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The Effect of Extensive Reading on Vocabulary Acquisition

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the benefits of extensive reading to learners in acquiring vocabulary and improving their attitude towards reading. It examined the effectiveness of using a series of Graded Readers and whether it is instrumental in achieving vocabulary acquisition. The sample of the study consisted of 30 students aged 14 from one intact class in form two of a Malaysian school. A treatment was administered for two weeks which consisted of extensive reading of graded books for thirty minutes outside the school timetable. A quasi-experiment design was used to measure the effectiveness of extensive reading. The instruments included pre-test and post-test, interview and questionnaire. The results of the data analysis indicated that using Graded Readers in extensive reading helps in improving and acquiring vocabulary among the students. Extensive reading also assisted in promoting positive attitude towards reading and this was seen through the analysis of the questionnaire and interview. The study concludes that extensive reading using Graded Readers brings benefit to the students' enrichment of vocabulary knowledge. Furthermore, it is also discovered that these students exhibited positive attitude toward reading.

Key words: Extensive Reading, Graded Readers, vocabulary, attitude

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Extensive reading not only develops reading skills but also benefits a whole range of other language skills, boosts confidence and motivation and improves overall learner's attitude. Reading, in this sense, has to be seen holistically as a crucial part of students' total development, not as some separate skill. Gains in vocabulary are among the most commonly cited benefits of extensive reading.

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Nuttal (1982), in Robb and Susser (1989), maintains that an extensive reading program is the single most effective way of improving both vocabulary and reading skills. Mason and Krashen (1996) are among the many others who support the gains in vocabulary thesis. They claimed that without an adequate repertoire of vocabulary, students are unable to go forth in learning English. Becker (1997) highlighted the importance of vocabulary development by linking vocabulary size to the academic achievement and also by stressing that vocabulary deficiencies were the primary cause of academic failure among students.

Extensive reading can promote good reading habits among the students and students who do less reading can be inculcated into the habit of reading through extensive reading. Students may find that they can successfully read after completing the books given to them for reading. This will become a motivating factor and promote positive attitude among the students, spurring them to read more and more. Extensive reading also enhances language, in general, and vocabulary specifically. Elley (1991) asserts that children who read extensively appear to learn the language incidentally, and to develop positive attitudes towards books when immersed in meaningful text.

Students need to develop strong reading skills to be able to learn a large number of words and their meanings. Stanovich (1980) explains that strong beginning reading skills facilitate vocabulary growth which, in turn, facilitates increased volume of reading. This reciprocal, causal relation between reading and vocabulary can be realised through extensive reading which can help reduce the vocabulary gap among the proficient and low proficient students.

Given the importance of extensive reading in enhancing overall reading skills and vocabulary knowledge of students, it is crucial that a study should be conducted in order to discover it effectiveness. In Malaysian context, it is noted that students have difficulties in understanding texts in English. Without an adequate repertoire of vocabulary, students are unable to go forth in learning English. Becker (1997) highlights the importance of vocabulary development by linking vocabulary size to the academic achievement and also by stressing that vocabulary deficiencies were the primary cause of academic failure among students. The deteriorating reading abilities and vocabulary deficiencies among the school students have been observed by these researchers. However, very few studies in the Malaysian context on extensive reading, in general, have been found so far (see Muniandy, K., 2013, Khrisnan, G. *et al.* 2009, Raihana Romly *et al.* 2014, among others). More research needs to be conducted to ascertain the effectiveness of extensive reading on vocabulary acquisition.

Having discussed the gap, the purpose of this study is to investigate whether reading leads to improvement and acquisition of vocabulary through reading of graded story books. In addition, this study also examined whether extensive reading program promotes positive attitude among students. In order to do this, two research questions (RQ1 & 2) are proposed below.

For RQ1, inferential statistics is used whereby both the null and alternative hypotheses are proposed in this study. If the null hypothesis is rejected, then the alternative hypothesis is accepted. For RQ2, only descriptive statistics using mean scores and percentages are used. The research questions are as follows:

RQ1: Does extensive reading improve and help in the acquisition of vocabulary among the students?

Ho: Extensive reading leads to a significant improvement on student's performance in the test scores.

H1: Extensive reading does not lead to a significant improvement on student's performance in the test scores.

Alpha is set at .05 for all statistical tests.

RQ2: Does extensive reading promote positive attitude towards reading among the students?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The Extensive Reading Setting in Malaysian Education System

In teaching English language in Malaysia, there have been two class reader programs, namely the English Language Reader Program (ELRP) and the Class Reader Program (CRP). The ELRP was in use when the structural English syllabus was developed for lower secondary schools. When the ELRP lapsed into obscurity due to some problems, it was converted to Class Readers Program (CRP). The main purpose of using class readers is to increase the reading experience of the students to make them more proficient readers and to instil in them the love for reading.

