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A Study on the Initial Stage of Extensive Reading Process through College Students' Journal Writing

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This paper explores the learners' experience process and features in the initial stage of extensive reading process through college students' daily based journal writings. The subjects of this study were 10 volunteer students and they kept their journals from 30 minutes to 2 hours daily based for two weeks. The participants took pre and post tests in order to find out how their reading comprehension ability improved. Four of them improved it while the rest of them did not. After writing journals for two weeks, all students agreed on the potential power of extensive reading. In addition, they realized their learning problems and tried to overcome them on their own ways. Although the research period was only two weeks, the students showed the potential of extensive reading in learning English. From the results of the study, extensive reading encouraged the students to read more and they were convinced that extensive reading will lead to successful learning English. It can be meaningful outcome from the 2-week period research. Thus, a longer period scheme could provide more detail information to the extensive reading.

[extensive reading/journal writing/reading comprehension/college students' perception about extensive reading]

I. INTRODUCTION

There has been much research reporting the benefits of extensive reading over the past decade. Extensive reading influences the learners' language proficiency development, reading speed and reading habits within the reading ability area. Most researches within extensive reading are quantitative and few are qualitative; the former is mainly focused on a particular extensive reading program and its benefits to learners, and the latter about what learners experience during the extensive reading process (Leung, 2002).

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Considering extensive reading as a salient factor in language learning development, the learners' experience process is crucial to learning the characteristics of extensive reading. For this end, Leung's qualitative research was based on diary studies, but it was faced with the limitation of 'subjectivity.' When the researcher and the observer are the same person, the research perhaps leads to what the researcher wants to see in the study which may cause inflating the effects of extensive reading or neglecting the negative effects of it somehow. The present study explores the learners' experience process itself and what features are found therein. It also tries to provide pedagogical implications on foreign language learners' language learning development.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Traditionally there are two reading approaches with the length of the text; one is intensive reading and the other is extensive reading (Nuttall, 1996). Intensive reading is slower reading with small amount of reading materials for general understanding while extensive reading is faster reading with large amount of various reading materials for pleasure. Louis Kelly credits Harold Palmer with first applying the term extensive reading in foreign language pedagogy as 'abundant reading' (Day & Bamford, 1998).

In Palmer's conception of extensive reading, texts were clearly being read for the purposes of language study. However, its attention was on the content and not the language. It could be said that the texts were also being read for the ordinary, real-world purposes of pleasure and information. Thus, it was that extensive reading took on a special sense in the context of language teaching real-world reading; for pedagogical purposes (p. 5).

Leung (2002) identified the characteristics of extensive reading from various studies as follows: First, students read as much as possible. Reading many books is the most inherent feature of extensive reading. Second, students read a variety of materials based on their interest, apart from the classroom reading. It is based on learner's own interest; the learners set their goals for reading as doing so for pleasure. Third, reading materials are well within students linguistic competence. If the level of reading materials is above the learner's linguistic competence, it will eventually prevent reading for pleasure. Fourth, students choose what they want to read and the purposes of reading are usually related to pleasure, information, and general understanding. Therefore, extensive reading involves various reading skills and strategies. Finally, follow-up tasks should be simple, encouraging, related to students' readings, and be done in a low anxiety environment. This is a clear guideline regarding the instructor's role in extensive reading.

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Gardener (2004) revealed the role of extensive reading in building vocabulary. He analyzed the lexical differences between narrative and expository reading materials and explored how these differences could affect children's potential vocabulary acquisition through reading. And he assessed that the children's vocabulary acquisition through extensive reading with wide reading and free reading. Kim (2003) also presented evidence of the positive effect both on Korean and English vocabulary competence by free reading.

The role of extensive reading regarding reading speed was identified in detail by Bell (2001). In his study, young adult students in Yemen Arab Republic were divided into intensive and extensive reading groups. The extensive group was exposed to a regime of graded readers while the intensive group studied short texts followed by comprehension questions. Kim (2012) also stated that extensive reading was effective in improving reading speed. Consequently, the subjects in the extensive group achieved both significantly faster reading speeds and higher scores on measures of reading comprehension.

Grabe (2004) suggested promoting extensive reading as one of 10 instructional implications for second language reading through a review of reading theory, research and assessment of reading. However, he urged others to provide strong evidence for the impact of extensive reading on reading comprehension abilities in the L2. That is, many studies are in favor of extensive reading as a support for reading comprehension development, but there is still needed more empirical research necessary on the topic.

