

## Factors for Successful Implementation of Extensive Reading Program Using Online/Offline Blended English Library System in Schools

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The objective of this study was to investigate factors that could bring about successful implementation of extensive reading using online/offline blended English library system called 'Reading Gate' in primary and secondary schools. Although there are a great number of studies on effects of various extensive reading on linguistic, cognitive, and affective development, few studies have investigated how extensive reading programs can be implemented at large scale, e.g., whole school level. After analyzing students' reading levels in 200 schools using the same online extensive reading program called Reading Gate, results showed that while some schools were successful, others were not. Five primary and 13 middle schools were selected as successful schools. Data on implementation of the program of schools was gathered. Eighteen teachers and seven headteachers took part in the interview. After analyzing these data on the implementation of the extensive reading program, results revealed that the following five factors for successful implementation of blended extensive reading programs: online level-up system, teacher intervention, integration with the curriculum, school-level support, and parents' awareness of literacy. This suggests that each factor might have contributed to the successful implementation of the extensive reading program at large scale. Implications and applications of this finding are discussed in this study.*

**Key words:** Extensive Reading, Online/Offline Blended Reading Program, English Library, Literacy, Free Voluntary Reading.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Evidence for the power of reading or for the value of free voluntary reading, continues to be accumulated in the field of English as a second or foreign language. In the last few decades, studies have shown that those who do more extensive reading have better development in reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary [1]-[7]. These results hold for the first and second

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language acquisition, and for children and adults by Krashen [8]. It is suggested that by reading widely and frequently, students acquire general academic background knowledge and subject specific knowledge to assist in their learning. It is also observed that students acquire vocabulary, a key component of background knowledge, through extensive reading. In the literature on extensive reading a number of studies have been conducted on what brings such effects. The literature shows that factors related to positive effect can be categorized into methods and materials, *inter alia*, timed reading, integrated instruction, graphic organizers, L1 reading, and subject knowledge.

In Korea, over the last several years efforts have been made by the government and 17 local offices of education to bring about changes in English language education. Among the English language policies proposed by the government was to increase students' exposure to English through extensive reading in the EFL(English as a foreign language) situation. Some primary and middle schools were selected and funded as model schools for the policy to be implemented and for successful cases to be disseminated across the country. The close examination of the policy reveals that the policy has dual purposes, *i.e.* to reduce the burden of private tutoring and to narrow the English input gap among students by providing equal support at the school-level regardless of students' family background. Some model schools provided their students with extensive reading through online/offline blended English Library system. This was introduced with the underlying claim that the second/foreign language acquisition can be facilitated by extensive reading as language is subconsciously acquired while students focus on meaning rather than form [8], [9].

Many previous studies focus on benefits of extensive reading in foreign language learning. Little studies have been conducted about what makes extensive reading effective in improving students' target language. Pedagogical implications can be drawn from information on factors for successful extensive reading, and then applied to different educational contexts. This study aims to investigate common successful factors from cases of primary and secondary schools implementing extensive reading program effectively, and to provide pedagogical implications and applications for the implementation of extensive reading at the formal education setting in schools.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Studies on Effects of Extensive Reading

The review of the literature on extensive reading shows that many studies have been conducted about effects of extensive reading on language development, cognitive and affective features [1]-[11]. Extensive reading is gaining support and recognition in second or foreign language pedagogy.

The analysis of research on variables shows that setting is among variables that affect the outcome of extensive reading. According to Jeon and Day [11], although an ESL(English as a second language) setting is thought to be a better surrounding for learning English, an EFL setting can also produce positive effects despite its limited input environment. This implies the

way of implementing extensive reading program can impinge on the outcome of extensive reading in an EFL(English as a foreign language) setting. Jeon and Day [11] also find that the library size has no significant influence on the impact of extensive reading. They suggest that teachers can start extensive reading on a small scale in their classrooms when the school cannot provide a library.

### 2.2 Connecting Extensive Reading with Technology

Recent developments in linking technology with reading have changed the direction of extensive reading. Examples of making use of technology in extensive reading are shown in recent studies at different settings [12]-[15]. The high effect of web-based stories suggests the possibility of adopting a computer reader program instead of setting up an expensive library [13]. Robb and Kano [13] state a computer reader program can be a great substitute for a library. According to their suggestion[13], Moodle Reader not only provides students with vast amount of reading materials, but it can also track students' reading progress and comprehension. It is also suggested that it can be used outside of the classroom, so it does not intrude on classroom time [13].

While the development of online English reading programs is actively being done and introduced to different educational settings, research on effects of extensive reading using technology is in its infancy yet. It is also needed to discuss how to integrate technology with the present offline extensive reading system. Utilizing cutting-edge technology does not necessarily mean that all the present offline extensive reading programs should be discarded and replaced by the online system. One needs to seek the way of maximizing benefits of extensive reading depending on contexts. There are a number of variables to be considered in making decisions, particularly at educational institutions.