Class Readers Program (CRP)

CRP is an program of extensive reading. In Malaysian schools where the medium of instruction is Bahasa Malaysia, students have limited exposure to English language texts. For some students, the only exposure to English language comes from the texts used in English language lessons. The texts are meant for intensive reading whereby students practice language skills via comprehension passages and exercises. The texts are read for language learning purposes, rather than for enjoyment. For the low English proficiency students, in particular, English language is associated with frustrations due to their inability to cope with the language. With the implementation of CRP, an extensive reading program, students' exposure to materials written in English increased. In the process of reading simplified and interesting series of class readers, the students begin to associate fun with reading in English. They become more motivated to read about interesting stories in English. When the motivation to read is intrinsic, a reading habit would slowly develop. Indirectly, the CRP is helping to enhance language proficiency. One of the aims of the CRP is to enrich students' vocabulary in terms of usage of words and phrases (KPM, Bahan Sumber Tambahan, 1992 : 195-6).

Although the CRP is concerned with developing reading skills, it also aims to introduce elements of literature into language teaching by introducing the basics for students to understand literature. This is done by introducing a variety of simplified graded readers of novels, short stories,

fables, legends and poems for study. Besides developing the reading skills, CRP also helps students enrich their language skills in terms of acquisition of vocabulary and the context to use them (Pukal Latihan KBSM, Bahan Sumber Tambahan, 1992: 195-6).

Having discussed CRP, these researchers have set grounds on the importance of the reader programs in school. This is because extensive reading stems from the theoretical framework accepted by many researchers.

Previous Studies of Extensive Reading Research

There are several trends found in research related to extensive reading. The first trend seems to relate extensive reading to reading enjoyment. For instance, Mason and Krashen (1996) reported that students in extensive reading program enjoyed greater relative gains in reading speed, writing proficiency, and performance on cloze tests than their counterparts in reading skills or grammar-translation based courses. Mason and Krashen also observed positive effects on attitudes towards English among extensive readers. In line with this, Robb and Susser (1989), in comparing extensive reading with in-class reading, saw readers from extensive reading program improved their reading skills, while reportedly enjoyed the process much more. Likewise, Gradman and Hanania (1991) found that extensive reading for personal interest and enjoyment to be by far the strongest influence on scores on the TOEFL. They found out that the class reading was the most important direct contributor to TOEFL test performance.

The second trend discovered is that extensive reading resulted in better acquisition of vocabulary among the students. For instance, Elley and Mangubhai (1981) reported a greater gains in reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills among primary school children involved in "book-flood" programs than the ones receiving traditional audio-lingual instruction, particularly as assessment was extended over longer periods (one to three years). Research on extensive reading indicates that it can be a powerful aid in language acquisition particularly vocabulary acquisition. Another study by Pigada and Schmitt (2006) which examined whether extensive reading can enhance lexical knowledge, discovered that students acquired 65% of the target words, in addition to enhancement in spelling ability and grammar knowledge.

The third trend found is the correlational study conducted on extensive reading program. Several correlational studies which investigated the effect of a variety of factors on L2 proficiency have shown the importance of extensive reading. Huang and Van Nearssen (1987) found that reading outside class was the most significant predictor of oral communicative ability. Green and Oxford (1995) in a study of the effect of learning strategies on language proficiency found that reading for pleasure was most strongly related to proficiency. These correlational studies are supported by Pickard's (1996) survey of class strategies used by a group of German learners of English, where extensive reading of newspapers, magazines and novels ranked very high on the list of strategies used for learning English. Use of reading and other input sources may be the only practical options of language development for some learners. In a study using reading boxes, Robb and Susser (1989) found that extensive reading of materials produced several results superior to a skills focused reading course involving less reading. The extensive reading program also gave the learners more enjoyment both of reading and writing. The effects of reading were thus both cognitive and effective.

It is clear from these studies that extensive reading can be a major factor in success in learning another language. The relationship between extensive reading and language proficiency is changing and complex, and success in formal study may make reading more feasible. Success in reading may also increase motivation for further study and reading. Based on the review of the studies conducted on extensive reading, it can be deduced that the benefits of the extensive reading outweigh any limitations that might occur in conducting extensive reading program.

Extensive Reading and Vocabulary Connection

Reading is claimed to be the major source of vocabulary growth in L1. This claim is based on research showing that the largest vocabulary growth occurs when children reach literacy, during the primary and particularly secondary school years (Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988). Some second language researchers and practitioners have claimed that uninstructed learning of vocabulary occurs in additional (non-native) languages as well. Krashen and his colleagues have been particularly active in promoting the importance of reading for vocabulary acquisition (Krashen, 1989; Dupuy & Krashen, 1993; Cho & Krashen, 1994). If we accept the claim that people acquire vocabulary through reading we must also accept several assumptions on which this claim rests. These are: the noticing assumption, the guessing ability assumption, the 'guessing-retention link' assumption, and the 'cumulative gain' assumption.