Most research about extensive reading has been done quantitatively, but few studies are qualitative with limitations of 'subjectivity'. Leung (2002) explored the learner experience during extensive reading process by using a diary. She was both a subject and a researcher in her study and although she did not overcome 'subjectivity' completely, the research revealed what the beginning level learner thought and felt while doing extensive reading. The 'subjectivity' may have violated the real picture of extensive reading somehow because the researcher expected certain positive effects in advance.

The aim of the present study is to identify what the learners do and experience at the initial stage of extensive reading through their journal writings. The three research questions of this study are as follows:

1. Does extensive reading improve college students' reading comprehension ability?
2. If the degree of improving in reading comprehension varied, what similarities was there?
3. What do college students consider extensive reading process in learning English?

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III. RESEARCH DESIGN

To examine the extensive reading process clearly this study used a daily based diary study. Ten Korean EFL volunteer students wrote their own journals for two weeks. A two-week diary may be not enough to understand the extensive reading process precisely, so this study might show only the initial stage of the extensive reading process. All students were asked to write a journal everyday for two weeks and the contents of their writing was to be composed of three parts. The first part was the date and the time how many minutes they spent reading. The second part regarded the selection of their reading materials and the reasons behind their selection. The final section considered the reading process; what the learner thought and felt while they were reading. For this goal, the subjects were provided the report form by the researcher.

1. Subjects

This study is based on 10 volunteer students who attended another class of the researcher. All subjects are students of the same university and their English levels are slightly different. Except for two students, they have not taken an official English test such as TOEIC or TOEFL. Of the two exceptions, one student (S5) took the TOEIC and scored 760, and the other (S8) took the same test and scored 570. The varying majors of the students included English Literature, Management, Computer Engineering, and Social Service with study year varying from freshmen to seniors. Two students of the participants were female students and eight of them were male students.

2. Procedure

There was an orientation session one day before starting journal writing. The session was a ten minute explanation of extensive reading and the guidelines of journal writing. The explanation of extensive reading was simple: they were told to choose any reading materials which they wanted to read but not have it be too difficult for their own level, and the goal of reading was not for studying but for pleasure. The guidelines of journal writing were to write a journal every day, reading any of their own reading materials at least for thirty minutes. However, the reading time was flexible so it would depend on the learners. The reason for setting the limitation on the reading time was to prevent too much reading at the beginning of the research. It might cause boredom immediately and negate the idea of reading for pleasure.

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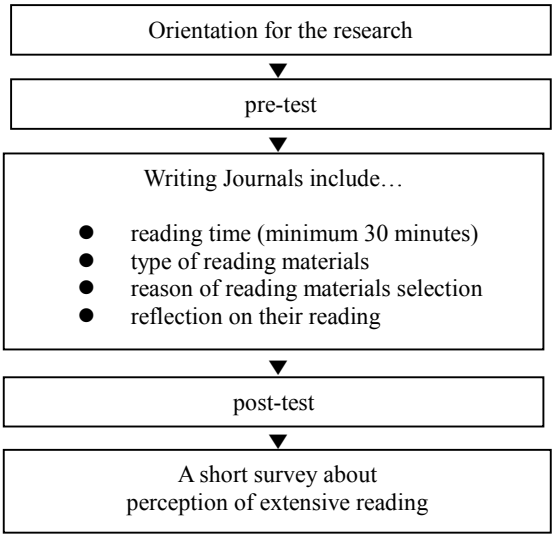
The students took a pre-test and a post-test in order to show if the learners' reading ability improved through two-week extensive reading period and to what degree. The tests were extracted from the general reading section of the IELTS preparation course book. The general reading section of IELTS is taken from notices, advertisements, leaflets, newspapers, instruction manuals, books and magazines. There are various types of questions such as multiple choices, short-answer questions, sentence completion, note/summary/table completion, labeling, matching, and so on. The reason why the IELTS was chosen for use in this section of the research was due to its 'unfamiliarity' to the learners; IELTS is less known among Korean EFL learners than TOEFL. General reading was also considered to prevent any influence from each learner's major study. The general reading section was designed for entry into vocational or training programs – not at degree level – for admission into secondary schools and for immigration purposes.

