The intact group design was employed to ensure this study’s authenticity. The participants of this study included 69 Thai EFL learners enrolled in Technical English for Forestry and Agriculture taught by the researcher at a public university in Thailand in the second semester of the academic year 2017 (from 8 January to 4 May 2018). The two classes consisted of 36 and 33 students each. The participants were considered to be underachieving college students due to their English grades in Foundation English III subjects (D and D+). The researcher was aware of their negative perception and attitude towards English based on the researcher’s ten years of experience in teaching this reading course and the former students’ reflections on their reading ability and the course’s assigned activities.

At the beginning of the study, a test of English reading comprehension was used to measure the students' reading ability and compare the students' test results in both groups. The independent t-test showed that the level of English reading proficiency of the two groups was not significantly different at the significance level of .05 ( $t = 1.764, p = .082$ ). The result indicates the participants' reading comprehension was at similar level, so the two groups were comparable in terms of their reading comprehension.

## **Setting**

### ***Technical English for Forestry and Agriculture***

This course was designed for Forestry and Agricultural students who had passed Foundation English III. The contents of the course were divided into two main parts: reading strategies and technical reading, focusing on reading practice and applying reading strategies to understand and interpret Forestry and Agricultural English academic texts.

This study required the students to practice ER outside the classroom and asked them to work individually on assignments called Weekly RRJ or SRA reading practice. For these additive ER activities, the students' post-reading tasks were not graded, but they received 10 points for weekly reading and submitting the assignments regularly.

### ***Additive Extensive Reading Activities***

Both RRJ and SRA are based on ER theory. The difference is that RRJ focuses on students' self-monitoring of their reading behavior or reading strategies (Paksasuk, 2013), whereas SRA focuses on skill building to enhance students' reading comprehension (SRA Reading Laboratory overview brochure, 2020). The teacher gave weekly feedback on the students' ER activities to both groups.

1. Weekly RRJ was assigned to Group 1 and was based on self-regulation. Students in this group were asked to read any English text they chose each week (except examination weeks) of about one-page length and to write a reflective journal (in Thai or English) as their post-reading tasks. In the journal, students were to:
  - express their opinion about the text they read
  - describe in detail how they read, for example, which reading strategies they used, and what problems they encountered while reading and how they solved them, and
  - summarize what they read (in Thai or English)
2. SRA: SRA 2b level was selected for the students in the second group for weekly ER practice outside the classroom. The students took a speed pre-test from SRA based on their reading proficiency level. After that, they worked on SRA weekly with at least two reading cards outside the classroom. They had to submit their SRA practice booklet weekly for the teacher to monitor their reading behavior and progress.

## **Research Instruments**

This study utilized three research instruments:

1. English RC pre-and post-tests: The Grammar, Vocabulary and Reading (GVR) section in the Examination for Certificate of Competency of English (ECCE) sample test-Form B (2014 Cambridge Michigan Language Assessments) was used. It consists of 100 multiple-choice items. It took 90 minutes to take the test. This test was used to measure the students' English reading proficiency before and after taking this course.
2. Students' written reflection on the additive ER activity during the semester.
3. Personal information questionnaire; this instrument collected information about the participants, such as their personal and educational background, especially related to English learning, as well as their perception towards this reading course and the reading activities implemented.

### Data Collection and Analysis

This research was conducted under the ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the Kasetsart University Research Ethics Committee, Thailand. The students of both groups were informed about this research and given an informed consent form. At the beginning of the semester, the students completed a pre-test in class, and did a post-test in the last week of the semester with the same RC test. At the end of the semester, the students also completed a questionnaire and submitted their written reflections on the ER activity.

The data of the students' pre- and post-tests were analyzed based on the arithmetic mean and SD. Then, a t-test analysis was conducted using the SPSS try-out program to compare the pre- and post-test results of the two groups. The students' qualitative data, collected from the written reflections and the open-ended questionnaire, were analyzed using a content analysis approach to find the main themes of the students' perception towards the additive ER activities.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### RRJ and the EFL Students' Reading Comprehension

Table 1 shows the results of the paired *t-test* between the pre-test and post-test of the first group. The results reveal that after practicing RRJ, the students' English reading comprehension was not significantly different, as shown from .05 score ( $t = 1.374, p = .178$ ), although their reading comprehension scores improved. The result may be because RRJ focused on self-monitoring and the use of reading strategies, so the students did not have the opportunity to do the reading comprehension exercises after reading, which led to less familiarity with the comprehension questions (Milliner, 2021).