A) The Noticing Assumption

It is assumed that on encountering an unfamiliar word, the reader notices it as a word he or she does not know. Gass (1988) refers to such an encounter as an apperceived input. Noticing or attention to the new material is an essential condition for learning (Schmidt, 1994). Noticing a word as unfamiliar is a prerequisite for the next assumption.

B) The Guessing Ability Assumption

It is assumed that on encountering and noticing an unfamiliar word, the learner decides to infer its meaning from context. Guessing strategy for reading comprehension has been advocated by some reading experts (Haastrup, 1991; Schouten-van Parreren, 1989; Elley, 1989) and taught in first and second language courses. The clues may be linguistic, or non-linguistic in the world knowledge of the reader. The basic assumption behind this is that people can use contextual clues successfully and will do so, particularly if the word is relevant to the message of the text.

C) The 'Guessing-Retention Link' Assumption

It is assumed that having guessed a new word, the learner may subsequently retain it. However, one should distinguish comprehension from retention. Learning the word meaning and other word properties, implies more than comprehending it in a particular text during a reading activity. The meaning of a word has to be retained in long-term memory. In surveying the rate of learning from

context, Nagy (1997) concludes that first language readers have a one-in-twenty chance of retaining successful guesses.

D) The 'Cumulative Gain' Assumption

It is assumed that if a word is not remembered after the learner's first exposure to it, additional encounters will increase the probability of retaining it. Even if very few words are retained after reading one text, the cumulative gains over time may be quite remarkable if the learner reads regularly. Gradman and Hanania (1991) conclude that it is likely that extensive reading helps to improve the level of proficiency in a global sense, enhancing acquisition of grammar, vocabulary, and rhetorical structure.

The most important finding from language studies is that vocabulary learning is a gradual process of one meeting with a word, adding to and strengthening the small amounts of knowledge gained from previous learning experience. The implications of this finding are very important for managing extensive reading.

It is thus critically important in an extensive reading program that learners have the opportunity to re-encounter words that they have met before. This can be done in two ways:

a) by doing large amounts of extensive reading at suitable vocabulary levels so that there are repeated opportunities to meet wanted vocabulary.
b) by complementing the extensive reading program with the direct study of vocabulary.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

Participants

Thirty students aged 14 participated in the program. The students come from a mixed ability class in Form Two. Most of them are of low to average proficiency students who used minimal English, whether at home or in school. However, they are capable of reading and understanding given texts meant for Form Two. The students were placed according to their book report from an extensive program called NILAM reading program which is part of their school timetable.

It must be noted that English is used only in their English classes, and even then, usually in response to their teacher's questions. However, they are motivated to do well in school and as well as in learning English. This is important because extensive reading would not work if the students do not possess a certain level of proficiency and were not motivated to read. Based on their mid-term examination, it was noted that all students passed their English examination with the top scorer obtaining 87% and the lowest scorer obtaining 45%.

Extensive Reading Sessions

Prior to carrying out the reading sessions, the students were briefed on its aims and objectives as well as the rationale for implementing it. It is important that they fully understood the aims and objectives as well as the rationale for extensive reading, because it was only when they believed in its value, the program worked. Several aspects pertaining to the implementation of the program was emphasized such as organising the program, establishing routines, and monitoring the progress of students' reading.

The program was structured according to a timetable or schedule which was consistently followed. The time that was set aside for the program was totally devoted to the program and no work other than reading in English was carried out. The books used in the program were Graded Readers prescribed by the Ministry of Education for Form Two students over a period of 2 weeks, 5 sessions per week. Students read for 30 minutes from 1.30 p.m. to 2.00 p.m. after school. Day and Bamford (2002) considered this amount of reading as the goal for successful extensive reading program. Nation and Wang (1999) also suggested that learners need to read about one Graded Reader per week in order to meet repetitions of the new words soon enough to reinforce the previous meeting.

The features of the program was adapted from Day and Bramford's (2002) "Top Ten Principles for Teaching Extensive Reading", that the reading material is within the learners' level of competency, that reading is individual and silent, and that the purpose of reading is for pleasure. As Day and Bamford have mentioned, these are among the basic ingredients of extensive reading, and among the conditions and methodology necessary for its success.

Prior to the running of the extensive reading sessions, a pre-test was administered. A gap filling procedures worksheet was given to the students. Students were given 40 minutes to answer the worksheet. After the two weeks of reading sessions, the students were given a post-test, using the same type of worksheet. A questionnaire was administered and then an interview was conducted with six students chosen randomly.

