13

by Maria Ping

Audio-Assisted Versus Text-Only Extensive Reading Materials: Potentials and Student Preferences

Maria Teodora Ping and Syamdianita

Mulawarman University Language Center, Samarinda, East Borneo, Indonesia

A number of studies have suggested that audio-assisted reading texts facilitate language learning (e.g., Brown, Waring, & Donkaewhua, 2008; Chang, 2009). However, audio-assisted reading texts have not been commonly used in Indonesian EFL classrooms, especially for extensive reading (ER) activities. Therefore, this study attempted to fill in this gap by investigating two areas of inquiry: (a) the potential benefits of the two different modes of ER materials; namely, audio-assisted reading materials and text-only reading materials and (b) students' opinions and preferences towards the two modes of ER materials. The findings revealed that both audio-assisted and text-only materials facilitated vocabulary learning. However, text-only materials outperformed audio-assisted materials in terms of facilitating reading comprehension. In analysis of student preferences, the students with a lower level of proficiency favored text-only materials, whereas the students with a higher level of proficiency favored audio-assisted materials.

Keywords: Extensive reading, audio-assisted texts, text-only, vocabulary learning, reading

INTRODUCTION

The importance of extensive reading (ER) for language learning and acquisition has been explored in a number of scholarly studies (Cohen, 2017; Krishnan, Rahim, Marimuthu, Abdullah, Mohammad, & Jusoff, 2009; Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Renandya, 2007; Renandya, Rajan, & Jacobs, 2009). ER activities require students to read materials in the target language (Day & Bamford, 2003). In this case, students select their own reading material, then read it independently of the teacher. They read for general comprehension, overall meaning, and enjoyment. When they read extensively, they become fluent readers. It not only helps to increase their reading but also their oral fluency. In other words, students who read a lot develop positive attitudes toward reading and increase their motivation to study the foreign language (Day, 2003). Studies have indicated that ER increases the exposure level of the learner to the language, which also means enhancing the learner's general language competence (Bell, 1981).

In EFL classrooms across Indonesia, reading is often taught using short texts with close guidance from the teacher. The intention is to help students learn meaning, develop reading skills, and enhance their knowledge vocabulary and grammar. To accommodate this, reading has been constrained to written texts,

which limits the potential usefulness of audiobooks and scripted podcasts. To address this practice, this paper looks at the development of students' vocabulary by comparing two difference sources of input: audio-assisted reading materials and text-only reading materials. The second part of the study surveys student preferences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Extensive Reading

Extensive reading (ER; sometimes referred to as *sustained silent reading, pleasure reading*, or *free voluntary reading*) is an approach to second language (L2) reading instruction that aims to encourage students to engage in large amounts of reading. This approach has been described as "reading gain without reading pain" (Day & Bamford, 1998) with the intention of helping students become more fluent, independent, and confident readers (Day & Bamford, 1998). To select reading materials, Day and Bamford (2002) offer ten principals:

1. Students should be presented with materials that contain few or no unfamiliar vocabulary or grammar items.
2. There should be a variety of reading material on a wide range of topics.
3. Learners should be able to choose what they want to read.
4. Learners should read as much as possible.
5. Students should be encouraged to read quickly in order to improve fluency.
6. The purpose of reading should be related to pleasure, information gathering, and/or general understanding.
7. Reading should be individual and silent.
8. Reading should be its own reward.
9. Teachers should explain to students what ER is, why they are doing it, and how to go about it.
10. Teachers are encouraged to read the same or similar content as their students so that class time can be reserved for discussion.

There are many reasons why ER facilitates language development. It allows students to observe the target language in its natural context and see how it works in extended discourse beyond the language found in ELT textbooks. It builds vocabulary and helps students understand how grammar is used in context. ER also helps students to develop reading speed and fluency. In terms of affective factors, ER can help students build their confidence, encourage motivation, and foster a passion for reading. These benefits, taken together, develop language competence and can be used to foster autonomous learning (Maley, 2010).

Reading-While-Listening

Reading-While-Listening (RWL) is a new approach that uses audio-assisted materials. Originally developed as a means to help students with listening comprehension, (McMahon, 1983, as cited in Askildson, 2011), these audio-

assisted materials are now being used in conjunction with ER. The written texts are used to assist listening comprehension by giving learners more access to identify the letter–sound relationship. Learners are introduced to the spoken rate, rhythm, and the natural flow of the language (Chang, 2009). Studies on RWL have demonstrated gains in student satisfaction and listening comprehension (Brown et al., 2008; Chang, 2009; Chung, 1999; Woodall, 2010). Based on these studies, the benefits of RWL can be said to include the following:

1. It can appeal to audio-lingual learners.
2. It can alleviate pressure that comes with learning a foreign or second language.
3. It provides learners with input from more than one source.
4. It can develop fluency in all four skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Reid (1971, as cited in Askildson, 2011) observed that students who were taught with RWL methods performed significantly better in reading and comprehension. This is supported by studies from other scholars including Blum, Koskinen, Tennant, Parker, Straub, and Curry (1995, as cited in Chang, 2009), which also showed that learners improved their reading fluency after learning through RWL. Another study done by Amer (1997, as cited in Askildson, 2011) illustrated that EFL students who were given RWL instruction outperformed those who were given only silent reading instruction. In addition to improving learners' language skills, Brown, Waring, and Donkaewbua (2008) reported that RWL made listening tasks more enjoyable for EFL learners.

