

# Interactive Group in Extensive Reading to Enhance Reading Ability of Thai Undergraduate Students

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Received 21/12/2020	<b>Abstract</b>  Reading is as essential as other communicative skills; however, reading practice is not likely to be the first choice of practice for learners. This is especially true among Thai learners. This study examines extensive reading (ER), otherwise known as reading for pleasure or wide reading in combination with interactive groups to investigate the effects on Thai undergraduate students' reading ability, and their opinions toward their reading development, including an exploration of self-autonomous development. The study was a mix-method study with 30 students from a university in Thailand who voluntary participated for a 10-week study. Results from the pre-test scores ( $M = 13.17$ , $SD = 4.58$ ) and post-test scores ( $M = 20.73$ , $SD = 6.28$ ) indicate that there was a significant increase in the reading scores, $t(29) = -6.3$ , $p = .000$ . The results suggest that extensive reading activities are likely to contribute to participants' reading skill improvement. In addition to the quantitative analysis, the qualitative interview analysis also revealed that participants maintained a positive attitude towards their reading skill development and self-autonomous skills.
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## 1. Introduction

English language teachers in Thailand have changed their teaching approaches to provide learners opportunities to develop their skills. Yet reading is as essential as other skills. It is often utilized for studying rather than for communication as it can support learners in acquiring advanced knowledge in their specific field of study as well as for self-improvement (Chin-Ming Chen et al., 2014; Jaisook, 2015; Harmer, 2001; Vintinner et al., 2015). Moreover, as various studies show, it can help readers gain specific in-depth knowledge and vocabulary and improve writing skills (Ediger, 2001; Harmer, 2001; Lems et al., 2010; Scrivener, 2005). However, when learners think of improving or developing their English language skills, reading is not likely to be a priority as reading can be tiring or boring when reading materials are not interesting or the topics do not align with the readers' interests. Simply put, they might not want to read when the reading material fails to engage them, leading to fewer instances of reading practice outside the classroom.

During my years of teaching and observing classroom experiences in various English courses, I have found that students always begin their reading by looking up the meaning of unknown words in the dictionary rather than focusing on the main idea of the story. Even when students get the meaning of unfamiliar words, they also get tired and bored from searching for words in dictionaries. Afterwards, they still do not know the story or main idea of the text, which can make them uninterested in reading or fail to discover the more significant themes in the text. The texts are thus discarded, and learning activities terminated.

Extensive Reading (ER) is well-known as individual reading practice outside the classroom. Whether reading for pleasure or entertainment, readers can purposefully choose their preferred texts and read for general understanding rather than as a school exercise, such as finding main ideas or identifying parts of the text. It means that the readers are less stressed and can find pleasure in their reading activity. Moreover, many studies concur that the benefits of extensive reading are not only reading comprehension, vocabulary recognition, and linguistic confidence, but that it also cultivates a positive attitude in the reader towards reading, which can lead to the practice of writing on their own (Ediger, 2001; Scrivener, 2005; Lems et al., 2010; Harmer, 2001). Although extensive

reading studies revealed benefits on language proficiency, many scholars have questioned the effectiveness of extensive reading throughout much research. For example, Nakanishi (2015) conducted a meta-analysis and Jeon and Day (2016) analyzed the extent to which extensive reading proved beneficial to learners' reading fluency, reading comprehension, and vocabulary.

Reading ability can also be improved when interacting with friends as people learn from each other through interaction (Handzic & Tolhurst, 2002). When they are grouped, they have a chance to interact with their peer(s) in various ways as the group activity creates a positive learning environment where members learn from each other, sharing their ideas and experiences. It also supports other personal skills, such as responsibility, interdependence, problem-solving, motivation, and attitudes (Johnson et al., 1978; Millis, 1990; Slavin, 1987; Michailidis et al., 2018; Sung-Hee Jin, 2017; Araújo et al., 2017; Manathunga and Hernández, 2015; DePietro, 2012; Jaisook, 2015). Accordingly, I believe that interactive groups encourage good reading practices, especially for learners who are struggling with reading as well as foster learner autonomy, which is one of the most important lifelong learning skills. For these reasons, this research will examine how combining the interactive group with extensive reading can improve learners' reading ability and learner autonomy.

## 2. Review of Literature

### 2.1 Extensive Reading

Researchers and scholars define reading ability in terms such as decoding messages, transferring of meaning from mind to mind, and reading comprehension (Nuttall, 2005; Grab & Stroller, 2001; Proctor & Ehrenstein, 1995). Reading ability can be developed when learners practice reading regularly as with other skills. Extensive reading (ER) is a well-known reading practice that occurs outside the classroom is otherwise known as free reading (Krashen, 2004), pleasure reading wide reading or independent reading (Day & Bamford, 2002). It provides a beneficial option for developing reading ability in various dimensions as its key concept is based on Krashen's Comprehension Hypothesis which

states that language acquisition and literacy development occur when learners understand information. Therefore, to acquire language successfully, the comprehension input must be interesting and engaging, or the input should induce a state of implicit learning (Ng et al., 2019). Furthermore, during the extensive reading activity, readers are not expected to complete any tasks or achieve all the points of reading comprehension as other reading activities require (Clark & Rumbold, 2006; Krashen, 2004). It is not enough to tell students to read a lot; it is crucial to provide them a program that includes suitable materials, guidance, tasks, or other facilities for their reading (Harmer, 2001). Extensive reading can be arranged by instructors, providing texts of either fiction or nonfiction. Any level of texts can be used to ease the readers' confidence. In case of difficult stories, adapted versions are acceptable.