**Table 1. Comparison of the First Group Students' Reading Comprehension Before and After the Implementation of RRJ Activity**

	N	Pre-test X̄ SD	Post-test X̄ SD	t-test	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Total Test Scores	36	27.58 5.729	29.17 5.950	1.374	35	.178

$p < 0.05$

### SRA Reading Laboratory and the EFL Students' Reading Comprehension

The results of the paired *t-test* of the second group in Table 2 show that after the SRA practice, the students' English reading comprehension was significantly better at the significance level of .05 ( $t = 2.283, p = .029$ ). This implies that SRA as an additive ER practice can help students improve their English reading ability. The results support those of Rosenshine and Meister (1997), Tantarangsee (2012), and Vaai and Heem (2014).

**Table 2. Comparison of the Second Group Students' Reading Comprehension Before and After the Implementation of the SRA Activity**

	N	Pre-test X̄ SD	Post-test X̄ SD	t-test	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Total Test Scores	33	30.00 5.635	32.27 6.385	2.283	32	.029

$p < 0.05$

### Comparison of the SRA and RRJ Effects on the EFL Students' Reading Comprehension

Table 3 shows the results of *t-tests* between the post-test scores of both groups. The results show that the students who practiced ER through SRA (Group 2) performed significantly better reading comprehension than those who did RRJ (Group 1) at 0.05 ( $t = 2.092, p = .040$ ). The results corroborate the qualitative results in the next section.

**Table 3. Comparison of the Students' Reading Comprehension in Groups 1 and 2 after the Implementation of the Additive ER Activities**

	N	Post-test Group 1 X̄ SD	Post-test Group 2 X̄ SD	t-test	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Total Test Scores	69	29.17 5.950	32.27 6.385	2.092	67	.040

$p < 0.05$

### Students' Perceptions towards the Additive ER Activities (SRA and RRJ)

The qualitative data of the students' written reflections on SRA and RRJ activities along with their responses in the questionnaire show that the students in both groups preferred the practice of additive ER through SRA and RRJ. The content analysis shows five major themes: (1) Change in attitude towards English and English reading; (2) Reading skill development; (3) Increase of knowledge and practice of learning strategies; (4) Limitations of SRA and RRJ; and (5) Factors affecting the students' English reading improvement.

#### *Change in Attitude towards English and English Reading*

Due to their improved English reading ability, the students in both groups positively perceived English and reading in English after practicing ER through weekly RRJ or SRA. Generally, the students in both groups reported that RRJ and SRA made them want to practice reading English more. After a few weeks of regularly practicing RRJ and SRA activities, all

students experienced changes in their reading behaviors. For example, they relied on the translation applications less, and they tried some reading strategies learnt in class and found that they understood the English text better. These experiences made them feel more confident about reading English texts and they wanted to read more. They were not afraid of reading English texts anymore. All students in both groups revealed their attitude changes:

[I] applied the reading techniques learnt in class ... when reading, [I] didn't have to use translation applications much for reading comprehension... [This practice] makes me not feel discouraged when reading English articles. In the past, reading in English, for me, was very difficult. I didn't understand what I read, and I didn't know how to start reading. Searching for the meaning of vocabulary was difficult.... But now I don't have to use any translation applications to learn the meaning of those words anymore. I can understand it.... Reading English articles is not that difficult for me anymore. (S6/1)

I was one who escaped (avoided) English for my whole life. I was afraid to read and to express my opinions when facing the word 'English' until taking this 01355206 Technical English course. ... The extra-activity [RRJ] and reading techniques make me want to learn and be interested in English more. (S6/8)