Graded Books

Graded books provided by the Ministry of Education were used, as these books would be within the students' understanding and has been evaluated by the ministry as suitable for the Form Two students. The books are simplified and abridged versions of existing fictions and fairy tales. According to Hsueh-chau and Nation (2000), Graded Readers do not require as much background knowledge as academic texts, and hence, are likely to represent the most favourable conditions for reading. The focus was to motivate them to read as much as they could. If they could see the success of reading, they would be more likely to read on their own. A selection of thirty graded books of various titles was placed in the classroom for the students to choose and read.

However, two books were chosen, entitled 'Sleeping Beauty' and 'Dot and the Kangaroo' to test their reading performance in the pre- and post-test. Based on the system of levels devised by Hill (1997), a system which categorises graded books from major book publishers into reading levels, these books published by Macmillan Publishers are at elementary level with a vocabulary range of 300-500 words. It has been stated by researchers that at least 95% of the words should come from the first and

second level of content words in order to be understood by the students and for guessing words from context (Liu and Nation, 1985).

The books were analysed using a vocabulary profiler program created by Nation for the world-wide-web (Liu and Nation, 1985). The profiler analysed and grouped the vocabulary from the graded reader into levels such as content words, function words, word families and their percentages. The profiling identified that the books are at suitable level recommended by the ministry for the students because they fell between 95% first and second level of content words. Therefore, the story is of a vocabulary level that is suitable for mixed ability readers. The analysis done by the vocabulary profiler is shown in the table 1.

Table 1 Lexical Composition of the Graded Books

	Sleeping Beauty	Dot and The Kangaroo
Function Words	50.21%	47.46%
First 1000 Words	35.66%	37.66%
Second 1000 Words	7.22%	9.40%
Academic Word List	0.00%	0.29%
Off-line Word	6.91%	5.19%
Total of Function words, First and Second 1000 words (%)	**93.09%**	**94.52%**

4.0 INSTRUMENTS

In conducting this research, three research instruments were used. They are pre- and post-test, questionnaire and interview. Some accounts of the instruments are explained in the section that follows:

a) Pre-test and Post-test

A pre-test was administered to ascertain the level of vocabulary knowledge the students have before the experiment. The students were asked to sit for a gap filling task which is similar to cloze test, but the researcher is in control of which words to be deleted (Nuttal, 1996). The gap filling task comprises two summaries of the stories from the graded books that students have read in the extensive reading sessions. The students had to fill the blanks with words they encountered from both the stories read. The test was administered prior to the commencement of the reading sessions.

Then, the students were asked to sit for a post-test which was carried out after the two-week extensive reading sessions. The post-test was the same test that was given during the pre-test. The results from the pre-test and post-test were compared and described to show if any differences occurred.

b) Questionnaire

A questionnaire was administered at the end of the program to obtain the views of the students with regard to the reading program. The questionnaire with four options (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) was given to the students. The finding of the questionnaires was used to describe the attitude of the students.

c) Interview

A semi-structured interview was conducted with six subjects individually after they had gone through the extensive reading period to elicit in-depth information about how the students perceive extensive reading in vocabulary development and their attitude towards reading. The interview was held after the questionnaire was administered and collected. The questions were designed to investigate particular areas such as enjoyment, interest, learnt words, students' attitude and benefits of extensive reading. This is necessary in order to obtain feedback on the extensive reading sessions carried out. It would also give insight to the researcher if the students were able to acquire vocabulary through the reading experience of the students themselves.

5.0 RESULTS OF DATA ANALYSIS

For the pre-test and post-test, the answers given in the gap filling task were marked by the researcher. The marks awarded were based on a point-scale system. One mark is given to every correct answer while zero mark is given to incorrect answer.

T-test was conducted on the scores of the pre-test and post-test. Since the mean score was derived from the same subjects through a pre and post-test, a dependent sample t-test was carried out on the scores of the pre-test and post-test to investigate if there were any significant differences between them.

The analysis used mean scores, standard deviation and dependent samples t-test to describe the findings. For the first research question, inferential statistics was employed to find the significant difference between pre-test and post-test. For the second research question, data from questionnaire were analysed using descriptive statistics, such as percentages, mean scores and standard deviation. Interview data were analysed qualitatively to find supporting evidence regarding the students' attitude towards reading.

Students' Performance

Results of the pre- and post-test were analysed and compared using a dependent sample t-test shown in the Table 2.