Although the ten principles of ER proposed by Day and Bamford (2002) were widely recognized and used in either an English as a foreign language (EFL) or English as a second language (ESL) setting, not of all the principles were applied in practice. The frequently used principles were principle no. 1 which mentions easy materials; principle no. 2 referring to availability of reading material with a wide range of topics; principle no. 3 stating that learners choose what they want to read; principle no. 4 proposing that learners read as much as possible; and principle no. 8, stating that reading is silent and individual. The principles were criticized by many scholars in that they were impractical especially in some learning settings where there were contextual and curricular limitations. (Macalister, 2015) Additionally, it was proposed that the principle no. 6 "Reading is its own reward" should be "Reading will need to be monitored and assessed" as it may encourage students to pay attention on their reading. (Ng et al., 2019)

According to Macalister (2015), the ten principles were considered guidelines, not commandments in the role of context, learner choice, and applying curriculum design to extensive reading. As for the role of context, extensive reading is considered an individual reading activity, but some research revealed that an extensive reading program was more effective when it was blended into other classroom activities or tasks such as speaking or writing output tasks. Thus, extensive reading should not be given as a reward and students do not necessarily need to choose what to read. According to learner choice, extensive reading encourages learners

to choose what they want to read, but some limitations such as financial access or language proficiency can become obstacles to achieving reading goals. To address this problem, it would be better to allow teachers to choose for them. Graded readings are a good option, or magazine articles may also be considered. Extensive reading will play a better role if the teachers know the language level of their students and the proper size of vocabulary to enhance reading comprehension. This can happen if the students are tested before the activity. As for curriculum design, there may still be doubt how much learners can benefit as extensive reading requires more than the principles to support effective output. Environment, such as poor-resources, and learner need also play an important role.

Stoller (2015) highlighted five key elements of teaching L2 reading to help learners becoming effective reader. These elements are in accordance with four of the ten principles of extensive reading proposed by Day and Bamford (2002). First, if reading materials are interesting, comprehensible, and fun to read, they can encourage learners to engage in reading comprehension. Second, one of the solutions to help students read more is to allow learners to read what they want. Third, when a teacher becomes a role model, perhaps by sharing what she/he reads, learners can be motivated to read as well. The next element is the importance of rereading. It is believed that one of the best ways to promote reading fluency and meaningful reading is through rereading. Stoller proposed that students should be asked to reread texts for other purposes, for example, identifying the main idea, finding details or writer's attitude, or comparing other texts as appropriate options for extensive reading activities instead of traditional post-activities such as filling the gaps in a reading log. The last element is that students often meet or fail to meet the level of expectation of their teachers. Thus, teachers should set high expectations for all learners and assist them in achieving those expectations. It is believed that this will allow them to gain confidence and motivation, leading to the path of becoming better readers.

Over the past decade, extensive reading has been questioned for its effectiveness; however, meta-analysis studies conducted during this time confirmed its effectiveness on reading proficiency. Nakanishi (2015) explained that extensive reading was used widely, but the application seemed to be controversial in confirming that extensive reading had effectively influenced learning due to its independency of learning and the

lack of replication studies in various settings. To ascertain its effectiveness, a study compared 34 former research from control vs experimental research and pre-posttest design to analyze the effectiveness of extensive reading on learning. The meta-analysis study revealed positive effects in that the group contrasts had a medium effect ( $d = 0.46$ ) while the pre-posttest research showed a higher performance ( $d = 0.71$ ). Although a control group in this study was not included, the complete size of the effect was large enough to confirm its positive findings. Moreover, the study analyzed the length of instruction time in extensive reading. It found that the longer learners were engaged in extensive reading, the more significant the effect. The analysis also showed that late learners were more influenced by extensive reading than early learner as they had developed analytical skills which were helpful for learning. Also, their maturity could be beneficial in terms of their comprehension of texts.

