

## The digital-mediated extensive reading on English Language learning of agriculture students

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### Article Info

#### Article history:

Received Aug 8, 2023

Revised Nov 27, 2023

Accepted Dec 11, 2023

#### Keywords:

Agriculture students

Digital-mediated extensive reading

English as academic purposes

Reading skill

Teaching strategy

### ABSTRACT

Reading is a skill that is initially taught in schools. Students are introduced to the alphabet and later learn to read texts. Reading Foreign languages is also introduced when students learn a foreign language. The student requires reading activities that include vocabulary learning. Extensive reading is one of the practical activities of reading. Nowadays, extensive reading activities include reading printed and digital text in e-books, journals, and internet and social media articles. In addition, digital extensive reading research on university students of agriculture is still rare. Thus, research on digital-mediated extensive reading in agricultural students' needs to be conducted to investigate whether it improves their reading comprehension. This study involved 84 agricultural students majoring Agroecotechnology study program. The participants take an English course. The data for this study was taken from the pre-test and post-test scores and questionnaire. The data will be analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The results of the study shows that the digital-mediated extensive reading effectively enhances the student's reading comprehension in English as academic purposes (EAP) setting, and the students express that the digital-mediated extensive reading provides flexibility, technology utilization, and reading.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Reading activities commonly conducted in the classroom are intensive reading in which the students answer a question following the text. A rigid question-answer exercise occurs in the classroom [1]. This kind of reading activity is like a test because the students answer the question and the teacher knows the answer. It is not clarified that the students learn to read; it is just a textbook-oriented activity, and they finish the task in the textbook. It could create a tedious reading activity. An alternative teaching strategy of reading is extensive reading to avoid boredom. This teaching strategy allows the students to read with pleasure because they are not asked when to read but to read as many texts or books as possible. In addition, it provides the students to read what they want at their linguistic ability. Moreover, extensive reading has several positive impacts on language learning. It is able to enhance reading comprehension [2], reading rate [3], and vocabulary [4].

In higher education, students gain knowledge independently by reading various texts, i.e., books, journal articles, and research reports. Thus, reading skill plays a pivotal role for students. Reading skill, in this case, is reading English text because the references the students read are primarily written in English,

although they are non-English majors. The aim of the English course in our faculty of agriculture expects the students to read scientific articles written in English comprehensively. The students must become accustomed to reading a lot in order to update the information related to the field of agriculture. Thus, extensive reading is assumedly suitable for them.

Extensive reading is one of the activities implemented for students to get them used to read. The extensive reading implementation may significantly impact English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' target language skills, learning moods, attitudes, and involvement [5]. Some previous studies revealed the positive impact of extensive reading programs on students' English proficiency. Extensive reading is a part of the reading curriculum [4]. It revealed that extensive reading improved students' aspects of language learning, including reading comprehension, reading rate, and vocabulary acquisition. Similarly, students could broaden their vocabulary after participating in an extensive reading program [6]. Gaining statistically significant in listening, reading, and writing test scores after one year of implementing extensive reading [7]. Those previous studies focused primarily on extensive reading activity that took place offline.

Extensive reading requires the institution to provide many books or journal articles, which is costly for some institutions. The institution should pay more for buying graded readers and various books. Some institutions are unable to provide many references. Teachers expressed that their schools lack English references [8], preventing them from implementing extensive reading. It is one of the challenges in implementing extensive reading at certain schools or universities in Indonesia. One of the strategies to overcome the challenge, e.g., lack of references, is to migrate to digital-mediated extensive reading. The digital-mediated is defined as non-printed texts that the students read. The non-printed texts include e-books, news on a website, journal articles, and other texts available on the internet. The digital-mediated extensive reading, in this present study, is defined as a reading activity in which the students read non-printed texts extensively. The idea of digital-mediated extensive reading stems from the existence of the digital age in which all written information is available not only in print but also in digital form.

Several previous studies regarding digital or online extensive reading have been conducted. EAP learners found it enjoyable and increased their confidence when they joined the online extensive reading (ER) [9]. Extensive reading online increased the students' reading speed [6]. The digital library book is preferable because it is colorful and has rich materials [10]. Other studies demonstrated the implementation of extensive reading through specific applications. Some teachers used Edmodo and Google Classroom to teach extensive reading [11]. The result showed that it was conducted effectively. A study of Japanese as a foreign language (JFL) classrooms also revealed that after engaging in hybrid extensive reading, students' reading rates on both elementary and intermediate-level reading material improved significantly [12]. Zhou and Day [9] also investigated whether online extensive reading can significantly improve the reading attitudes of intermediate and advanced English as academic purposes (EAP) students.