## 3. RESEARCH METHOD

5 primary and 13 middle schools were selected among 200 public schools using the online/offline blended English Library system called 'Reading Gate' in 2016.<sup>1</sup> In Fig. 1, Reading Gate is an online/offline blended extensive reading program with 1,600 e-books with activities and online quizzes about 2,700 authentic books based on LMS(Learning Management System). It provides different types of activities such as Reading Comprehension, Vocabulary Practice & Test, Summary or T/F Test, Gap Filling, and Writing, and so on. All books are in the library, and they can be borrowed and read.

<sup>1</sup> The best schools were selected based on their total ranking according to their students' total sum of acquired points of the online/offline program called 'Reading Gate'. To have interviews with the participants from the best schools, we tried to email, call, and visit them with the help of the headteachers and teachers.

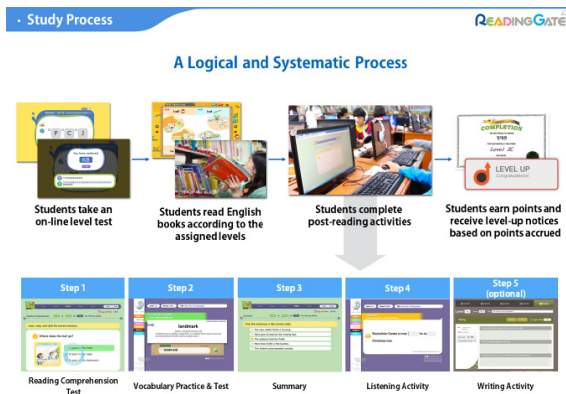


Fig. 1. Diagram of the Reading Gate System

The participating schools were categorized best schools where students' reading has improved greatly since the introduction of the reading system. As shown in Table 1, 18 teachers and 7 headteachers took part in the interview about the implementation of the reading system. The gathered interview data were analyzed with the secondary source data such as documents and records. The collected data from different sources were categorized according to its frequency and salience. Factors affecting the effects of extensive reading were drawn from the categorized information gathered from different cases.

Table 1. The Profile of Participants in Interviews

Participants (Sex, Age)	School / City	Position
A(M, 34)	A Middle S. / S City	Teacher
B(F, 41)	B Middle S. / B City	Teacher
C(M, 29)	C Middle S. / S City	Teacher
D(F, 37)	D Middle S. / B City	Teacher
E(F, 43)	E Middle S. / B City	Teacher
F(F, 39)	F Middle S. / B City	Teacher
G(F, 36)	G Middle S. / S City	Teacher
H(F, 32)	H Middle S. / B City	Teacher
I(M, 50)	I Middle S. / J City	Teacher
J(F, 32)	J Middle S. / B City	Teacher
K(F, 36)	K Middle S. / S City	Teacher
L(F, 39)	L Primary S. / S City	Teacher
M(F, 43)	M Primary S. / B City	Teacher
N(M, 45)	N Primary S. / S City	Teacher
O(F, 41)	O Primary S. / B City	Teacher
P(F, 45)	P Primary S. / S City	Teacher
Q(F, 34)	Q Primary S. / C City	Teacher
S(M, 59)	S Primary S. / S City	Headteacher
T(F, 59)	J Primary S. / S City	Headteacher
U(F, 58)	U Primary S. / B City	Headteacher
V(M, 58)	V Primary S. / B City	Headteacher
W(F, 60)	H Middle S. / S City	Headteacher
X(M, 57)	X Middle S. / B City	Headteacher
Y(F, 56)	Y Middle S. / S city	Headteacher

#### 4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Five factors were drawn from the analysis of the gathered data from the documentary source and the interviews with the participating 18 teachers and 7 headteachers: online level-up system, teacher intervention, integration with the curriculum, school-level support, and parents' awareness of literacy.

##### 4.1 Online Level-up System

All of the 18 teachers said in the interview that the LMS(learning management system) played an important role in encouraging students to actively participate in extensive reading. What they observed was that the online program allowed them to consistently motivate their students to take part in extensive reading since the online system made it possible for the busy teachers to check their students' routine activities with extensive reading. They also added that online library system made it possible for students to read at home or at schools at any time available. This is in parallel with Robb and Kano's suggestion [13] about using technology in extensive reading at the large scale.

Teacher C from A middle school said about the benefits of using the system:

*One of the good things about using the system is that it shows at which level individual students are. I can see clearly which students have achieved the goal or not. Based on the information I can give guidance to those in need. This is not complicated at all. It's simple. All you have to do is to follow the procedure it has set for users.(Interview with Teacher C, A middle school)*

Most of the teachers and headteachers mentioned the benefits of its level-up system shown in the table below. Students can move automatically to the next level when they earn enough points for their current level.