Jeon and Day (2016) also analyzed the effectiveness of extensive reading (ER) on reading proficiency by investigating the difference between two types of research design from 51 sample studies: (1) experimental vs control group, and (2) pretest vs posttest. The meta-analysis study was based on five of ten principles as proposed by Day and Bamford, 2002: the reading material is easy; learners choose what they want to read; learners read as much as possible; reading is individual and silent; and teachers orient and guide their students. The meta-analysis found that both types of research design revealed small and medium effects. It also showed that adult learners received more benefits than younger learners. Moreover, it was likely that extensive reading in English as a foreign language (EFL) had a higher effect than English as a second language (ESL). Regarding the reading materials, web-based materials were found more effective than paper-based ones. Lastly, including extensive reading in a curriculum confirmed the highest effect mean. The meta-analysis study therefore suggested integrating ER into EFL and ESL classes.

In summary, extensive reading (ER) is a reading activity where the readers read in their own preferred time with appropriate texts selected by the reader. Readers choosing their own books undoubtedly encourages the readers to read more and can lead to a lifetime of good reading habits. Reading extensively is another L2 teaching approach to enhance readers' linguistic competence, gain more vocabulary, and improve reading speed

(Day & Bamford, 2002; Richards & Schmidt, 2002; Bamford & Day, 2004; Grabe & Stoller, 2001; Suk, 2017; Jaisook, 2015). Moreover, some extensive reading research revealed that the extensive reading had positive effects on other communicative skills such as listening (Ellis, 2005).

## 2.2 Interactive Group

Vygotsky (1978) proposed social constructivism as a supportive learning environment where learners were surrounded by people and involved with useful materials. Bossche et al. (2011) also agreed that educational settings reap benefits in the implementation of learning environments that have a crucial team learning component.

The interactive group builds a learning environment where learners become involved in (provided) tasks, communicate with other learners, and learn from others. Interaction is a general term among communicative learning activities like cooperative or collaborative learning. It refers to personal communication, which is facilitated by an understanding of four elements: language tasks, willingness to communicate, style differences, and group dynamics (Yu-Chun Kuo et al., 2017; Oxford, 1997). Apart from learning benefits, the group activity which Steven et al. (1991) called cooperative learning supports other personal skills, such as, responsibility, interdependence, problem-solving, motivation, and attitudes (Johnson et al., 1978; Millis, 1990; Slavin, 1987). Similarly, Kirchhoff (2015) agreed that social interaction that occurs during collaboration between peers strengthens learner motivation to read, whereas isolation undermines motivation.

Language tasks can be any kind of task that encourages learner interaction. Willingness to communicate is the eagerness to communicate with others in the target language. Vercellotti (2018) investigated whether interactive learning spaces increased student achievement. The study found that the interactive learning space classroom provided students with classroom engagement, which led to effective learning outcomes. The interactive learning spaces in Vercellotti's study refer to various collaborative, cooperative, or problem-solving activities. In her work, she incorporated interactive learning in group conversation, dialogue, problem-solving tasks, and feedback. Similar to Shi & Han (2019), the study

proved that cooperative learning in the form of group learning promoted learner autonomy, including learning attitude, interest, and motivation.

Parsons (2017) researched the effect of roundtable classrooms based on interactive learning. The study found that the roundtable classroom promoted interactive learning among students as well as other desirable learning aspects such as face-to-face accountability, verbal immediacy, cohort effort, and fidget factor.

In conclusion, reading ability plays an important role in communication, especially when studying at academic levels. Therefore, this study considers methods of drawing learners' attention to reading activities by integrating extensive reading into interactive groups as it is believed to benefit learners in developing their reading ability (Karaman & Orhan Özen, 2016; Parsons, 2017; Vercellotti, 2018), and other meaningful forms of learning such as self-confidence, learner autonomy, and the language skills of vocabulary and listening (Shi & Han, 2019; Chin-Ming Chen et al., 2014; Ediger, 2001; Harmer, 2001; Jaisook, 2015; Lems et al., 2010; Scrivener, 2005).

### **2.3 Learner Autonomy**

Holec (1981) defined autonomy as '...the ability to take charge of one's own learning'. However, it is a contested concept with various meanings. For example, Little (1991) defined 'autonomy' as its a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision making, and independent acquisition. Other researchers define "learner autonomy" as "the capacity to take responsibility for one's own learning" (Benson, 2011, cited in Lyddon, 2016).

To explain "learner autonomy," it is necessary to describe the condition of learners when they feel free or comfortable to engage in the learning process. It also means that when learners are free to learn, they are confident to learn whatever the lesson is. Once they decide, they have the self-direction to see it through. Therefore, learner autonomy is a significant factor not only in learning but also in living as when they acquire confidence in the decision-making process.

Research has shown that learners who have gained excellent or high proficiency in language skills develop autonomy. For example, Jianfeng et al. (2018) found that learning motivation and autonomy were



significantly and positively correlated. The research results indicated that learning could more accurately predict the variance in language proficiency when compared with learner autonomy. Similarly, Salehi et al. (2015) studied the relationship between degrees of EFL learners' autonomy, use of strategies for coping with speaking problems, and learners' success in their speaking classes. The study found that learners who were ranked at low levels of English-speaking ability appeared less autonomous when compared to high proficiency learners of English. It is thus suggested that more opportunities for developing autonomy should be provided to the students so that they would grow more accustomed to it and be more successful in communication skills.

