



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Changes in Vietnamese University Students' Attitudes towards English Reading via an Extensive Reading Project: A Tri-Component Model Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Whether or not extensive reading transforms Vietnamese university students' attitudes towards reading using a tri-component analysis model is an uncharted area. This study delved into the reading attitudes of English majors concerning their cognitive, conative, and affective dimensions through a two-month extensive reading (ER) project. Participants were composed of 26 first-year students at a large urban university in Vietnam. Research instruments included a pre-project questionnaire, a post-project questionnaire and book records. The findings revealed a positive change in the students' reading attitudes, characterized by reinforced belief in the benefits of reading, heightened positive feelings, and an increased intent to read. Recommendations for practice and further research were provided and discussed.

1. INTRODUCTION

The first-year university students in Vietnam tend to be more proficient in linguistic components than practical language skills due to an extensive focus on grammar and vocabulary exercises in English language education prior to tertiary levels (Pham, 2005). Back at school, students are often trained to read short texts intensively with the primary goal of passing exams to gain entry into a university. This might lead to their loss of interest in reading in English (Quan, 2022). Consequently, most freshmen harbor negative or apprehensive attitudes towards foreign language reading upon entering higher education institutions (Doan & Phan, 2021). This raises the question of whether extensive reading can help alleviate Vietnamese first-year students' unfavorable attitude towards reading in English.

Extensive reading, a pedagogical approach that encourages students to read extensively for pleasure and overall comprehension (Ali et al, 2022), has been widely recognised in the literature for its potential to enhance various aspects of language learning and promote learner autonomy (Nation, 2005; Waring, 2006). While existing research on extensive reading in Vietnam has primarily focused on measuring vocabulary gain, reading fluency, and motivation (Nguyen, 2021; Nguyen, 2022; Pham & Duong, 2020; Truong, 2018), there is a gap in the literature concerning the comprehensive transformation in Vietnamese students' reading attitudes, especially ones that based on a three-component model for attitude analysis. Therefore, this research sought to fill this gap by employing the tri-component model encompassing cognitive, conative, and affective dimensions (Mathewson, 1994) to investigate the multiple facets of English reading attitudes.

The findings from this research study potentially offer valuable insights into extensive reading as a means to enhance English reading attitudes among Vietnamese EFL (English as a foreign language) students. They could inform language teachers about practices in Vietnam and inspire similar initiatives in other EFL contexts.

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Grounded in the above practical and theoretical gaps, this current study primarily aims to investigate the impact of extensive reading on the attitudes of freshmen towards reading in English. In order to achieve the aim, the following question was addressed: To what extent does extensive reading influence the attitudes of first-year university students towards reading in English with regard to their cognitive, conative, and affective dimensions?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Overview of extensive reading

The concept of extensive reading was originally attributed to Harold Palmer's notion that students would read substantially and speedily (Day, 2015). Other scholars share comparable viewpoints and have elaborated on the characteristics of extensive reading, which include easily understandable content, a wide range of book topics, student-driven book selection, and reading for enjoyment (Day & Bamford, 2002; Brown, 2009; Krashen, 1993). Numerous studies have documented the beneficial impacts of extensive reading on various aspects of foreign language learning such as improvement in reading comprehension (Mariano et al., 2020; Park, 2017), reading rate (Mariano et al., 2020), vocabulary (Iqbal & Komal, 2017; Mermelstein, 2015), grammar (Khansir & Dehghani, 2015; Lee et al., 2015), and writing (Mermelstein, 2015; Park, 2016).

2.2. Extensive reading and reading attitudes

The role of students' attitudes in the language learning process is emphasized when it comes to their overall success. In the context of second language reading, it is crucial to gain insights into the factors shaping students' reading attitudes, which are considered a "complex psychological construct" (Yamashita, 2013). Alexander and Filler (1976) define reading attitudes as a set of emotions associated with reading that prompts learners to either engage with or avoid a reading situation. More intricately, Smith (1990) believes that reading attitude is "*a state of mind, accompanied by feelings and emotions that make reading more or less probable.*" What can be observed from the views above is that the concepts "state of mind" or "feelings and emotions" may lack clarity in aiding teachers to understand students' reactions to reading.