Those previous findings have been made. First, Online ER improves students' reading attitudes. Second, online extensive reading could be implemented as a required component in EAP courses because of its benefits in language proficiency. More importantly, the findings of a long-term study extended the positive effects of extensive reading to settings such as online reading and EAP. However, the impacts of digital-mediated extensive reading on students' reading comprehension and attitudes still need to be explored. This present study was conducted to fill those gaps by addressing the following research questions: i) does the digital-mediated extensive reading significantly affect the students' reading comprehension?; ii) what are the students' reading attitude toward digital-mediated extensive reading?

## **2. METHOD**

### **2.1. Setting**

Indonesia is an EFL country in which English is not used for daily conversation; it is learned in a classroom. English course is taught starting from primary education to higher education. English is taught once a week during primary and secondary education. While in higher education, English is taught once or twice a week, depending on the university's regulations. The English meeting difference is caused by the different credits of English courses offered in each university. This present study was conducted at one of the universities in Malang, Indonesia. English course had two credits in the university where the present study was conducted. It is a compulsory course for a first-year student. English was taught once a week for 100 minutes in a semester. The objective of the course was to build four skills, i.e., writing, listening, reading, and speaking. All teaching and learning were conducted online because of the pandemic condition.

### **2.2. Participants**

The participants of this study were first-year undergraduate students of the faculty of agriculture majoring in agroecotechnology. Two classes ( $n = 84$ ) were involved in the present study, and they were

willing to take part in the study. Generally, they had completed six years of studying English during junior and senior high school. At the university, they enrolled in a compulsory English course the authors taught. They were not taking other English courses during the semester when the present study was conducted.

### 2.3. Procedures

A quasi-experimental design was adopted because of practical constraints such as the class was already settled and it was impossible to assign random sampling. Two classes were involved in the study: one was a treatment group, and the other was the control group. The treatment group received a digital-mediated extensive reading, while the control group received a common teaching method such as intensive reading and grammar translation. The digital-mediated extensive reading was an independent variable, and the reading comprehension score was a dependent variable. The digital-mediated extensive reading was applied for a half-semester. Further, the treatment group filled out the questionnaires regarding their attitudes toward implementing the digital-mediated extensive reading.

The treatment group underwent the digital-mediated extensive reading during outside class hours. The treatment group was instructed on how to do the digital-mediated extensive reading. The participants read digital texts voluntarily, e.g., journal articles, news websites, e-books, and others, and they were not allowed to read printed text. They were required to self-select the digital texts. This self-selects activity enabled the students to choose based on their appropriate level of reading. They read at least one text weekly. The digital-mediated extensive reading was enjoyable; thus, there were no comprehension questions following the task. After reading the digital texts, they reported them weekly to a reading log. The student's reading progress was monitored by looking at the reading log and being reminded if they forgot to write in the reading log.

The reading log comprised the week, title, source, vocabulary, tenses used, and interesting points. The week was filled with the time when the students read the digital texts. The title was the text title the students read. The source was the website or reference from which the texts were taken. Vocabulary was filled with the difficult vocabulary found in the texts. The tenses used were the tenses found in the text. Interesting points were an aspect or something attracting the students when they read the texts. The reading log was made in the form of a Google Spreadsheet in which the link was distributed to a treatment group to fill out. The students filled out the reading log online by themselves. The teacher could monitor the number of students reading in real-time because of the Google Spreadsheet.

The control group did not receive the digital-mediated extensive reading. The participants in the control group read a module and did exercises on the module during outside class hours. They read the assigned text and did the assigned exercise. They did what the teacher assigned; they did not read what they wanted to read.

### 2.4. Data collection and analysis

The treatment and control groups took a pre-test and post-test to obtain the participants' reading scores as the data. The pre-and post-test had 30 questions comprising reading comprehension questions. The pre-test was administered before the implementation of digital-mediated extensive reading, while the post-test was administered after the implementation of digital-mediated extensive reading. The data was obtained from pre- and post-test on reading comprehension and the questionnaires. The normality test was conducted between the treatment and control groups. The normality test applied the Shapiro-Wilk test. The result of the pre-and post-test was analyzed using a non-parametric test, the Mann-Whitney U test, to know the significant difference between the treatment and control group. SPSS software was used to analyze the data.