In Thailand, Chanthap & Wasanasomsithi (2019) found that learner autonomy among students enrolled in reading class increased with statistical significance after the integration of a blended learning and extensive reading instructional model. Furthermore, Ghufuron & Nurdianingsih (2019) studied the effects of a flipped-class environment and learner autonomy with Indonesian students. The study found that the flipped-class atmosphere fostered better communication amongst learners and learner autonomy, including motivating learners. In interviews, learners admitted that they were inspired to engage in in-class learning activities and self-regulated teaching environments.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Participants

The participants in this study were 30 volunteers of 323 university students in Thailand, enrolled in English courses of semester 2 during the academic year of 2018. The participants' ages ranged from 18-20 years old. There were 13 males and 17 females from the faculty of science and technology, faculty of social work, and college of interdisciplinary studies.

#### 3.2 Procedures

The timeframe for this study was 10 weeks. On the first day of meeting, the participants were tested on their reading ability and grouped according to their topics of interest. During the 8-week reading

intervention, each group was provided one reading article to read per week. The reading materials were non-fiction articles which were chosen from reliable online news resources such as CNN, BBC, and National Geographic. When the participants started the extensive reading activity, they were required to discuss the article, applying background knowledge to the content of the reading materials. Other useful or supportive materials were also provided without interference from teachers or researchers. At the end of each reading meeting, the groups were required to complete weekly journals to make a note of their background knowledge and new vocabulary learned from the articles, summarize the main idea of the articles, and reflect upon the interactive activity. At the end of the intervention, each student was tested on their reading improvement, and some participants were interviewed regarding their opinions towards the extensive reading and the interactive group.

### **3.3 Data Collection and Data Analysis**

Data in the mix-method study was collected from pretest and posttest scores and the interview forms. The pretest consisted of a vocabulary and reading comprehension test, which was a one-hour test composed of 40 multiple-choice items based on the B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). Based on an analysis by SPSS version 23, the pretest gained the reliability of Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) at .79. The posttest was the same series of the pretest whose multiple choices and questions were reordered. Its reliability was also analyzed by SPSS version 23 and checked by language specialists.

The interview form was divided into two parts: general information and the interview questions which focused on the opinions of (1) the interactive group in the extensive reading activity's reading regarding comprehension development and (2) the interactive group in extensive reading regarding self-autonomy in learning. After the interviews, the data were analyzed based on interactive performance and learner autonomy.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### **4.1 The Descriptive of the Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension Tests**

**Table 1***Pretest and Posttest Scores of Participants*

Levels	Participant No.	Pretest Scores	Posttest Scores
High	1	24	29
	2	21	23
	3	21	26
	4	20	23
	5	19	10
Average	6	18	28
	7	18	21
	8	16	16
	9	15	16
	10	14	15
	11	14	27
	12	14	21
	13	13	23
	14	13	25
Low	15	12	31
	16	12	24
	17	11	25
	18	11	27
	19	11	23
	20	11	24
	21	10	23
	22	10	15
	23	9	24
	24	9	14
	25	9	20
	26	9	10
	27	8	8
	28	8	11
	29	8	14
	30	7	26

Table 1 shows that there were mostly positive changes among participants at all levels. 80% of the participants who were rated at a high level had better scores in the posttest, which showed an increase of 10 – 25%. Additionally, 55% of those at the average level showed an improvement in their posttest scores of more than 50%, while one-third of them showed an increase of 5 – 20%. Similar to a majority of participants at a low level, the posttest scores of the average level group surpassed 50%. Only 6 % of the participants showed no changes in their scores, including 3% whose scores decreased after the experiment. All in all, the posttest scores show significant reading development in the participants at various levels.

**Table 2**

*Paired Samples Statistics*

		Mean	N	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre-test	13.17	30	.837
	Posttest	20.73	30	1.147

**Table 3**

*The Paired Samples Test*

		Paired Differences		
		Mean	SD	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Pre-test - Posttest	-7.567	6.543	-6.335
				.000

According to Table 2 and 3, the results from the pre-test ( $M = 13.17$ ,  $SD = 4.58$ ) and post-test ( $M = 20.73$ ,  $SD = 6.28$ ) indicate that there was a significant increase in the reading scores,  $t(29) = -6.3$ ,  $p = .000$ . The results suggest that extensive reading activities in congruence with group interactions resulted in an improvement in reading competence.

## 4.2 The Interview Results

Below is the data collected from the nine selected interviewees: four interviewees from the highest scoring group, two interviewees from the lowest scoring group, and three interviewees from the average scoring group. The results of the interview questions were classified into four main sections: (1) articles and readers, (2) opinions on group reading, (3) interactive group and students' learning, and (4) extensive reading and interactive activity.