Table 2 Performance of Students

	Type of Test	Mean	SD	t-value	p
Subjects n=30	Pre-test	60.37	14.32		
	Post-test	70.83	15.49	-4	0.000
	Margin of Improvement	+ 10.47			

p<.05, N=30

The result shows that the mean score obtained for the pre-test was M= 60.37 and the mean for post-test was M=70.83. This shows an improvement of +10.47. This result clearly indicates that there was an improvement in the test scores acquired after the extensive reading sessions of two weeks. The t-value for the comparison of the mean score between the pre-test and post-test was t (29) = -4 with p < .05 is beyond the critical boundary of t= +2.045. The result shows that extensive reading does lead to vocabulary acquisition and consistent with the researcher's assumption that extensive reading leads to vocabulary improvement and acquisition. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

In sum the result shows significant difference between the pre-test and post-test as reflected in the scores of the tests in Table 2. Therefore in answering Research Question 1, extensive reading does lead to a significant improvement on students' performance in the post-test. On the basis of the proposed hypothesis, the results support the alternative hypothesis. Thus this study concludes that extensive reading helps in improving and acquiring vocabulary.

Individual analysis of the scores obtained by the students indicates that 25 students showed improvement on the post-test while 5 students did not improve as shown by the negative score. The percentage of students who obtained positive score was 83.3% while 16.7% obtained negative score. Therefore, this indicates that students did better in the vocabulary test after going through the extensive reading sessions and the increase in the post-test shows that students have improved and acquired new words.

Discussion

Details of the findings highlighted that there was an improvement in the acquisition of vocabulary after the extensive reading sessions. This is consistent with Coady's (1997) idea that the majority of vocabulary words are learned gradually through repeated exposure and encounters in various contexts. Consequently, the graded books used in this research which consists of words that are repeated a number of times have led to a greater vocabulary development. The graded books were also of suitable level as profiled by the vocabulary profiler and this aided in the fluent reading of the stories. This is proved by the results of the t-test which showed significant improvement in the post-test as compared to the pre-test. This result also supports the findings of Nation (1997) and Day and Bamford (2002) which suggest that extensive reading resulted in students' making significant gains on aspects of language competence, notably in vocabulary.

Analysis was also steered towards the type of answers given by the students which revealed that students have partial knowledge of words. For example, the word "gift" was equated to "present" and "thing" by the students, although in the context of the story it means 'life'. This reflects Morgan and Rinvoulucri's (1986) view that vocabulary acquisition is not a linear process but a branching process where words are not learnt mechanically as little pockets of meaning but associatively. Even if the answers were not accurate, they still reflect partial understanding of the word. This is consistent with Beck and McKeown (1991:791) who stated that "knowing a word is not an all-or-nothing proposition; it is not the case that one either knows or does not know a word. Rather, knowledge of words should be viewed in terms of the extent or degree or knowledge that people can possess".

Further analysis of individual answers also shows improvement in the spelling of the words in the post-test as compared to the pre-test. The consistent reading of the graded books had also enhanced sight vocabulary stressed by Grabe (1991) and Paran (1996) who noted the importance of extensive reading in providing learners with practice in automaticity of word recognition and decoding the symbols on the printed page (often called bottom-up processing). The consistent reading of the graded books has shown that it is beneficial for improving spelling.

Analysis done on the answers given by the 5 students who obtained negative score on the post-test reflects that these students were the type of learners who rely on graphophonic cues (sounding out) and less on semantic (grammar) and syntactic (meaning) cues. Students at this level may overlook or misunderstand details in reading and may wrongly predict or not recognize errors. Therefore, this could be the reason as to why the students did not improve in the post-test and that their answers were obtained through inaccurate guessing. For these students, apart from the extensive reading, word-focused activities may be helpful and effective for vocabulary learning. Word-focused activities help students to notice words which they may have overlooked while reading long texts, such as the graded readers. This finding also gives insight into future development of extensive reading program, which is to take into account students who have not yet progressed to the stage of utilising strategies such as semantic and syntactic cuing systems. Activities and strategies using this cuing systems can be included as part of the program to enhance the effectiveness of acquiring vocabulary through extensive reading.

Students' Attitude towards Reading

In addressing Research Question 2, data from the questionnaire and interview were analysed and triangulated. The students were asked to respond to a questionnaire containing ten items in order to identify the subjects' attitude with regard to extensive reading. The subjects indicated their preferences on a 4 point Likert scales ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). Each item or response was associated with a point-value, and the subjects' scores were determined by summing the point values for each statement.

For the questionnaires, the four options given were analysed. Assuming the highest score is 40 while the lowest score is 10, when both scores are totalled and divided by two, the range will fall between 26-40 and 10-24. The positive range of 26-40 was regarded as positive attitude while 10-24 was regarded as negative attitude and this was determined by the mean obtained. Each item in the questionnaire is described with regard to the percentages obtained.

Table 3 Mean of students' responses in questionnaire

Mean	Standard Deviation	Attitude
29.5	6.850	Positive

Key: Positive: 26-40   Negative: 10-24

The table above shows that the mean score for students' responses towards extensive reading was M=29.5, S.D=6.850. With reference to the range shown in Table 3 above, the mean fell into the category of positive perception. Therefore, it can be concluded that extensive reading does promote positive attitude towards reading among students.