The questionnaires regarding students' attitudes toward the digital-mediated extensive reading were distributed to the treatment group. The questionnaires comprised three categories, i.e., attitude toward learning flexibility, attitude toward digital technology, and attitude toward reading. A 4-point Likert scale was used for the questionnaires. The questionnaires used Google Forms, and the link to the questionnaires was shared with the Whatsapp group. The google Forms was used because it could calculate the result automatically, and the students filled it out conveniently using their smartphones. Questionnaires were analyzed using a 4-point Likert scale, i.e., 4 (strongly agree), 3 (agree), 2 (disagree), and 1 (strongly disagree). The questionnaire results were tabulated automatically because it used Google Forms. The mean score of each question was estimated. Then, the data were interpreted descriptively.).

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study transformed the teaching of reading by integrating digital-mediated extensive reading. The intention was to build a different reading experience for students. The treatment group was compared to the control group, a traditionally taught class, to determine whether any difference in reading comprehension

would be found. In addition, it investigates students' reading attitudes on implementing digital-mediated extensive reading.

### 3.1. Reading comprehension

The result of the normality test using the Shapiro-Wilk test is described in Tables 1 and 2. The results of both groups showed that they were not normally distributed ( $Sig < 0.05$ ). Then, a non-parametric test, the Mann-Whitney U test, was running.

The result of the pre-test and post-test on reading comprehension are shown in Table 3. It shows that the gain score from the treatment group ( $M = 15$ ) is higher than that from the control group ( $M = 1$ ). It implies that digital-mediated extensive reading affects students' reading comprehension. Furthermore, it needs to check whether the difference is significant by using the Mann-Whitney U test. The Mann-Whitney U test was running because the data was not a normal distribution.

Table 1. Normality test for the control group (Shapiro Wilk test)

Control group	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pre-test	0.776	42	0.000
Post-test	0.646	42	0.000

Table 2. Normality test for the treatment group (Shapiro Wilk test)

Treatment group	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pre-test	0.831	42	0.000
Post-test	0.598	42	0.000

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for pre and post-test

	Pre-test		Post-test		Gain	
	Mean	SD.	Mean	SD.	Mean	SD.
Control group	64	6.36	65	4.12	1	4.73
Treatment group	76	22.12	91	16.6	15	21.73

SD = standar deviation

The result of the mean rank from a post-test between the control and treatment groups is exhibited in Table 4. The mean rank for the control group ( $M = 28.43, N = 42$ ) and treatment group ( $M = 56.57, N = 42$ ) were different because the treatment group was higher than the control group. It showed that the student's reading comprehension from the treatment group, which received the digital-mediated extensive reading, was better than that of the control group. Table 5 shows the result of Mann-Whitney U.

Table 5 shows that Sig. (2-tailed) value of reading comprehension was .000. Therefore, the students in the control and treatment groups differed significantly ( $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ). It means that the digital-mediated extensive reading significantly affects the students' reading comprehension. The digital-mediated extensive reading helps to increase students' reading comprehension.

These results show that digital-mediated extensive reading effectively improves students' reading comprehension. The students' reading comprehension in the treatment group improved significantly than in the control group. This result advocates other studies on the effect of extensive reading on reading comprehension [4], [13]–[15].

There are several possible reasons why digital-mediated extensive reading effectively improves students' reading comprehension. The first reason is an increased vocabulary. A high frequency of reading enables one to encounter similar words; as a result, vocabulary increases. The students re-encounter high-frequency words when they read a lot [16]. Vocabulary is an essential element of language that supports a text's understanding. The more students know the vocabulary, the easier they understand the text. In addition, the students are allowed to choose the topic of the text based on their interests. It provides them with a specific topic (narrow reading) because they read similar topics. It also makes them encounter similar vocabularies repeatedly. Extensive reading provides an opportunity to encounter repeated words in context [17], [18].

The second reason is reading rate or reading fluency. Comprehending a text is affected by reading rate or reading fluency. The students who read slowly assumedly challenged to comprehend the text because they needed to check the vocabulary many times and then lost the gist. While the students who read quickly

find difficulty in comprehending text because their objective is to finish reading a text. Therefore, the students can comprehend the text at their appropriate reading rate. The learners are encouraged to reading fluency if they read a text which is “well within their linguistic ability” [19].

The third reason is reading strategy. The digital-mediated extensive reading facilitates the students to read various topics or genres of texts. Various reading strategies the students use depend on the reading purpose and the level of proficiency. More proficient students use more varied reading strategies than that less proficient students [20].