### 4.2.1 Articles and Readers

The first section is about articles and readers which refers to questions regarding the materials and students' preferences. (Q1) What articles did you read?, and (Q2) Which one did you like the most? The preferred article among the highest scoring interviewees was the climate change news as it was a topic relevant to their daily life as well as the most accessible. The second preferred news item was an article about the Korean male beauty market. This was followed by tips from Marie Kondo, a Japanese tidying-up master, and the anti-vaxxer movement, respectively. The average scoring interviewees rated the news on economic and social issues, such as a topic 'You can give all your money away, but it won't solve poverty'. The South Korean male beauty stories, along with the tidying-up tips, came in 2nd place. Interviewees found these topics relevant to their daily life and more directly connected to their interests. Similarly, the lowest score interviewees voted for the article on climate change followed by Marie Kondo's tidying-up tips, respectively. Interviewees showed more interest and attention to the topics relevant or connected to their daily lives.

### ***4.2.2 Opinions on Group Reading***

The next section is students' opinions on group reading found in questions (Q3) Who were your reading group members? How did your group begin the reading activity?, (Q4) How did you feel when you started reading in the interactive group for the first time? (Q5) How was your feeling after you had done the interactive group reading?, (Q6) Did you help your friends or your friends help you when reading? How did they help you? Or how did you help them? And (Q7) In your opinion, what could be the reason why you get higher/lower scores in the posttest?

Regarding the interviewees' feelings and opinions towards group reading, more than half expressed positive opinions on participating in this interactive reading group. This was mainly attributed to their desire to read and share their ideas with friends. They felt comfortable having someone help them practice reading or wanted to challenge themselves by practicing English. In contrast, the remainder felt pressure when they had to read with friends because they did not feel confident in their language ability. Two interviewees felt uncomfortable when they had to read with friends who are better at English, but they said they were willing to learn from them. One interviewee was afraid of becoming a burden to the group while another, who is good at English, thought that he would make their friends uncomfortable because of his confidence. All in all, after three weeks of group reading, all the interviewees thought they had developed various learning aspects especially their reading ability and their friendship.

#### **Excerpt 1**

**P1:** I felt excited for the 1<sup>st</sup> time I had to read with my friends as I talked a lot and shared a lot. I was afraid of scaring my friends.

**P3:** Umm...when I first read with my friends, I felt under pressure due to our friendship. Although we are friends, this was like a kind of mission.

**P5:** We compared our ideas and discussed for the correct answers and it was helpful!

### ***4.2.3 Interactive Group and Students' Learning***

The issue of interactive activity and students' learning was taken up in question (Q8) How did the interactive group affect you or your reading/learning? Most of the interviewees said that the interactive group had strengthened their confidence in reading because when they read in the group, they had friends with whom they could discuss and check their understanding. After the reading group, they realized that reading practice was not as tricky as they imagined. Another critical benefit of the interactive group the interviewees noted was that the interactive group was an outside-classroom "classroom" where they learned from their friends. They learned how their better-skilled friends worked on reading English, and they could imitate their learning styles to improve their reading practice. Moreover, the interactive group provided the interviewees a chance to work as a team as they had the same goal they needed to achieve. They thought that working in groups broadened their points of view. It also made them more careful when reading, because they learned various techniques from friends, some of which were different or opposite to theirs. Additionally, they learned how to work in groups and listen to their group members. They became less afraid of sharing their opinions.

#### **Excerpt 2**

*P1: The interactive group supported me when I missed something or corrected me. It was like sharing different points of view.*

*P4: I felt more relaxing when working in the interactive group which was good for my learning because I didn't see this group activity as a serious assignment.*

*P6: Reading in groups strengthened my reading confidence as I had someone checked my comprehension.*

### ***4.2.4 Extensive Reading and Interactive Activity***

Question 9 asked the interviewees about extensive reading and interactive group: (Q9) Did you think that the extensive reading encourages you to practice reading after the research group? How? And

(Q10) If there is a continuous extensive reading activity, would you like to read in a group? Why? The answers suggest that extensive reading encouraged the interviewees to read more related articles. Also, it motivated them to read more about various topics that interest them. They wanted to continue their extensive reading since they thought it was a good practice and helped them acquire new knowledge. However, two interviewees wished to practice their listening and speaking rather than reading skills. To assure the continuity of the extensive reading, the interviewees agreed to continue learning in groups, because they felt the group committed them to practice reading. If they read on their own, they could stop or give up reading anytime; if they read with their friends; however, they felt they had to finish the reading. Some preferred smaller groups because as they provided mutual time to read.