RESEARCH METHOD

This project was designed as a classroom-based, mixed-method case study. The aim of the study was to explore the implementation of ER activities in a reading comprehension course in the English Department at Mulawarman University in Indonesia. In this study, 60 participants were randomly selected and divided into two different groups. Each group received different ER materials. The first group had text-only ER materials while the other group received audio-assisted texts.

The instruments used in this study included reading comprehension and vocabulary pretests and posttests. The other instruments were a questionnaire and an informal interview. The questionnaire and follow-up interview were used to find specific information regarding students' preferences of the different modes of reading materials. The research procedures were as follows:

1. The students in both groups were asked to do a pretest, which allowed the researcher to assess their level of vocabulary and reading comprehension.
2. The students in both groups were asked to read three levels of ER materials that ranged from "easy" to "moderate" to "difficult."
3. The students in both groups were asked to do a posttest.
4. The results of the posttests were compared to measure the potential

effectiveness of each mode of reading materials.

5. The students were asked to complete a perceived reading attitude questionnaire.
6. The students who had the lowest and highest scores were invited for follow-up interviews.

The quantitative data collected for this research was analyzed by using both independent and dependent *t*-tests to measure differences within and between the groups. The qualitative data from the interview was analyzed by using the Flow Model framework introduced by Miles and Huberman (1994). Their approach to qualitative inquiry seeks to identify patterns and trends in students' preferences.

DISCUSSION

Quantitative Findings

The data for the quantitative part of the study was gathered to discern whether audio-assisted materials and text-only materials had significant effects on student vocabulary learning and reading comprehension. The findings revealed that both audio-assisted and text-only ER materials facilitated vocabulary learning. Yet, the benefit for reading comprehension appeared to be significant in the Text-Only group but not in the Audio-Text (audio-assisted) group. These findings are illustrated in Figure 1.
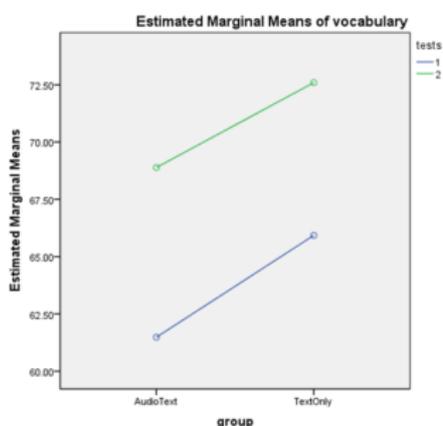

FIGURE 1. A Comparison of Vocabulary Pretest and Posttest Mean Scores.

A *t*-test was used to measure whether there was a significant gain in both groups. For the Audio-Text group, the value of *t* was 3.010 (p = .005). This indicates that there was a significant difference in their pretest and posttest results. For the Text-Only group, the value of *t* was 2.217 (p = .035). This also shows a significant gain after the intervention.

In looking at the reading comprehension results, the findings revealed that the

Text-Only group made a significant gain. The value of t was 3.832 (p = .001). The calculation for the Audio-Text group resulted in a t value of 1.900 (p = .067). This shows that there was no statistically significant difference between the results of their pretest and posttest. These findings are illustrated in Figure 2.
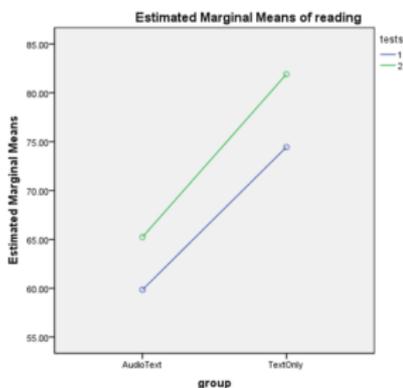

FIGURE 2. A Comparison of Reading Pretest and Posttest Mean Scores

When these results for both dependent variables (vocabulary and reading) were compared simultaneously (by using multivariate and univariate tests (i.e., Repeated Measures MANOVA), the results show no significant difference between the two groups in terms of their learning gains after the interventions: F(2, 57) = .326, p = .723, η^2 = .011.; Vocabulary F(1, 58) = .031, p = .861, η^2 = .001; Reading F(1, 58) = .359, p = .551, η^2 = .006). This suggests that both modes of ER facilitated positive gains.

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative data explored the students' preferences on the two different modes of ER materials. All students from different proficiency levels in this group agreed that the audio helped them recognize sounds and pronunciation. However, the students with lower levels of proficiency in the Audio-Text group confessed that it was difficult to concentrate, while the more proficient students in this group felt the audio materials enhanced their comprehension.