Table 4. Mean ranks

Ranks	Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Reading comprehension	Control	42	28.43	1194.00
	Treatment	42	56.57	2376.00
	Total	84	-	-

Table 5. Mann-Whitney U result

Test	Reading comprehension
Mann-Whitney U	291.000
Wilcoxon W	1194.000
Z	-5.418
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000

### 3.2. Students' attitudes toward the digital-mediated extensive reading

Based on the result of the Mann-Whitney U test shows that digital-mediated extensive reading affects students' reading comprehension. The questionnaires were distributed to the treatment group to get deeper data regarding students' attitudes toward the digital-mediated extensive reading. Three categories were included in the questionnaires, i.e., attitude toward learning flexibility, attitude toward digital technology, and attitude toward reading.

#### 3.2.1. Attitudes toward learning flexibility

The data obtained from a questionnaire dealing with attitudes towards learning flexibility are presented in Table 6. Table 6 highlights the means of each statement. The result shows positive attitudes on the learning flexibility. The Table 6 indicates that the digital-mediated extensive reading enables the students to search for unlimited English texts on the internet ( $mean = 3.74$ ). The students can read English texts using gadgets everywhere ( $mean = 3.84$ ). The students can determine when they want to read ( $mean = 3.61$ ). The students read English texts during their free time ( $mean = 3.26$ ). The students can determine how long they read ( $mean = 3.34$ ).

Table 6. Result of questionnaires regarding attitudes toward learning flexibility

Statement	mean
I can search for unlimited English texts on the internet	3.74
I can read English texts using gadgets everywhere	3.84
I can determine when I want to read	3.61
I read English texts during my free time	3.26
I can determine how long I read	3.34

#### 3.2.2. Attitudes toward digital technology

The findings of the questionnaire about attitudes toward digital technology are presented in Table 7 below. Table 7 exhibits the means of each statement. The result implies positive attitudes on digital technology. The Table 7 presents data indicating that the utilization of the internet facilitates the process of searching for English texts ( $mean = 3.89$ ). The students are familiar with digital technology (website, Instagram, Facebook) and efficiently operate it ( $mean = 3.82$ ). The students think that technology can help them learn English ( $mean = 3.87$ ). The students use websites conveniently to search for English texts they want ( $mean = 3.66$ ).

Table 7. Result of questionnaires regarding attitudes toward digital technology

Statement	Mean
The internet helps to search English texts	3.89
I am familiar with digital technology (website, Instagram, Facebook) and efficiently operate it	3.82
I think that technology can help me learn English	3.87
I use websites conveniently for searching English texts that I want	3.66

### 3.2.3. Attitudes toward reading

The result of questionnaire about attitudes toward reading are displayed in Table 8. Table 8 illustrates the means of each statement. It reflects positive attitudes on reading. According to the data presented in the Table 8, the students gain a lot of new information and knowledge through reading ( $mean = 3.61$ ). Students' vocabulary increases through reading ( $mean = 3.61$ ). The students think that English skill helps them in their future career ( $mean = 3.84$ ). The students' other courses are good because of their reading skills ( $mean = 3.45$ ). The students are comfortable reading digital texts ( $mean = 2.92$ ). The students feel that their reading skill increase ( $mean = 3.24$ ).

Table 8. Result of questionnaires regarding attitudes toward reading

Statement	Mean
I gain a lot of new information and knowledge through reading	3.61
My vocabulary increases through reading	3.61
I think that English skills will help me in my future career	3.84
My other course's score is good because of my reading skill	3.45
I am comfortable reading the digital texts	2.92
I feel that my reading skill increase	3.24

In short, the result of questionnaires shows that the digital-mediated extensive reading facilitates learning flexibility. The flexibility includes easy searching English texts, accessibility using gadgets everywhere, and time and duration of the reading. Digital-mediated extensive reading is suitable for educational institutions having poor-resource printed texts. Gadgets can be utilized as a tool to read the text. Moreover, the students are tech-savvy and convenient using gadgets.

The internet provides abundant digital texts, some of which can be accessed freely. In an EFL country, printed English texts are rarely available, only in the classroom. Therefore, the internet is a resourceful English text for students in EFL countries. Online learning environment facilitates many reading resources for learners [21]. The digital-mediated extensive reading enables the text in form of digital so that the texts can be read everywhere using the students' gadgets as long as the internet connection is available. Thus, digital-mediated extensive reading offers flexibility. One of the strengths of the online environment is flexibility [22]. The digital format allows students to read extensively during a short spare time, such as waiting for transportation at the bus stop or the next class, because they read using their gadgets and bring their gadgets everywhere.