Table 2. Level-point Relationship

Level	Pre-K	KA	1A	2A	3A	4A	5A	6A
		~KC	~1C	~2C	~3C	~4C	~5C	~6C
ESL	PK	K	G 1	G2	G3	G4	G5	G6
EFL	Alphabet & Phonics	P G1~3	P G4~6	M	H	CSAT	Foreign Language	High School
Point/Book	1.0	1.1~ 3.2	4.5~ 7.2	8.5~ 11.7	14.0~ 16.6	19.9~ 23.6	26.1~ 27.0	31.4~ 36.0

Note: P for Primary School, M for Middle School, H for High School, CSAT(College Scholastic Ability Test)

In Table 2, points are given to students when they acquire 80% of the scores per each step after reading printed books or e-books. The online level up system aims to help students stay motivated and to get direct access to information on their reading performance. The level automatically changes when the volume of reading, i.e., the number of points, reaches a

required amount. Every time individual students complete each level, they are given a certificate called a level-up certificate<sup>2</sup>.

To illustrate the online level-up system, students normally need to read 100 books for their level up. As the following table shows, a point is given when a reader has passed the current course after reading a book. The point value is set for each book and marked on the cover of the book. The point value is determined based on the level of the book, word counts, and other variables of grading books.



Fig. 2. Online Level-up System

Two headteachers of J primary school and H middle school said that they gave the level-up certificates directly to the students, and this was strong motivation for students' extensive reading. They added that parents were as delighted and motivated as their children:

*One mother expressed her thanks to me. She was very happy to see her daughter at Grade 6 feel proud of the level-up certificate received directly from me. She said she could see her child get confident in English. She tried to show me that since the school started the reading program, her daughter improved a lot in her English vocabulary and writing as well. (Interview with Headteacher B, J primary school)*

#### 4.2 Teacher Intervention

The analysis of the interview data reveals that the role of homeroom teachers or English teachers can be one of key variables of effective extensive reading. It was often said that homeroom teachers were very important for students to get involved with extensive reading. The teachers said that if students had strong encouragement from homeroom teachers, they were eager to read more books and got good results. Teacher H from L middle school said that she checked her students' reading every day. It resulted in her students' active participation in extensive reading compared with other students whose homeroom teachers were not intervened in the reading process.

According to Teacher E, the principal of C primary school in D city, he regularly visited classes and praised the students.

<sup>2</sup> A certificate of completion is awarded (with the principal's name) to a student who has achieved a level-up.

He added that homeroom teachers could recommend most motivated students for an award given by the headteacher. There were schools where homeroom teachers at the same grade had regular meetings and shared their ideas on helping students read more and better, solving problems they have faced, or other emerging issues over extensive reading.

Teacher F of G middle school explained how she interacted with her students:

*I check up the record of individual students' reading, reading points and levels on the regular basis. If one student has difficulty in making progress, I talk with the student and try to find out what problems he or she has. Sometimes I suggest reading strategies or I just listen to what students say about difficulties in reading. (Interview with Teacher F, G middle school)*

#### 4.3 Integration with the Curriculum

As the curriculum of the primary and middle schools are different, it was found that the way of integrating extensive reading system into the regular curriculum at middle schools was different from that of primary schools. One prominent way of integrating extensive reading into the regular curriculum was that the results of extensive reading were made as part of performance assessment.

According to Teacher H of J Middle School, the school reflected students' English reading results in performance assessment as 100 points in the first semester (by her school standard). She said that the school has a plan to raise the portion to 200 points.

Teacher N from S middle school also explained how her school reflected reading results in performance assessment. At her school maximum 5 points can be reflected into the performance assessment. Her school has a similar plan to J Middle School, i.e. to increase the portion to 10 points. This school has assigned one hour out of total three English classes to English reading class in the computer room.

*At the training session, it was suggested that we can use the ER program at the regular class. I understand this brings a very positive effect on my students' English language learning. In my class, reading books and doing activities is given as homework. I check who does or does not the homework on the computer. This is part of assessment. If they want a good score in English, they have to do the homework. This works very well and not a burden for me. (Interview with Teacher N, S middle school)*

#### 4.4 School-level Support

It was found that students got more motivated and good results when provided with the school-level support as incentives such as events, awards, coupons, favorite snacks, etc. 'Market Day' and 'Bookworm Awards' are good examples of school-level incentive events for students' good extensive reading habits. Teacher K of B Primary School explained how the school has run Market Day program utilizing Mileage Account:

*Our school makes use of students' mileage account, and arranges prizes and students' favorite incentive programs to draw up students' interests and participations. This has been very effective in enhancing students' motivation for reading. (Interview with Teacher K, B primary school)*

He gave the details of the incentive program as follows. It is called H Dream High Mileage Account Program. In Table3, items for Mileage include Participation of After-school Program, English Book Reading, Reading Assistance Program, and Using Library on Saturday. Each item is given mileage point(s).