Interpretation of Students' Responses

In order to facilitate the analysis of students' responses, the items were grouped according to the criteria listed below.

Table 4 Criteria for items

No.	Criteria	Item
1	Preference of Stories	2,3
2	Motivation and Attitude on Reading	4,5,6
3	Vocabulary Learning	7,9
4	Enjoyment and Importance of Reading	1,10
5	Support and Guidance	8

Data from the interview were also included in providing evidence of the analysis. In order to gather more information, six students were chosen at random to be interviewed. The students were interviewed a day after the questionnaire was administered so as to gather more information on the students' attitude on reading and also to clarify the students' responses on certain items in the questionnaire. This is necessary as some of the responses needed further clarification, for example, on students' response that they need the teacher to discuss the stories.

Although, the students were interviewed in English, they were allowed to respond in the first language, Bahasa Melayu, especially when they were unable to describe their feelings or thoughts in English. This was necessary in order to get accurate information from them. Students were encouraged to give their opinion as much as they can and were discouraged from resorting to a 'yes' or 'no' answer due to language difficulties they had. Allowing the students to speak in the first language whenever they were hindered by language problem enables more information to be elicited from them.

One of the categories of the questionnaire items is preference for stories. Table 5 shows the findings of the category.

Table 5 Preference of Stories

No.	Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		1	2	3	4
2	I like the choice of the stories.	0	30.00%	33.33%	36.67%
3	I can understand the stories.	0	13.33%	66.67%	20.00%

Based on the responses that were obtained as shown in the table above, 70% of the students agreed that they liked the stories they read from the graded books. Reading materials selected for extensive reading programs should address students' needs, tastes and interests, so as to energise and motivate them to read the books (Bell & Campbell, 1996, 1997). Majority of the students (86.67%) agreed that they can understand the stories. This is consistent with the analysis of the graded books which shows that 93% to 94% of the words can be understood by the students and that the books are of suitable level to the students. One study states that at least 95% of the words should come from the first and second level of content words in order to be understood by the students and for guessing words from the context (Liu and Nation, 1985). However, it must be noted that familiarity with one of the stories, that is, Sleeping Beauty, may have contributed to their agreement with the preference list.

Next, based on the percentage of agreement by the students as shown in Table 6, the results reflect the students' encouraging and positive attitude towards reading.

Table 6 Motivation and Attitude on Reading

No.	Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		1	2	3	4
4	I will continue to read story books in English.	0	13.33%	56.67%	30.00%
5	I feel confident reading stories on my own.	0	33.33%	46.67%	20.00%
6	I will read more story books at home.	0	40.00%	40.00%	20.00%

Majority of the students (86.67%) will continue to read story books in English, 66.67% of the students are confident to read books on their own while 60% responded that they will read more books at home. This is due to the fact that the graded books chosen were according to the level of the students' proficiency, making it easy for them to understand the story. As a result, they felt motivated and confident to attempt more readings on their own. Furthermore, the consistent response by most of the students in the questionnaire reflects the positive attitude towards reading. This could be due to the fact that most of the students have not read consistently before in an extensive reading setting and this could have given them the opportunity to read for pleasure.

Data from the interview also seem to support these findings. In the interview, the students were asked *'What do you think about reading in English now compared to what you thought about reading in English before'?* Two students reported that they found reading books in English difficult before this program. Although they attempted to read story books in the school library, they often would

not continue until the end of the book. One student did not notice any difference in his reading English materials before and after the program. Three students mentioned that they read only Malay or Chinese story books and that they had never attempted to read English stories before. But after completing the extensive reading sessions, they were adamant about continuing to read more English books. In fact, they found that they were able to finish reading a number of story books in two weeks was commendable because they could understand the stories even if they did not understand certain words. They noted that they will continue to read if they could get access to graded books. This seems to indicate that they became more motivated after the extensive reading sessions.

A particular question on motivation was also asked in the interview *'Do you feel motivated to continue reading English books in future'*? Four students answered that they were motivated to read books and will continue to read in the future by borrowing books from the library. However, two students reported that reading English books at home is difficult because they did not have access to the books they liked.

In terms of vocabulary learning category, results from the questionnaire are shown in the following Table 7.

Table 7 Vocabulary Learning

No.	Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		1	2	3	4
7	I can understand the story even if I don't know some words.	0	13.33%	73.33%	13.33%
9	I think reading helps me to learn words.	0	0	56.67%	43.33%

The responses reveal that 86.66% of the students are able to understand the story even if some of the words in the stories cannot be understood. This indicates that the students were able to guess from the context and were not hindered by the new words that they did not understand. The most interesting finding is that 100% of the students agreed that they were able to learn words. This is consistent with research findings which say that vocabulary acquisition is incremental in nature. Even if very few words are retained after reading one text, the cumulative gains over time may be quite remarkable if the learner reads regularly (Horst, Cobb, and Meara, 1998).