### Excerpt 3

*P3: I wanted to continue practice reading after this, as well as I wanted to practice listening and speaking skills too.*

*P4: Reading in group is good for improving my skills, but I may practice extensive reading on my own as I found it difficult to practice with my friends at a certain time. We would be pretty busy in the next academic year, but we could do in a smaller group.*

## 5. Discussion and Interpretation of the Findings

### 5.1 The Use of the Interactive Group in Extensive Reading Has a Positive Effect on English Reading Ability.

This study examined the use of the interactive group in extensive reading to investigate learners' English reading ability as a supportive reading program which included familiar and updated reading topics, productive reading techniques, and a supportive environment. The intervention resulted in significantly increased reading scores. The results suggest that extensive reading is thus likely to contribute to the participants' reading skill improvement. There are two reasons behind these positive effects on learner's reading development.



First, the interactive group in extensive reading provides a constructivist process of learning for learners. According to William et al. (2015), the constructivist process occurs when learners are encouraged to think about what the topic means to them personally. Readers discuss what they already know about the subject (and perhaps record it in a mind map) and are allowed to interact with new information as well as incorporate it with their existing knowledge to reconstruct their understanding. In the present study, interactive group members had to share their background knowledge during the initial phrase and discuss the content of the reading articles. Moreover, learners had a chance to learn and collect new vocabulary with the other group members by discussing and brainstorming various contextual clues. When readers consider and discuss the main idea of the articles, they are better able to understand the texts. This implementation of implicit and explicit learning allows learners to utilize former or existing information as well as new information from their group interactions to enhance their reading comprehension.

The result accorded with the findings of Boakye (2017), who investigated the improvement of first-year students' reading proficiency through a reading intervention program that relied heavily on an extensive reading component. Students were required to read short stories and novels of their choosing and record their affective and cognitive responses in a portfolio. The affective benefits include increased motivation and positive attitudes in reading, while the cognitive benefits included reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and other structural knowledge. Both Boakye and the present study produced similar results in reading development in terms of cognitive gains. However, it is essential to note that while the current research grouped students, Boakye's subjects practiced reading individually. Boakye's study also reported that some students had difficulties in comprehension and associated boredom. These problems were ameliorated somewhat by the interactive group, in which group members helped each other through discussion and supportive talks.

Another reason for the outstanding results of the interactive group in extensive reading is the scaffolding process to reach the zone of proximal development (ZPD). In sociocultural theory, individuals can learn through social interaction between two or more participants. According to

Vygotsky (1978), the interactive group in extensive reading can be considered a support network for learners, especially those with limited levels of language. The group encourages poor readers to interact with other learners with higher levels of language to learn and achieve their zone of proximal development, or their higher potential. Although some of the participants, especially those with lower levels of English, felt worried at the beginning of the experiment, learners were open to learning from their friends, especially from those who expressed more confidence and knowledge. Once they were relaxed and observed how their better-skilled friends worked on the articles and absorbed those techniques, they developed their own reading methods and applied them with practicality. The interactive group in extensive reading became a supportive part of success similar to another Vygotsky-based study by Sadeghi et al. (2016), which investigated the influence of a sociocultural theory, called shadow-reading, on the reading comprehension of Iranian learners. The study reported that shadow-reading significantly influenced Iranian learners' reading comprehension. Based on shadow-reading, learners were required to listen and repeat passages in a well-disciplined imitative task and then summarize what they had comprehended from the text. This practice provided learners an opportunity to listen to their friends, repeat, or adapt what they learned into their own ideas similar to the process in which the interactive group in extensive reading provided. The results from both studies are positive and encouraging.

In conclusion, the use of the interactive group in extensive reading has an effective result on English reading ability in terms of constructing knowledge and learning from one another.

## **5.2 Thai Undergraduate Students Have Positive Opinions Towards the Interactive Group in an Extensive Reading Activity in Their Reading Development.**

There are three significant factors that explain why the learners held positive opinions on their reading development following the experiment.

First, the interactive group in extensive reading became a “hang-out” meeting with reading practice as a bonus. Learners expressed that they did not see the group as a study group which made them feel more

comfortable to talk, share, and learn. This makes the readers perceive the reading group more favorably than other kinds of educational settings. When there is no pressure on a group meeting, students are open to interacting with each other in various ways, such as asking for background knowledge or sharing real-life experiences, which are relevant to the reading topics or sharing what they think about the reading materials. Moreover, the interactive groups in extensive reading are considered less formal, more relaxing, and pleasant. Thus, the interactive group provides a comfortable atmosphere for group members to practice reading.

Second, the articles provided as reading materials make the reading group more enjoyable. Initially, some interviewed participants were worried about what they were about to read; however, because they found the articles were interesting topics and relevant to their lives, they began to feel more comfortable with learning and practicing how to read effectively in the interactive group. According to Yamashita (2015), easy and familiar reading materials encourage readers to read fluently and reduce obstacles as readers connect the reading materials to their background knowledge. Also, if readers are allowed to read topics they are interested in or feel familiar with, their motivation to practice reading increases. As the interviews showed, the most popular article was news about Greta Thunberg, a Swedish teenage environmental activist. Students felt mutual participation in that topic as global citizens. Other articles covered familiar issues such as the Korean male beauty market, or poverty, placing 2nd and 3rd in their choice of favorite topics, as they had understood or experienced some of these issues. When readers read stories close to their experience, not only do they share lessons from their background, but they are also eager to join in discussions or learn more about the topic.