[Practicing SRA] changes my attitude towards English. [It] makes me be interested in English more.... be interested in reading English articles more. (S7/1)

I didn't like English and I am very weak at English. ... But when I have chances to practice reading through SRA, which I like, it makes me want to learn English. (S7/24)

These results are consistent with the students' feedback from the questionnaire's responses:

RRJ helps increase the experience in reading compared to in the past when I didn't like reading at all. (S6/13Q)

Personally, I like reading SRA. (S7/10Q)

The students' words confirm that both RRJ and SRA activities made them change their negative attitude towards English and reading English into a positive one because these activities were a platform for them to practice reading strategies learnt. Once they applied those strategies without the fear of grading, they felt comfortable and wanted to try different strategies. The more they practiced reading with various reading strategies, the better they comprehended the text. As a result, practicing these two additive ER helped them improve their reading skills and reading comprehension and this led to their positive attitude towards English and English reading. Some students reported that after practicing RRJ and SRA, they also had positive attitude towards English or learning English (S6/8, S7/1, and S7/24). The results support several previous studies (e.g., Bieri, 2018; Endris, 2018; Levy, 2017; Nutalak, 2019; Pongsatornpiat, 2021; Puripunyanich, 2021; Rahmawati & Nasir, 2018; Shih, 2019; and Yilmaz et al., 2020) on the positive effects of ER on learners' attitude towards ER and reading in English as well as on learning English (Maipoka & Soontornwipast, 2021; Yilmaz et. al., 2020). The students' positive attitudes motivate the students to enjoy reading and they read more without being asked to.

### ***Reading Skill Development***

The qualitative results reveal that both RRJ and SRA activities enhance the students' reading ability. Both additive ER activities helped them improve their reading skills including guessing meaning, comprehending reading texts, and using reading strategies. Many participants reported their reading development through their reflective journals. Through the RRJ and SRA activities, the students had more chances to try various reading strategies. The more they practiced, the better they used those strategies to comprehend the texts. They found that their reading skills such as guessing meaning, using background knowledge, and learning new vocabulary improved.

Doing RRJ is very impressive because [it] helps us see how we improve our reading skills when learning this course.... And [it] helps [us] learn how to guess the meaning of unknown words. (S6/1)

[It] makes us know how we read, how well or badly, or how we should deal with our weaknesses and the new knowledge we are reading. (S6/5)

[I] practice and improve my reading skills better in terms of reading comprehension, referring, and answering the questions as well as learning various vocabulary. (S7/1)

Doing SRA reading makes us know and improve ourselves ... When we start to have our own reading process and get better evaluation, we use the old strategies to read and get the same results, which means our reading process is effective. (S7/7)

The students' written reflections are consistent with the quantitative data of their pre- and post-test results since both RRJ and SRA activities enhance their English reading ability and skill development. It appears that the additive ER activities help students improve their English reading proficiency and strategies. However, although the students in Group 1 perceived that RRJ activity helped them improve their reading skills, their post-test scores were not significantly better than their pre-test scores. This result is compatible with that of Yoshizawa et al. (2020) in that some students in an ER group did not improve their reading proficiency. This may be because these students in this group did not do reading comprehension exercises after reading as those in Group 2 did, or their reading behavior may not promote or hinder their reading ability improvement (Yoshizawa et al., 2020). Although their test scores did not significantly increase, the Group 1 students perceived a sense of accomplishment in their reading ability.

These qualitative findings are consistent with the ER benefits found in other studies, such as Channa et al. (2015), Levy (2017), Nutalak (2019), Wirth and Aziz (2015), Wisaijorn (2017), and Yilmaz et al. (2020). The ER activities made the students explore their reading process, and they started practicing reading strategies learned in class and gained more vocabulary. After practicing, their reading habits changed in terms of the use of reading strategies, awareness of their own reading process, and learning more vocabulary.