After taking post-test, the participants were surveyed about their perception of extensive reading. The survey was conducted with four simple questions which were related to their opinion of the effect of extensive reading and asking suggestions with it.

The entire procedure of the research was illustrated in the figure 1.

FIGURE 1

Summary of the Research Procedure



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IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Pre-test and Post-test

The comparison of the two tests shows that the learners improved their English reading ability. It is evident that extensive reading has a positive effect on learners' reading comprehension as other previous research has revealed. There were 20 questions in each test and scoring the test was done at 1 point per question. In the pre-test, ten students scored from 5 to 17, and the mean of the test score was 9.8 while the learners in the post-test scores ranged from 13 to 19 with a mean of score of 15 (see table 1).
S5 did not take the post-test because of a personal conflict. Except for him, all learners took both tests.

TABLE 1
Scores on the Pre-test and the Post-test

	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10	mean
pre-test	7	14	12	6	13	6	8	17	5	10	9.80
post-test	14	19	15	14	-	16	13	16	13	15	15.00
improvement	7	5	3	8	-	10	5	-1	8	5	5.00

The results of their improvement after extensive reading can be described in table 1. The table shows the gap between each student's test score and mean of the test. Thus, the negative illustrates that a student's score is under the average of the students' test score. Comparing the results of two tests, the span of students' scores in the pre-test is greater than that in the post-test.

As seen in the figure 2 below, not all students improved their reading comprehension through extensive reading, although the overall scores are higher in the post-test than in the pre-test. In the pre-test, the students' score ranges varied, but there was very little score difference in the post-test relatively. It is therefore meaningful to compare the difference between each students score and the mean of each test.

The three bars for each student show how the learners developed through extensive reading. S3, S5, and S10, however, had only two bars, because two of them received the average score of the post-test, so it was regarded as no effect. In fact, all students agreed that the post-test was relatively easier than the pre-test. Therefore, it is difficult to identify if the overall 5 point increase resulted from the characteristic of post-test itself

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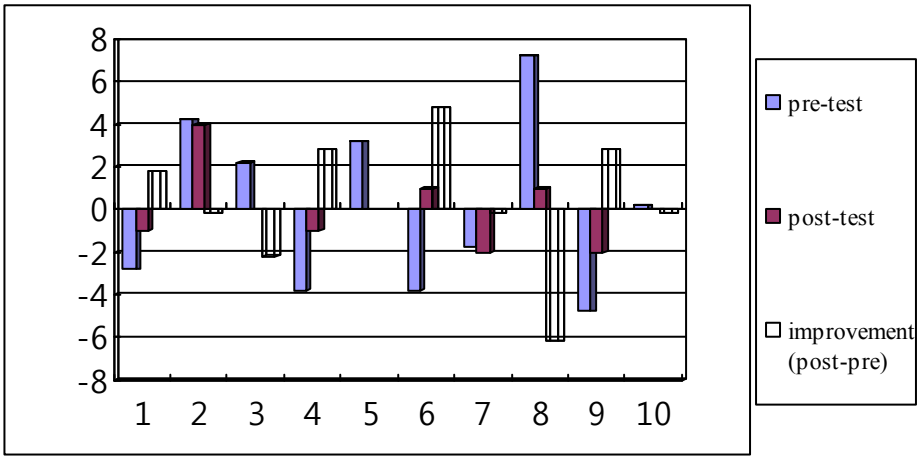
or from the effects of extensive reading. S5 could not take the post-test, so the influence of the reading on him was not included here. The third bar illustrates the extensive reading effects on each student's achievement, both negatively and positively. The longer the third bar, the greater the extensive reading effect. From the Figure 2, we can understand how extensive reading impacts each student. When the third bar is under zero (0), the extensive reading did not influence at all, thus the students' reading comprehension was regarded no improvement. When the third bar is over zero (0), then student is positively affected by extensive reading, so the reading comprehension ability improved. It is salient to identify the two polar effects of extensive reading by comparing the highest and the lowest of the third bar. In order to figure out clearly the features at the initial stage of extensive reading, ten participants were divided into two groups according to the degree of improvement after post-test: one is over zero and the other is under zero. The students improved their reading comprehension after two weeks were classified as Improved Group (IG) and S1, S4, S6, and S9 are in this group. The other students who less improved or did not improved were categorized as Less Improved Group (LIG) and S2, S3, S7, S8, and S10 are in this group. The features will be analyzed with the students' journal entries in the following section.