The digital-mediated extensive reading enables students to read out-class time; therefore, they decide when to read. One of the ways to integrate extensive reading into language classrooms is by implementing it in an after-school club [23]. The students read at their convenience, whether in daylight or at night. The students maximize their free time by reading extensively. In addition, digital-mediated extensive reading makes students use their time effectively to gain knowledge by reading a lot during their free time instead of playing games. The students themselves set the duration of reading so that the students determine the reading pace and whether they want to read more than an hour or less than an hour. One benefit of reading in an online environment is that the students read at their own time and pace [21]. The students are authoritative toward their reading time, and they voluntarily read what texts and how long they spend reading.

The result of questionnaires shows that the digital-mediated extensive reading provides digital technology because it enables the internet to search English texts. Furthermore, it is relevant to students familiar with digital technology. Thus, they find it easy to operate it. Students' familiarity with digital technology enables them to operate websites conveniently and select which websites contain English texts they want to read.

Technology plays a role in finding the texts. The web-based reading strategy provides easy retrieval and flexibility [24]. Technology helps with efficient work. The students do not need to go to the library to

find the texts, but they can find them through websites. The students are presumably considered digital natives, so they live within digital technology. They always bring gadgets connected to the internet and scroll up social media. The students utilize social media, like Instagram, to find an initial text [25].

The technology that can help is a website, gadgets instructions. The websites and gadgets instructions are primarily written in English; therefore, the students get accustomed to reading in English. The students know how to use the website to find English texts and select websites containing English texts. The students include a technology-savvy generation that does not face technology problems, e.g., computer skills [26].

The student's attitude toward reading is positive, as seen from the result of questionnaires. The digital-mediated extensive reading enables students to gain much new information because they read extensively. In addition, their vocabulary also increases. They consider English skill is one of the critical skills for their future. Furthermore, reading skill also assists the students in improving their other's courses. However, the comfort of reading digital texts received less value because of screen radiation making it less comfortable reading digital text.

Reading texts opens knowledge and updates current information. The learner's objectives of extensive reading are various, one of which is to obtain information [19]. Extensive reading enlarges the students' knowledge [27]. The students may read texts which are attractive to them, such as their hobby and their passion. It is possible to encounter the same vocabulary many times during reading because of a similar topic they read; thus, students' vocabulary increases. Vocabulary was acquired through repeated exposure to similar words [4]. When the students encounter the same vocabulary, they can acquire the vocabulary incidentally, which they learn without any purpose to gain the vocabulary. Acquiring new vocabulary is one of the benefits of extensive reading online [6].

As English becomes a global language in which many people communicate with other people using English, the demand for English skill competence elevates. "Today English is a commodity, valued internationally like gold or oil" [28]. Several jobs, scholarship requirements, conferences, and journal articles require English-written or English-spoken language. It implies that having English skills is vital for the future. During digital-mediated extensive reading, the students get accustomed to reading, and as a result, it creates a reading habit. The students could find an effective reading strategy because they frequently read. Extensive reading increased reading strategy use [20]. Consequently, the students could effectively find the gist of texts from other courses.

Reading digital texts is less comfortable. It is engendered by the eye. The eyes are tired when they read digital text. The radiation from the screen makes the eyes tired. Reading a long text on a device makes their eyes strained [29] and sore eyes [30]. This result advocates [9]. They found that "ER improves a reading skill". Asian teachers believed that the student's reading proficiency was effectively enhanced because of extensive reading [31].

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Strategies for teaching reading are various. One of which is extensive digital-mediated reading. The digital-mediated extensive reading effectively enhances the student's reading comprehension in EAP settings. Three possible reasons for making digital-mediated extensive reading effective are vocabulary improvement, reading rate improvement, and various reading strategies application. In addition, students' attitudes toward digital-mediated extensive reading are positive. The students express that the digital-mediated extensive reading provides flexibility, technology utilization, and reading.

The limitation of the present study is the small number of participants and self-reported questionnaires on reading attitudes. The generalizability of this study needs to be considered because of the small number of participants involved. Self-reported questionnaires tend to be subjective and suffer biased responses. For further research, it is suggested to involve more participants and second-year higher education students.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was funded by LPPM Universitas Brawijaya under contract number 974.21/UN10.C10/PN/2022.




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