It is interesting to also note that the interview data seem to also indicate the same notion of findings. One of the interview questions was '*Do you feel that extensive reading sessions were beneficial to you'*? All six students reported that they found the extensive reading sessions beneficial to them. One student reported that he felt lazy to read at home but liked reading with his friends in the classroom. In particular, two students reported that through reading consistently every day they could understand more words. One student reported that by reading in the classroom he could discuss words that were not understood before. In other words, the extensive reading sessions gave them the opportunity to encounter new words with their peers and learn to use them in their proper context.

Students were also asked *'What new words have you learnt from the two stories that you have read'?* Three students reported that they cannot remember any words, however they were able to retell the stories in their own words. One student reported that she learnt the word 'cruel' from one of the graded stories entitled 'Dot the Kangaroo'. The student said that when the hunters kill the animal they are said to be cruel. This clearly indicated that she has learnt the word through the context provided in the story. Another student reported that she learnt the word 'bad fairy' from the story 'Sleeping Beauty'. One student reported that she learnt the words 'hop' and 'pouch' from the story 'Dot the Kangaroo'. This seems to indicate that students became more aware of some new words and familiarised themselves with these words by stating their meaning and retelling the stories.

With regard to   enjoyment and importance of reading category, the results are shown in Table 8 below.

Table 8 Enjoyment and Importance of Reading

No.	Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		1	2	3	4
1	I enjoy attending the reading sessions.	0	20.00%	60.00%	20.00%
10	I think the reading program should continue.	0	6.67%	43.33%	46.67%

Based on the students' response, 80% of the students enjoyed the reading sessions which they attended after school from 1.30 to 2.00 p.m. Students only read the stories and they were not given any form of instruction by the teacher. Students read at their own paces and they were not required to carry out any form of activities. This could have encouraged and motivated them to attend the reading sessions as they are not taxed into doing any exercises or activity.

These findings are also supported by the interview data. In the interview, the students were asked *'Was extensive reading enjoyable'?* All the six students agreed wholeheartedly that the extensive reading sessions were enjoyable because they got to read story books without having to do exercises or writing activities derived from the readings. Two students commented that this was relaxing after a whole day of learning science and mathematics which were tiring. All six students also stated that they preferred "Sleeping Beauty" than "Dot the Kangaroo". This is because they liked the fairy tale 'Sleeping Beauty' compared to "Dot the Kangaroo" which is an adventure story set in Australia. Overall, they tend to enjoy the stories, although it must be noted that the degree of enjoyment varies from one story to another.

In terms of support and guidance category, Table 9 shows the findings.

Table 9 Support and Guidance

No.	Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		1	2	3	4
8	I do not need a teacher to explain the story.	50.00%	30.00%	10.00%	10.00%

The students' response reveals an interesting finding in that 50% of the students did not agree with the item that they did not need a teacher to explain the stories. This reflects that half of the students wanted some form of interaction with their teachers, especially in discussing the stories.

In the interview, a question on the role of the teacher was also asked *'Do you think the teacher should discuss the story?* This question was included in the interview after 50% of the students responded in the questionnaire that the teacher should discuss the story with them. In order to find out more information, the six students in the interview were asked this question. Five students reported that even though they could understand the story, they still prefer the teacher to discuss the story with them so that they could ask the teacher about words that they did not understand.

They also expressed that the teacher should talk about the characters in the story and explain the story to them because this would facilitate their better understanding of the story. This dependency on the teacher to explain the story could arise from the literature learning environment where the teacher would go into great length to explain about characters, plot, setting, theme and values in the short stories or novels. This is consistent with Morgan and Rinvoulucri (1986) views that vocabulary acquisition is not a solitary but a social process where we expand our comprehension of word meanings by interchanging and sharing them with others.

6.0 DISCUSSION

Day and Bamford (1998) pointed out that extensive reading is one of the ways through which second language learners can develop their language skills in various areas and one of it is vocabulary. The results of the questionnaire too confirms that most of the students found it useful in learning new words and this had motivated them to continue reading in future. The interview sessions also revealed that the students had learnt some words such as 'hop', 'pouch' and 'cruel' that they had come across in the stories. The students also enjoyed and stated that they had benefited from the extensive reading program. Krashen (1981) argues that students can acquire language, particularly in this research context vocabulary on their own provided they received enough exposure to comprehensible input done in a more relaxed and stress-free atmosphere.