A final reason why readers feel positive in their reading development is that they have a chance to express their opinion or knowledge to acquire acceptance by their friends. According to William et al. (2015), a good relationship in a group creates individuals. When people are accepted, particularly from their peers, they become encouraged and emboldened. There is no omission of the participants in the study despite members with lower levels of English. The interactive groups are not competitive but supportive assemblies. They encourage those with advanced levels of English to share and teach others with lower levels of

English. Some participants feel comfortable having someone help them practice reading and want to challenge themselves in practicing English. In contrast, others may feel pressure as they lack confidence in their language ability. They may feel that they cannot help their friends. However, when they learn and adopt some useful reading skills, they assimilate themselves into group practices and soon become mentors.

The interactive group in extensive reading provided learners an opportunity to develop their reading ability through three dimensions: supportive group environment, familiar reading materials, and self-actualization. Learners agree that their reading development improves when they can perceive it by themselves in terms of understanding the text correctly and being accepted by their friends. This result accords with Kirchhoff (2015), who studied the effects of collaboration on face-to-face book talks in Japan and questioned whether the book talk motivated students and was beneficial in L2 learning. The Kirchhoff study experimented with students in the Extensive Reading class, where students were majoring in English literature and required to read various books chosen by themselves throughout the semester. The students were given a questionnaire at the end of the semester when they conducted face-to-face book talks with their friends in a group. Kirchhoff found that collaborative discussion stimulated extensive reading for Japanese university students in terms of changing extensive reading from being an individual activity into one that meets students' academic and social needs, which may be considered as intrinsic motivation to read. One of the critical differences between Kirchhoff's study and this current study is the topics learners discussed. In the Kirchhoff study, learners were asked to introduce and report on the books they read. In contrast, for the current study, learners were asked to talk about articles read by the group and discuss and summarize the pieces together. Also, the first study consecutively changed the group members, whereas this one didn't. Although both studies have shown some differences, the results point in the same direction: interactive group activity is supportive for learners and encourages them to learn and practice more in reading development. The interactive group became a friendly study group that built motivation and instilled confidence for learners to improve their ability.

Huang & Liou (2007) reported a similar result. They researched whether the online extensive reading program can lead to vocabulary

gains on the target learners. The study chose sixteen selected articles from the computer corpus of a local Chinese-English magazine. These articles were used to construct an online extensive English reading program with 38 college students over twelve weeks. The results found an improvement in vocabulary learning among students. Extensive online reading is a practical and beneficial tool, not only for improving vocabulary but also for learner satisfaction.

In conclusion, the results have shown reading improvement among learners as well as strengthening of learners' confidence, even if students do not overtly perceive it. The interactive group in extensive reading allows them to observe their progress from the beginning to the end of the intervention. It demonstrates how their reading ability improves when they can answer their friends or understand the texts correctly over a period of time. This explains the positive views held by the learners regarding their reading development following this experiment.

### **5.3 The Use of Interactive Groups in Extensive Reading Develops Student Autonomy in Both Proactive and Reactive Ways.**

Learner autonomy is necessary for future career opportunities, as well as the development of life skills. The discussion of the development of autonomy in the interactive group in extensive reading follows the two types of autonomy in the East Asian context, as proposed by Littlewood (1999): proactive and reactive levels of autonomy.

The proactive level of learner autonomy development is projected when there is interaction and language use in the interactive groups. In the present study, learners were grouped and encouraged to interact with each other by sharing information and discussing opinions and ideas. They experienced the learner-centered interaction in which they were fully responsible for their learning. From the beginning of the study to the end, participants were involved in planning their reading mission. Primarily, students determined how their reading group would work and how they would share their opinions and information. They engaged with learning tools such as background knowledge or PowerPoint pre-reading presentations. They also prepared a discussion for reading answers and solutions. From this it can be determined that the process of the interactive group in extensive reading provides learners an opportunity to

completely take part in the reading activity. From choosing the articles, deciding on each step, clarifying or determining other language details, and concluding the activity, participants realize that they own or belong to the mission. They will thus pay attention and dedicate themselves to achieving a mutual goal. Moreover, regarding this study, the participants are free to talk and share their opinions and information since none of the researchers or teachers interfere at any stage. Thus, the study requires responsibility from participants to take action which encourages to gain self-autonomous skills.