An approach to adequately characterizing the internal structures of reading attitudes is based on the so-called tri-component model, which was originally proposed by social psychologists in the realm of attitude formation (Teale & Lewis, 1981). The model consists of cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions (Figure 1). In his literature analysis, Reeves (2002) states that researchers widely concur on employing this model to explore reading attitudes.

The three dimensions can be found in the work of Mathewson (1994) and McKenna (1994). The cognitive aspect relates to an individual's personal evaluative beliefs concerning the nature and value of reading while the affective element embraces emotions and feelings associated with reading, and the conative dimension pertains to action readiness and behavioral intentions that can either facilitate or impede reading.

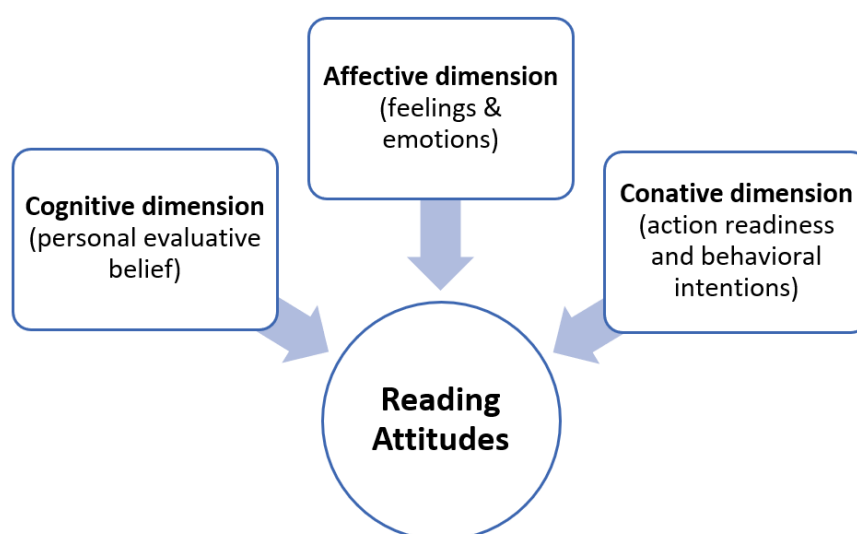


Figure 1. Tri-component model of reading attitudes (Mathewson, 1994)

Yamashita (2013) explains reading attitudes as an “acquired predisposition” formed by readers’ personal experiences; therefore, extensive reading is anticipated to have an impact on learners’ attitudes. A wealth of research reports on the impact of extensive reading on the attitudes of learners in various countries. Grundy (2004) set up a 10-week reading program for students of an English class in New Zealand. The students could share their own materials with each other or select available books in the classroom. The survey results indicated that the majority of the students had more positive attitudes and were more interested in reading English than before. Shumaila and Khan (2021) designed an experimental study on 110 school students from Pakistan and concluded that the students’ attitudes towards reading improved through extensive reading. In Vietnam, in contrast to a great number of research on ER’s effects on skills and abilities (Nguyen, 2021; Nguyen, 2022; Pham & Duong, 2020; Truong, 2018), there seems a paucity in comprehensive analysis of how students’ reading attitudes can be altered by the ER approach.

2.3. Considerations in implementing extensive reading

Day and Bamford (2002) propose the ten principles of extensive reading, which serve as guidelines for the effective implementation of ER programs (Figure 2). This list aims to create a supportive environment for learners to engage in extensive reading and maximize the benefits of the approach.

1. *The reading material is easy.*
2. *There’s a wide variety of material on a wide variety of topics.*
3. *Learners choose what they want to read.*
4. *Learners read as much as possible.*
5. *The purpose is usually pleasure, information and general understanding.*
6. *Reading is its own reward.*
7. *Reading speed is fast.*
8. *Reading is individual and silent.*
9. *Teachers guide their students.*
10. *The teacher is a role model.*

Figure 2. Top ten principles of extensive reading (Day & Bamford, 2002)

Choosing suitable materials is a crucial aspect to take into account when incorporating extensive reading. Two types of materials that should be considered are graded readers and authentic materials. A graded reader is a simplified version of a previously written work or an original work written in a simple language (Hill & Thomas, 1988). Waring (2011) advocates the use of graded readers for EFL students, emphasizing that reading is more effective and enjoyable when students engage with materials they can easily understand and enjoy. Otherwise, students could encounter difficulties posed by decoding and translating texts beyond their abilities. Graded readers are particularly suitable for EFL learners as they control syntax and lexis, ensuring the content is comprehensible (Waring, 2011).