The additive ER activities in this study were found to be effective based on the students' perceptions, as they have eight features that corroborate the ten principles of ER suggested by Bamford and Day (2004). First, easy reading materials; the students in both groups chose their own reading materials that matched their language proficiency and their interests. Second, a variety of reading materials, both RRJ and SRA, allowed the students to read a wide range of



different texts such as news, magazine articles, children books, and periodical articles. Although reading materials in the SRA set were arranged and selected, those reading passages included various topics and sources. Third, self-selection of reading materials; the students chose their own reading passages. For SRA, the students self-selected their reading materials, from 15 stories for each level. Fourth, more chances of reading practice; obviously, these ER activities provided the students more opportunities to practice reading regularly on their own.

Fifth, reading for pleasure, information, and understanding; in this study, the students were encouraged to read for their own benefits including for improving their reading skills, although the ER activity was compulsory for the course. The score gained for the activity was not based on how well they did on reading comprehension, but on the regularity of their reading. Additionally, the students chose the reading topics they were interested in. Particularly, for RRJ, they read for their own pleasure and benefits, not for the teachers'. Sixth, individual reading; this activity was an individual assignment for both groups. Seventh, reading for personal purposes or rewards; as mentioned above, the students read for their own purposes, such as for pleasure and for improving their reading ability. Some of them chose to read English children books they had, but never read. Lastly, teacher as a role model for a reader; for this course, the teacher used the classroom as a platform to demonstrate how to read. The students learned how to read English texts along with the teacher.

The different features of the ER activities in this study can be compared with those in many previous studies with ER programs (Puripunyanich, 2021, 2022; Wisaijorn, 2017; Yilmaz et al., 2020), particularly in terms of two features. First, the ER activities were additive reading activities which occurred outside the classroom, while most of the previous studies involved graded reader activities held in the classroom or held as an ER program. Secondly, the students were not graded on their reading. Despite some different features, the results of this study support the benefits of ER, regardless of the types of reading materials or types of ER. It confirms that ER really helps the students improve their reading ability. As Day (2015 cited in Ng et al., 2019) suggested, we should regularly practice ER in different contexts, that is, use it as individual or non-instructed reading, and through blending extensive and intensive reading in the classroom as was done in this study.

Additionally, the ER activities in this study were designed as homework assignments because many low-proficiency and non-successful EFL readers, particularly Thai students, rarely have a chance to read English texts outside the classroom, and most reading classes focus on reading academic texts for academic purposes only. Therefore, the students with negative attitude towards English and English reading tend to wait for the teacher to give the answers because they feel that English texts are too difficult for them to read and understand. They feel discouraged to read English texts and are afraid to read and practice on their own. This is compatible with Robb and Kano's (2013) claim, "[w]hile motivated students will gladly do whatever they can to improve their language proficiency, the other students will normally not do outside work unless there is a means for their instructor to verify that their work has been done" (p. 244). Therefore, to encourage the low English proficiency students to read more on their own, the additive ER activities were effective to make them enjoy reading English texts regularly and to provide them more chances to read and apply reading strategies while reading.

This study also provides more in-depth information on how the students read and practice reading strategies based on the results of their qualitative reflections. Through RRJ and SRA activities, the students in this study learnt how to solve problems by applying reading strategies. The students tried many strategies to figure out which one worked for them, and they remembered those to be used in the next reading. The results of this study prove that additive ER does help the struggling students improve their reading ability and practice reading more often as S6/1 reported:

Later on [I] read the whole paragraph and translated it using the [reading] techniques [such as] finding connectors, looking for a subject, verb, a context and the surrounding words, and referring to the former sentence in order to find the meaning of the word.

### ***Increase of Knowledge and Practice of Learning Strategies***

The students in this study reflected that besides their improved English reading, they also gained other benefits when doing RRJ or SRA activities. Most of them referred to knowledge increase and practicing learning strategies. Wirth and Aziz (2015) explain, “[t]hese reflections (*reading with reflection*) not only encourage students to read more regularly, but they also promote content mastery and foster student development of monitoring, self-evaluation, and reflection skills” (p. 1). The students in this study, especially those who did RRJ, learned more about what they read and were more aware of their reading behavior, than previously. Meanwhile, the students who practiced reading via SRA agreed that this activity made them learn to evaluate their reading performance, and they could apply this self-evaluation skill to their real life. In addition, the students in both groups reported that doing ER weekly promoted responsibility and self-discipline since these were independent activities and were not graded for their reading comprehension.