Some researchers may not accept reactive autonomy as a level of autonomy. However, reactive autonomy is a type of learner autonomy which can occur progressively and can be completed at the proactive level. Individual learners, such as reticent learners, may have some difficulties in engaging in the interactive group, which can also hinder their learning and self-autonomous development. Members of a group often begin as peripheral participants - that is to say, new, or prospective members often spend time either observing from the edges of the group or participating in minor roles. According to William et al. (2015), over time, these peripheral participants facilitate recognition from other group members, which, in turn, encourages a fuller sense of belonging to the group and more active participation in events. The interactive group in extensive reading provides learners an opportunity to find their sense of self and belonging in the community. As such, the interactive group can be considered a community of practice. As proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991), such communities lead to gains in personal fulfillment and learner autonomy. Learners may feel uncomfortable in the early weeks, but they become proactive at a certain level, and some of them, especially those at weaker levels, can take on a leading role. Some, for example become confident enough to share what they think and believe what they know to be accurate. The participants may further express their autonomy when they are confident enough and ready to take part in activities, such as encouraging their friends to share opinions or summarizing group discussions. As this research demonstrates, learners can develop autonomy at a reactive level when they reach a certain point of autonomy. Learners are most likely to feel a sense of agency when they can reach their full potential or a state of self-actualization – finding meaning in what they do and expressing their sense of self.

Based on the development of language learner autonomy in the study, the results accord with Chanthap & Wasanasomsithi (2019), who studied the effect of integration of a blended learning and extensive reading instructional model at a Thai university. Their study revealed that the combination of a blended learning and extensive reading instructional model increased learners' autonomy significantly. The blended learning provided learners an opportunity to participate in online and face-to-face learning as well as combine instructional models, such as face-to-face reading strategy instruction, online reading activities, and extensive reading activities. According to research, some similarities confirm why the present study succeeds in developing language learner autonomy. First of all, the processes of reading practice started from activating learners' background knowledge in preparation, which was done in the current study when learners were given an opportunity to discuss and share what they knew about the topic. Second, the presentation and practice of both studies introduced new materials and strategies and allowed learners to practice and learn from group members. Such learning includes reading comprehension, unknown vocabulary, and other aspects. Lastly, both studies determine that learners' autonomy develops when learners build their reading skills and adapt their own practices. In the Chanthap and Wasanasomsithi study, learners developed autonomy when they became independent readers; in the present study, learners demonstrate their autonomy when they become active group participants or leaders of the group.

Learner autonomy correlates with language ability. Research reports that autonomy develops with language ability. For example, Hu & Zhang (2017) found that students' English proficiency improved with the progress of learner autonomy. Also, the study implied that collaborative learning played an essential role in fostering learner autonomy in China and that instrumental motivation and educational culture also had an influence on learner autonomy development. Similar to Shi & Han (2019), the study proved that cooperative learning in the form of group learning promoted learner autonomy, including learning attitude, interest, and motivation. The results followed the study by Jianfeng et al. (2018), which found that learning motivation and autonomy were significantly and positively correlated. Research results indicate that learning could better

predict the variance in language proficiency when compared with learner autonomy.

In conclusion, providing learners an opportunity to take charge of their learning leads to the development of learner autonomy in both proactive and reactive ways. Participants with advanced levels of English, or who are confident in sharing information or expressing their opinions to their friends, developed autonomy with the weekly reading practice. At the same time, those with weaker levels of language ability learned from their friends. They waited until they were ready, and when they were prepared, they utilized their own language tools, revealing their autonomy. Clearly, the use of interactive groups in extensive reading effectively generates and strengthens autonomy among learners.

## 6. Conclusion

The present study aimed to explore extensive reading in cooperate with the interactive group which can enhance learners' confidence in reading ability and autonomy. The findings show that the use of the interactive group in extensive reading has a positive effect on English reading ability. ( $t(29) = -6.3, p = .000$ ) Also, Thai undergraduate students have positive opinions towards the interactive group with an extensive reading activity in their reading development. Moreover, the use of interactive groups in extensive reading has effectively developed student's autonomy in both proactive and reactive ways.

The present study reached the research goals where learners could improve their reading proficiency, including developing positive attitudes towards reading practice. However, there was some feedback and recommendations for further research in terms of timing, grouping, and other issues. First, it was suggested that the study should last longer than ten weeks to develop students' new reading habits after the reading experiment. Second, interactive groups should be smaller, as smaller groups make meetings more flexible in meeting time and interaction. Lastly, further research could integrate other communication skills such as listening skills into the practice as students have different purposes in practicing language skills. It was revealed that extensive reading encouraged learners to read more in other related areas and it motivated them to read more various topics. Students wanted to continue their



extensive reading because they thought it was good practice and helped them learn more new knowledge. However, some wished to practice their listening and speaking skills rather than practice reading.

As the world has been facing a pandemic for more than a year and many traditional classrooms have gone online, teachers have been forced to adapt their teaching methods to include new materials or activities. Extensive reading with online-based materials can supplement self-directed learning both in-class and outside class as many teachers have found that learners cannot sit in front of the screen for long. With class time diminished, self-study should be increased, and extensive reading provides a positive alternative. Self-learning activities are more effective if they are well-prepared and guided. This means that teachers still need to organize self-learning activities for their students to achieve the best results.

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