Table 3. Points for Each Reading Activity

No	Activity	Points
1	attention of all after-school classes for a month	1 point per each After-school class
2	registration of 1 after-school class	2 points per month class
3	registration of 2 after-school classes	3 points per month classes
4	registration of more than 3 after-school classes	5 points per month school classes
5	participation in English Book Reading Program	1 point per 30 points
6	participation in Reading Assistance Program	1 point per 5 books
7	Using Library and English Library on Saturday	1st~3rd grade; 1 point per more than 1 hour, 4th~6th grade; 1 point per more than 2 hours

More details on the incentive program are as follows:

- Recording mileage points in the account and using them as 'Market Day' coupon (1 point = 100 won);
- A student or teacher can record the points in the individual's account, but the teacher must confirm it by marking at the check box;
- Only one account available per student;
- Preparing extra incentives like Weekend Double Points Accumulation Event when needed to boost up students' interests and participations;
- Purchasing is available only in English, helping English speaking experience lead to acquiring English Conversation Skills and motives for further English learning;
- The school can invite parents to the venue. They can make contribution with prizes like stationery, snacks, refreshments, beverage, etc..
- Budget must be secured for the incentive program.

#### 4.5 Parents' Awareness of Literacy

All the participating school agreed that parents' support is important for the successful implementation of the online/offline blended extensive reading program system. They

said that parents needed to be aware of the importance of literacy. It was found that all the schools made efforts to raise parents' awareness of literacy. One of the common strategies was to hold orientations or workshops for parents, which take place in the beginning of each semester. It was also revealed that students' reading was better at the semester when many parents attended than at the semester with less number of the attending parents. The meetings with parents lasted one hour at average, followed by the meeting with teachers. Most teachers said that parents had an opportunity to understand how the reading system works, and also to think about what they can do to support their children's literacy development. Teacher P of K middle school shared what one of the parents told at the workshop:

*This is what I was told from a mother of one student in my class. She said, 'The principal looks like he strongly believes that reading is important in literacy. I can see his point. ... I decided to use the online library with my child at home. Now I knew how to use it through the experiential session. (Interview with Teacher P, K middle school)*

## 5. CONCLUSION

One of main problems most EFL(English as a foreign language) situations have faced is that students are less or little exposed to language input. This is true of the Korean context. The review of the literature on language learning shows that extensive reading is gaining support and recognition in second or foreign language pedagogy, particularly for providing rich input for students' reading development. This study focuses on an extensive reading program integrated with technology that was implemented at the large scale. It aims to draw what factors have brought success in the implementation of the online/offline extensive reading program system.

The analysis of the gathered data from the interviews with teachers and headteachers reveals that there are five factors that can affect the effects of extensive reading at the large scale. The first one is using online level-up system. By using the LMS(learning management system) of the online/offline reading program, students get motivated to read more, and teachers get access to the way of encouraging their students to be engaged in extensive reading. Secondly, teachers' intervention can make a difference in students' reading out of class as well as in class. It is emphasized that using an extensive reading system is not necessarily leading to successful implementation. Thirdly, the extensive reading program can be effective in improving students' reading when it is integrated into the regular curriculum than implemented in separation. Fourthly, the school-level support can be provided to encourage students to take an active part in extensive reading activities. It is closely related to headteachers' leadership to invite those involved in school education and work in collaboration [13], [15]. Lastly, the positive effects of the online/offline extensive reading system can be maximized if parents are aware of literacy and a role of reading in literacy development. It is suggested that schools provide an

opportunity for parents to experience and reflect upon their own way of supporting children at home.

Many students come from home environments that are not language-rich, where vocabulary development is limited. So on/off blended English library system can be a good solution to support the students and teachers to have good environment of extensive reading at both schools and homes. This study also indicates that English language learners benefit from the same language-rich environments as their native English-speaking peers. English language learners also must acquire content area knowledge and literacy skills based on Extensive Reading with their online/off line blended English library system.

In conclusion, the introduction of the online/offline library system can be a viable way of providing rich exposure to authentic input, but the introduction does not necessarily guarantee a successful implementation. It is suggested that those parties involved play a role in gaining students' language development. Implications regarding learning management system, teacher training, curriculum reconstruction, headteacher leadership, and parents' support need to be considered in making educational policy to disseminate such online/offline library system to other schools across the country. Regarding the extensive reading program using online/offline English library in schools, more teachers need to know five successful factors and share their successful experience through better studies in the future.

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