FIGURE 2

Comparison of the Span of Scores in Pre and Post-tests



2. Students' Diaries

Unexpected situations occurred during the research such as a car accident involving S9 and S5's grandmother's funeral on the very last day. S9 could not keep journal

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writing for two weeks continuously so he handed in only few days' writing but he took the post-test. S5 kept journal writing everyday but he could not take the post-test and answer the short survey about extensive reading. Additionally, S1 started her journal writing one week later after the study had begun. She had to join a certain activity run by the university and she was so busy that she could not write journal during the first week. A week later, after the study had launched, she asked whether she could join the present study or not, and was given an open choice; it depended on her desire. That was a clear example of extensive reading initiated the learner's own reading goal – for pleasure, and she did her journal writing sincerely and found a positive effect from extensive reading.

1) Improved Group (IG)

S6 had some distinguished features in his diary. First, he spent a longer time writing than the other students; he typically spent more than 1 hour, sometimes 5 hours, on reading, while the other students spent about 30 minutes – the suggested reading time of this study – and slightly more or less. Second, he tried to learn the reason for the difficulties which he faced during the reading process. He self-diagnosed his lack of knowledge about adverbial phrases and idioms, and prescribed to use an English-English dictionary. Third, he wrote seven entries in English while the other students wrote only in Korean; at the orientation session, the students were not asked to write in English. There were some grammar mistakes and incorrect spellings, but he tried to explain what he thought and felt while he was reading in English.

> Oh! It was very difficult and complex to me. It took about 5 minutes to read one sentence. Because there are many terms which I don't know….. But I spent the many time to find the words. I red the whole sentence and I found the words in dictionary step by step (Day 1 by S6).

Reading comprehension of S1, S4, and S9 also improved after two weeks study. Even though these three students are classified here as having received a positive effect from extensive reading, however, S1 is different from the other two students. S1 completed only eight entries because of her delay in joining the research. However, she had chosen to change her "rough" reading habits.

> The reason why I volunteered the study was to reform my rough reading habit, but I have not changed the reading habit completely yet (Day 2 by S1).

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S4 and S9 had similarly chosen the TOEIC test preparation book as reading materials. They wanted to both join the research and prepare for the test at the same time. Additionally, both of them believed that reading an English book was studying English and emphasized the 'studying' several times on their journal entries.

> I have to use reading materials… but I decided to study the book which I have been studying because I had no time to read (Day 3 by S4).
> If I set the time to read a book everyday (not the fixed reading time such as 30 minutes) and study systematically, I thought that my English competence would be improved surely (Day 2 by S9).

The four students were classified as 'improved group,' and there were similarities through their journal writings. Table 2 illustrated the similarities from the four students' entire diaries during the research period. They spent two or three hours on reading sometimes but usually two hours on it. They chose one or two books during the whole research period although they faced with some reading problems such as difficulties, lack of vocabulary or background knowledge. The reading material selection was quite different from that of the students of LIG. The four students recognized that their reading problem resulted in reading comprehension difficulty so they tried to spend more time on reading. In addition, they used the dictionary to back up the unknown vocabulary. Generally, IG selected the proper reading materials for their reading comprehension ability.

The students were reminded that the extensive reading was for pleasure but they read for general understanding. Furthermore, one student targeted studying English and he tried to achieve better score on TOEIC test. However, their reading perception was relatively positive so they tried to find the better way to understand or expand reading time to overcome the reading problems. They examined what their reading problems were and the solutions as well. With this effort, the students led to encourage and motivate for themselves whenever they faced with language difficulties.

TABLE 2
Similarities of Improved Group's Journal Writings

SIMILARTIES	
Reading Time (average)	120 minutes (comparatively stable)
Type of Reading Materials	English text book/Major text book/TOEIC course book ● used one or two books for two weeks ● easy for understanding

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Reason of Reading Material Selection	general understanding
Reflection on Extensive Reading	recognize the learning problem ● lack of vocabulary ● lack of background knowledge ● lack of grammatical knowledge

2) Less Improved Group (LIG)

S8 recorded the top score at the pre-test, but he got a worse score in the post-test, and overall he showed a reverse development. He chose an English conversation book and a comic book as a reading material. Compared to the other students' reading materials, his can be characterized as less serious and lighter. One criterion for selecting reading material was its being 'interesting' to him. He also underlined how paying attention was important in listening and he even tried to memorize the sentences while he was reading the conversation book. One interesting aspect of his diary was his 'copying' another journal entry; that is, two of his journal entries were the same (Day 2 and 3).