This result was slightly inconsistent with the results of Brown, Waring, and Donkaewbua (2008), who reported that RWL was the most preferable learning mode for EFL learners. They argue that RWL made listening tasks more enjoyable for EFL learners. One explanation to explain this difference is that the students' level of listening comprehension was not included in the pretest in this study. Another factor to consider is that the students in this study listened to the audio texts on one speed, whereas students in the study conducted by Brown, Waring, and Donkaewbua (2008), could adjust the speed of the audio texts. These two factors could potentially influence students' comprehension and enjoyment of the audio texts.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on the findings in this study, using audio-assisted materials for ER activities could help students learn vocabulary. However, when it comes to promoting reading comprehension, the findings in this study indicate that the use of text-only reading materials outperformed the use of audio-assisted materials. While more-proficient students found the audio-assisted texts useful and enjoyable, the less-proficient students found it difficult to concentrate. With this in mind, teachers considering this method would be wise to select audio-assisted texts that align with the students' level of proficiency. For the lower-level students, teachers can select materials with basic grammar and vocabulary, and may wish to reduce the speed of the audio texts. This, in addition to practice and repetition, are helpful suggestions to optimize the benefits of audio-assisted texts with ER materials.

THE AUTHORS

Maria Teodora Ping is currently teaching at the English Department of Mulawarman University Samarinda, Indonesia, while also serving as the Secretary/Vice Director of the University Language Centre. She obtained her Doctor of Philosophy degree from Technische Universität Dortmund in 2011. Dr. Ping's main research interests are second language acquisition and reading instructions, particularly dialogic reading for young learners and extensive reading. Email: mariateodoraping@fkip.unmul.ac.id

Syamdianita is an English lecturer in Teacher Training and Education Faculty of Mulawarman University. She received her bachelor's degree in Mulawarman University and her master's degree at the State University of Malang. In addition to teaching, Syamdianita is an active English debate instructor. She is responsible for English club activity on the campus as an advisor as well as holding the position of head of the Planning and Development Division at Mulawarman University's Language Center. She loves being surrounded by friends, family, and novels. Email: syamdianita@fkip.unmul.ac.id

REFERENCES

Askildson, L. R. (2011). Theory and pedagogy of reading while listening: Phonological recoding for L2 reading development. *Journal of Linguistics and Language Teaching*, *2*(2). Retrieved from http://sites.google.com/site/linguisticsandlanguageteaching/home-1/volume-2-2011-issue-2/volume-2-2011-issue-2---article-askildson

Bell, T. (1988). Extensive reading: Why? And how? *The Internet TESL Journal*, *4*(2). Retrieved from http://iteslj.org/Articles/Bell-Reading.html

Brown, R., Waring, R., Donkaewbua, S. (2008). Incidental vocabulary acquisition from reading, reading-while-listening, and listening to stories. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, *20*, 136–163.

Chang, C. S. (2008). *Enhancing second language listening competence through extensive listening activities: Its effectiveness, difficulties, and solutions*. Taipei, Taiwan: Bookman Books.

Chang, A. C.S. (2009). The effect of reading while listening to audiobooks: Listening fluency and vocabulary gain. *Asian Journal of English Language Teaching, 21*, 43–64.

Chung, J. M. (1999). The effects of using video texts supported with advance organizers and captions on Chinese college students' listening comprehension: An empirical study. *Foreign Language Annals, 32*(3), 296–308

Cohen, A. (2017). *If you are learning a language, then you should be reading in it.* Retrieved from the Brainscape website: https://www.brainscape.com/blog/2010/09/reading-foreign-langage/

Day, R. R., & Bamford, J. (2002). Top ten principles for teaching extensive reading. *Reading in a Foreign Language, 14*, 136–141

Day, R. R. (2003). What is extensive reading? *English Teacher Talk, 21*, 1–2. Retrieved from http://ww.cape.edu/docs/TTalk0021.pdf

Krishnan, G., Rahim, R. A., Marimuthu, R., Abdullah, R. B., Mohammad, F., & Jusoff, K. (2009). The language learning benefits of extensive reading: Teachers should be good role models. *CCSE Journal, 2*(4), 107–116

Lightbown, P. M., & Spada, N. (2006). *How languages are learned* (3rd ed.). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Maley, A. (2010). *Extensive reading: Why it is good for our students... and for us.* Retrieved from https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/extensive-reading-why-it-good-our-students%E2%80%A6-us

Renandya, W. A. (2007). The power of extensive reading. *RELC Journal, 38*, 138–149.

Renandya, W. A., Rajan, B. R. S., & Jacobs, G. M. (2009). Extensive reading with adult learners of English as a second language. In T. Hedge, N. Andon, & M. Dewey (Eds.), *English language teaching: Major themes in education* (vol. 4; pp. 182–197). London, UK: Routledge.

Woodall, B. (2010). Simultaneous listening and reading in ESL: Helping second language learners read (and enjoy reading) more efficiently. *TESOL Journal, 1*(2), 186–205.