Practice RRJ makes us gain more knowledge. The more we read, the more various knowledge we gain. (S6/1)

[SRA practice helps] develop a student’s potential both in reading and thinking processes, and [we] are able to apply it in the future. ... [I] am determined to do SRA exercises in order to evaluate myself and will not cheat by looking at the answer keys first. This results in my commitment to have true improvement. (S7/20)

[SRA reading activity] allows us to practice our responsibility because we have to do it every week. (S7/23)

### ***Limitations of RRJ and SRA***

Although this study’s quantitative and qualitative results show that the additive ER activities, both RRJ and SRA, help the students improve their attitude towards English and reading in English, their reading ability and reading strategies, no teaching/learning approach or activity is perfect. Each ER activity has its strengths and weaknesses. Although both ER activities tend to help readers improve their reading ability, these two activities, which are based on different theories with different aspects, may lead to different results.

According to the students’ reflection and their pre- and post-test results, it seems that the students who practiced reading through RRJ mainly improved their reading process and habits,

as seen from their development in reading strategies, while the students experiencing SRA did well on reading comprehension and vocabulary exercises or tests. The students in the SRA group tended to develop their skills in doing tests as well. They focused on reading exercises provided on SRA sheets and used scanning strategies more frequently. They scanned the questions of the exercises to help them find the answers, and in turn, this helped them understand the reading passages. With these skills, the students practicing SRA had better scores on the post-test. Some of the students' reflections on SRA are as follows:

[I] practice and improve my reading skills better in terms of reading comprehension, referring, and answering the questions as well as learning various vocabulary. (S7/1)

Practicing SRA exercises makes me be able to read short passages better, improve my English reading proficiency. (S7/4)

Most students who practiced RRJ also found their reading ability improved, as seen from this student's reflection:

Doing RRJ is very impressive. It makes us see our improvement through learning in this course ... and learn how to guess meanings of unknown words. [I] practiced reading articles in English... [I] applied the reading techniques learnt in class ... when reading, [I] didn't have to use translation applications much in reading comprehension... [This practice] makes me not feel discouraged when reading English articles. In the past, reading in English, for me, was very difficult. .... But now I don't have to use any translation applications to learn the meanings of those words anymore. I can understand it.... Reading English articles is not that difficult for me anymore. (S6/1)

However, one student of the first group gave an interesting opinion comparing RRJ that she practiced and SRA that her friend in the other group did:

RRJ is very useful, but it didn't allow us to practice reading comprehension questions, compared with what my friend did in the other group because the other group had a chance to read and practice on exercises similar to those in the tests. This makes them have better skill in guessing. ... The other group has SRA laboratory which is interesting and convenient. Besides, self-evaluation on their exercises helps them know their weak points immediately and know their reading ability level. Unlike practicing on SRA, doing RRJ, we have to find our own reading materials and write our own reflection. It is hard to communicate and explain our own reading process to make [you] understand. I think if I practiced via SRA, I would improve my reading ability better. (S6/22)

S6/22's reflection reveals her worry about the scores on reading examinations and her goals to improve her reading ability more. Her words may explain the pre- and post-test scores of the RRJ group, which were not significantly different. Their reading ability improved, but with less chance of practicing reading comprehension exercises, they were less skillful at doing the tests, compared to those practicing with SRA. This supports Milliner (2021) in that the students need post-reading quizzes or comprehension exercises to evaluate their reading ability. According to this student, only one activity may not fully help the students improve their reading skills. With their own learning strategies and learning preferences or styles, the students may not gain full benefits from each activity they practiced. Therefore, to help the students gain the most, the combination of these two activities is needed.

### ***Factors Affecting the Students' English Reading Improvement***

The students' reflections, along with my informal observations during the study, revealed that there are two factors to enhance the students' positive change in reading ability. They are as follows.