> I read the movie scrip and an English conversation book as yesterday. What I feel....the most important thing of listening is paying attention to listening at the moment, and vocabulary competence and other basic things are needed as well (Day 2 by S8).

Here the meaning of 'negative' does not imply a defective influence of extensive reading. It means that students did not show considerable improvement on the comparison of the two tests after a two-week reading process. It is interpreted here to mean that extensive reading had no effect at all or very little on the learner. All of these four students showed their own characteristic of reading through their journal entries.
S2 was an exceptionally negative effect case and she was the only one who had risen over the average in the two tests; she was thus comparatively classified as an advanced learner. In her journal entries, she demonstrated how to judge the proper reading materials for herself.

> There were not many difficult words in the article and it was so comprehensible that I could not find any boredom. I thought this kind of reading material was just right for me (Day 3 by S2).

S3 struggled with the reading speed through the research period. He thought that his reading speed was too slow and tried to read faster, but then he realized that his effort to read fast interfered with his reading comprehension.

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> All of a sudden, I felt that my reading speed was extremely slower (Day 7 by S3).
> I comprehended the sentences roughly and unclearly..... it resulted from my effort to speed up (Day 7 by S3).

S7 seemed to discover the text organization as the goal of his reading by his own interpretation. So he tried to understand it from the beginning to the end. He also spent less reading time than the other students; sometimes he read only for 10 minutes.

> Today I read a book and glanced at the organization of it (Day 2 by S7).
> I read the birth of Heracles today. I thought the organization of the text was so simple (Day 14 by S7)

S10 fixed the reading time at 30 minutes as per my guideline every day. His reading materials were various, such as The Korea Times, a novel, articles on the Internet, an academic textbook, an essay, an English textbook and the Korea Herald. He regarded the reading as a means of studying similar to S4 and S9, but there was a difference between their reading materials: S10 used various kinds of materials while the other two used only a TOEIC preparation course book.

> Today I read an article about sports, it was easy to understand because I love sports (Day 1 by S10).
> I read 'the prince and the pauper' today, and it was very difficult to understand because I skipped over several sentences from time to time (Day 14 by S10).

The students of LIG demonstrated certain similarities from their journal writings. As seen in the Table 3, the students had similarities but they were slightly different from those of IG at certain points.

There was only one student could not take the post-test, so the degree of his improvement of reading comprehension was not sure in this study. However, his journal writing had many similarities with other LIG students such as irregular reading time and reading materials, thus his writing might be citied here.

> I read pop song lyrics. Because the messages in lyrics are very interesting and it contains many useful expressions (Day 1 by S5).
> Today I read some poems, and I found out a very impressive expression 'he guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake,' and it was really awesome. I should read it again and record it (Day 2 by S5).

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In general, LIG students demonstrated some similarities from their journal writings. Some of similarities could be seen in the IG students' writings, but some differences could be found in two groups as well. The similarities of LIG journal writings are illustrated in the following table.

TABLE 3

Similarities of Less Improved Group's Journal Writings

	SIMILARTIES
Reading Time (average)	30 ~40 minutes (comparatively unstable)
Type of Reading Materials	English text book/ Major text book/ TOEIC course book/ News articles / Novel / Internet issues / Pop Songs / Comic Books / English Conversation textbook / Movie Scripts ● used many various topic reading materials ● students to change reading materials promptly when they faced with reading difficulties
Reason of Reading Material Selection	from for fun to for general understanding
Reflection on Extensive Reading	recognize the learning problem ● lack of vocabulary ● lack of background knowledge ● lack of grammatical knowledge disappointed with their own English reading level

The reading time varied from 7 minutes to 50 minutes but it was irregular. The variety can be shown in the selection of reading materials as well. Whenever the students felt the reading difficulties of their reading material, they tried to find another reading material. That was why their reading materials span was so wide and various. Their reading purpose was general understanding which was similar to that of the students of IG, but sometimes they selected the reading materials for fun. They realized the same reading problems and figured out the same reasons for them as IG students. That is, they felt that their reading problems caused from their lack of language competence such as vocabulary, grammar, and background knowledge. However, the LIG students tried to solve the problems with changing reading materials unlike the IG students used a language dictionary or expanded the reading time. In addition, the LIG students were disappointed with their English level and they concluded that their present reading materials were higher than their level. Therefore, they tried to find easier reading materials for them. It resulted in the variety of reading materials.