The result of the descriptive analysis on the questionnaires demonstrated that extensive reading did promote positive attitude towards reading among most of the students. This could be ascertained by the percentage of responses given by the students who stated that extensive reading was interesting, beneficial and helpful in learning vocabulary. Only a small number of students

(6.67%) did not agree to continue with the extensive reading program. Overall, most students (90%) responded that they would continue to read English story books. The study has also revealed one interesting outcome that is 50% of the students tend to agree that teachers should explain the story to them. This gives insight to the research that some students prefer some form of interaction with the teacher after the reading sessions. Therefore, some activities such as retelling the stories, word-focused activities or quizzes can be held to make the reading sessions more lively and interesting.

Day and Bamford (1998) consider extensive reading an effective way of building positive attitudes among students toward reading in second language. They wrote that,

> "it is indeed the ongoing experience of extensive second language reading that have the most potential to establish positive attitudes towards second language reading. Students read material well within their linguistic ability, they have a choice of what to read, and they are not forced to read about topics they have no interest. In addition, they have the freedom to stop reading when they want to, with no questions asked. They read when and where they want to." (p.27)

During the interview sessions, students reported that extensive reading of graded stories was beneficial in improving their vocabulary. They also revealed that they will continue to read in future. This showed clearly that the experience they had in extensive reading resulted in positive attitude towards reading and in English. The students believe that they could increase their vocabulary repertoire through extensive reading because they could acquire it through the context of the story. This is possible because vocabulary can be developed through repeated encounters of words and these repeated exposures help students to learn new words.

The findings also reveal that the number or words learnt are small, about 2 to 3 words, compared to the amount of reading done on the graded story books. This is consistent with a study done by Lahav (1996) using simplified readers that students learnt an average rate of 4 to 5 words per book. This small gain should not be misconstrued that extensive reading is a slow and laborious way to acquire vocabulary. It should be understood that vocabulary acquisition is a cumulative process, and reflects the cumulative gain assumption which says that even if very few words are retained after one reading, the cumulative gains over time may be quite remarkable if the learner reads regularly.

7.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

It can be summarized that the students in this study had enjoyed the experience of extensive reading and also reported that it was beneficial in improving and acquiring vocabulary. This is further confirmed by the result of the post-test which showed that students did improve after the extensive reading sessions. The students attributed this to reading extensively. This experience also resulted in positive attitude toward reading and students believe that they enjoy reading now. Since students believe that extensive reading leads to many benefits they recommend that it should be continued.

Vocabulary acquisition is crucial to academic development. Not only do students need a rich body of word knowledge to succeed in basic skill areas, they also need a specialised vocabulary to learn content area material. A foundation of vocabulary knowledge must be given to students in order

for them to perform successfully in school. The development of strong reading skills is the most independent word learning strategy available. Extensive reading is crucial if students are to acquire a sufficiently large amount of vocabulary even though students are given intensive reading as part of language instruction. The benefits of extensive reading using graded readers have been observed through the vocabulary gains and the positive attitude exhibited by the students in this study. The findings revealed that extensive reading is important in improving and acquiring vocabulary and it promotes positive attitude towards reading.

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Appendix A

Scores Obtained by Subjects

Subject	Pre-test	Post-test	Score Gain
1	43	55	12
2	50	40	-10
3	70	90	20
4	58	48	-10
5	48	60	12
6	58	60	2
7	55	83	29
8	53	58	5
9	30	85	55
10	40	68	28
11	68	78	10
12	53	58	5
13	60	50	-10
14	78	85	7
15	55	63	8
16	80	83	3
17	43	65	22
18	78	90	12
19	80	90	10
20	83	88	5
21	45	48	3
22	65	75	10
23	65	75	10
24	78	88	10
25	48	60	12
26	83	88	5
27	63	58	-5
28	63	85	22
29	48	88	40
30	70	63	-7

Appendix B

Percentages and total number of students' responses

No.	Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		1	2	3	4
1	I enjoy attending the reading sessions.	0	20.00% (6)	60.00% (18)	20.00% (6)
2	I like the choice of the stories.	0	30.00% (9)	33.33% (10)	36.67% (11)
3	I can understand the stories.	0	13.33% (4)	66.67% (20)	20.00% (6)
4	I will continue to read story books in English.	0	13.33% (4)	56.67% (17)	30.00% (9)
5	I feel confident reading stories on my own.	0	33.33% (10)	46.67% (14)	20.00% (6)
6	I will read more story books at home.	0	40.00% (12)	40.00% (12)	20.00% (6)
7	I can understand the story even if I don't know some words.	0	13.33% (4)	73.33% (22)	13.33% (4)
8	I do not need the teacher to explain the story.	50.00% (15)	30.00% (9)	10.00% (3)	10.00% (3)
9	I think reading helps me to learn words.	0	0	56.67% (17)	43.33% (13)
10	I think the reading program should continue.	0	6.67% (2)	43.33% (13)	46.67% (14)