#### ***Regular Practice***

Bamford and Day (2004) stated that giving students more chances to read will help them improve their reading ability. The students in this study had more chances to read. Specifically, in this reading class, they were assigned to read weekly. In other English courses, the students were assigned to read for class lessons, and outside reading was optional. The students rarely read for themselves without teachers requiring them to do an out-of-class reading assignment. Based on my teaching experiences, the students who do not read or review their lessons regularly tend not to improve their reading and learning skills. Therefore, I set the ER activities as a weekly assignment.

The students' reflections in both classes mentioned that at the beginning they felt uneasy doing the ER activity because they did not like English and rarely read English texts. They thought that they could not do it well. After a few weeks, they were familiar with it and felt that reading in English was not as difficult as they thought. Many of them said that they liked this ER activity (both SRA and RRJ), and they would continue reading even when they finished this course because reading weekly helped them improve their reading skills, and it was not a difficult assignment. It seems that reading regularly helps the students improve their reading skills. The practice of regular reading, along with enthusiastically engaging in reading pleurably and extensively, will form a good reading habit that enhances academic performance (Owusu-Acheaw, 2014). Additionally, Yoshizawa et al. (2020) observed that reading regularly and consistently is one of the reading behaviors distinguishing successful readers from unsuccessful ones.

#### ***Self-monitoring, Self-evaluation or Assessment***

The students in both groups reported that with the ER activities, they had a chance to monitor and evaluate their reading skills via written reflection or the reading comprehension exercises with self-evaluation. They expressed that through their self-assessment activities, they knew how well they read and how their reading habits changed. They also learned the weaknesses that they had to improve. This makes the students become more autonomous learners. The results support previous studies (Channa et al., 2015; Maftoon & Tasnimi, 2014; Nosratinia et al., 2014; Roohani & Asiabani, 2015) in that metacognition is one of the promising reading strategies that help the students, particularly EFL learners, improve their reading ability.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The results of this study confirm that ER activities, particularly the additive ones, hold promise to enhance the students' reading ability and reading strategies and to change the students' attitude towards English and English reading. The results confirm the benefits of ER suggested by many previous researchers (Bieri, 2018; Chang & Renandya, 2017; Endris, 2018; Levy, 2017; Nutalak, 2019; Rahmawati & Nasir, 2018; Wisajorn, 2017; Yilmaz et al., 2020).

The implications and suggestions from this study relate to teaching EFL reading and reading activities. First, using ER activities in any form outside the classroom will help the students improve their reading proficiency and apply the reading strategies they have learned in class. Therefore, in implementing a successful ER program, the principles of ER proposed by Bamford and Day (2004) should be considered, especially reading with pleasure and students' freedom to choose their reading materials.

Second, since there is no best activity or teaching method, the combination of RRJ and SRA is suggested. Each activity has its strengths and weaknesses, so the combination of both will fill each gap. Following the results of this study, I added the RRJ main feature, namely reflection, to the SRA activity implementation. I asked the students, while reading, to briefly describe their reading behavior in the note space provided. This combination appeared to work quite well. The students' reading behavior changed. While working on reading comprehension questions, they also monitored their reading process and performance. They evaluated their reading proficiency based on the change in their reading habits.

Furthermore, explicit explanation, trust, and regularity are important factors that make students practice reading more. The students need explicit explanation about the ER activity and how it will help them improve their reading ability. Without clear explanations about ER, the students may not be able to complete the task effectively. Also, the teachers must build trust with the students to encourage them to try a new reading approach, which is difficult for them at the beginning because it is hard to change what they have done for many years. Trust in the teacher will make them wholeheartedly practice the new activity regularly. Some of my students told me that they would do what I asked them to because they believed I had a good intention for them to learn and improve their reading skills. In addition, regularity is also essential for the students in learning and making progressive results. The teachers have to reinforce the students to practice the ER activity routinely without doubts or hesitation.

Finally, further research on the combination of these RRJ and SRA activities in different EFL contexts will expand the knowledge on the use of these two activities as after-reading tasks when applying ER. In addition, research on the blending of intensive and extensive reading with different types of after-reading activities or tasks should be explored in order to help teachers with low budgets find the after-reading activities that are practical and suitable.

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