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3. The Role of Extensive Reading

A short survey about extensive reading was conducted right after a post-test. Four questions were used for the survey: *Do you think 30 minutes is proper for reading? Is the reading research period (two weeks) effective for improving reading comprehension ability? What suggestions do you have on the extensive reading? Do you expect your reading improvement from this reading period (two weeks)?*

TABLE 4
A Survey Results about Extensive Reading

Questions	Responses	Number of Students (%)
30 minutes reading time	• short/relatively short	5 (62%)
	• proper	2 (26%)
	• long/long enough to read per day	1 (13%)
Effectiveness of reading period	• helpful/useful	4 (50%)
	• not sure because two weeks are short	4 (50%)
Suggestions on improving extensive reading	• provide reading materials	2 (26%)
	• use the same reading materials	2 (26%)
	• start from easy reading materials	1 (13%)
	• provide reading classes regularly	1 (13%)
	• run for the long term	1 (13%)
	• teach grammatical points	1 (13%)
Expectance of reading comprehension improvement	• improve	4 (50%)
	• same as before	3 (38%)
	• not sure	1 (13%)

The responses from students were described in Table 4, the total number of students who took the post-test was nine, but one participant could not respond the survey as he had to attend the school event urgently.

After writing journals for two weeks, all students agreed on the potential power of extensive reading. That is, they all agreed that their English ability would improve substantially if they continuously partook in extensive reading. Even though their results were different individually, they believed that their English was improving compared to before joining the reading research. This is supportive evidence of extensive reading's affirmative effect in a psychological way. Thus, extensive reading assumes a role of being a 'booster' to learning English; students feel their English will be better at least in a certain way. All students thought that this depended on the period of reading; the longer they were exposed to reading something, the more their English improved.

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All students showed that they faced some difficulties and tried to solve them in their own way while reading. The difficulties were from a lack of background knowledge, grammatical knowledge and vocabulary, and some translation difficulties in Korean. However, they expected that those difficulties would be reduced if they continued extensive reading. With this expectation, extensive reading can be said to provide certain encouragement in learning a foreign language.

The reading material was a salient factor of extensive reading process. Many of them were confused when choosing the reading materials at the beginning of the present research. As a result, some students considered that studying English with a book was extensive reading simply because they read something. It was a crucial point relevant to how extensive reading affects learners' language improvement: an appropriate reading material means that was suitable for the learner's language level, his own interest, and his own reading style. To discover these factors is surely the instructor's role in extensive reading.

Extensive reading is usually an opposed concept to intensive reading, but the former has a more broad meaning and it actually contains the latter within it. Students did intensive reading, repeated reading, skimming and scanning occasionally during the two weeks and thus, reading extensively actually covers other types of reading, making extensive reading a probable representative form of reading.

There is no doubt that extensive reading facilitates the motivation in learning. Then, how it can be developed into a learning maximizer? According to student’s journal entries, the answer of this is quite clear; identifying the student's level, suggesting appropriate reading materials, and confirming or solving some minor problems such as guiding some grammar knowledge, or helping their understanding on different cultural background knowledge are keys. When those problems are too great and serious to enjoy reading itself, consulting with the learner and suggesting another way of reading is critical. Extensive reading instructors are responsible for all these things, so proper training for them is necessary for success of extensive reading.

V. CONCLUSION

This present study has two main limitations: One is that two weeks is not long enough to observe the extensive reading process. The other is that all participants are the researcher’s students, so they probably expect some improvement on their reading experience unconsciously or consciously for two weeks. However, there are some meaningful results of the study; the fact that all students realized that their learning problems and tried to find out how to overcome the problems is significant. Some of

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them attributed the problems to their lack of vocabulary or grammar knowledge, or understanding English culture. Combined with the expectation of their language improvement through extensive reading, this self-problem solving might lead the students' view of learning English to a potentially successful end. As Kim (2012) concluded, students might have their own strong beliefs in the long-term period of extensive reading. Self encouragement is a significant factor in learning foreign language, and extensive reading provides it to some degree. In an EFL environment like Korea, learners are exposed in limited language situation with the target language and extensive reading can produce a more expanded learning situation.

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Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Levels: College

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