Authentic materials are described as resources that were not originally created for educational use (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). Supporters of authentic materials often attach importance to the advantages of exposing learners to realistic examples of language use (Berardo, 2006). Likewise, Guo (2012) found evidence of vocabulary increase and motivation enhancement as a result of extensive reading of authentic texts.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1. Setting and participants

Conducted within a first-year English-major class at a Vietnamese university, this research was carried out by the researcher who also served as the class instructor. Utilizing convenience sampling, 26 students from this class actively engaged in an eight-week Extensive Reading (ER) program. These students had recently finished their first term and were embarking on the second term of their first academic year, indicating an intermediate level of English language proficiency.

3.2. Research instruments and data collection

An action research approach was adopted in the current study to investigate the impact of the eight-week ER project on students’ attitudes towards reading in English. Students’ participation in the project would not affect their

course assessment. The research instruments comprised pre- and post-project questionnaires designed to explore multiple attitudinal dimensions and student book records which kept track of each student's reading amount. The pre-project survey consisted of 11 statements crafted to comprehensively assess the cognitive, affective, and conative components. These items were adapted from the works of Laoarun (2013) and Yamashita (2013). A five-point Likert scale was employed, where the numbers on the scale ranged from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). Both positively and negatively formulated items were included in the questionnaire to mitigate the potential for "yes-set" bias among respondents (Hinz et al., 2007). The post-project questionnaire mirrored the pre-project questionnaire.

The researcher made a sustained effort to align the program with the ten principles proposed by Day and Bamford (2002) as illustrated in Figure 2. The research procedures were as follows:

Selecting appropriate books: Chosen reading materials included both graded reader series and unabridged books from reputable publishers such as Oxford Bookworm, Heinemann, Wordsworth, Happy House, Burlington, Penguin, and Macmillan. Book choices for the ER project adhered to the following guidelines: (1) the books must align with the participants' English proficiency levels; (2) a diverse range of reading materials, encompassing various genres and topics, was provided to cater to students' interests and needs; and (3) the students' prior background knowledge was taken into account during the selection process.

Introducing the project to the students and distributing a pre-project questionnaire: The teacher introduced the ER project to the class and outlined its purpose, participant requirements, reading approach, book selection, and how to maintain an individual book record that documented the titles of the books the participants read, start and finish dates, and the amount of time spent on reading. The pre-project questionnaire was then distributed to the students.

Implementing the eight-week project: The teacher provided guidance and support to students during the eight-week project. Book exchange took place twice a week during break time. The participants could borrow multiple books simultaneously and engage in extensive reading at home. The students were encouraged to read at least one book per week, with the flexibility to switch books if they found a particular book challenging or uninteresting. Weekly 15-minute sessions were allocated for consultation, addressing student inquiries, and providing book recommendations.

Distributing a post-project questionnaire: At the end of the eight weeks, the teacher collected individual book records to track students' reading progress. The post-project questionnaire was distributed to the students.

Ethical considerations: The student participants were provided with clear descriptions of the study purposes and procedures and guaranteed that their participation in this study would not interfere with their reading marks in any way. They were also informed that findings pulled out of the study would be anonymously reported and that they could withdraw out of the study any time without any consequences.

3.3. Data analysis

Once both pre- and post- surveys had been completed, data was transferred to SPSS for relevant statistical tests. For each statement on the questionnaire, the percentage of students choosing each scale (1 to 5) was calculated. This provided a clear picture of the distribution of attitudes across different statements.

Mean score for each statement was computed to assess various aspects of students' attitudes towards reading in English. The statements indicating negative attitudes were reverse-coded during data preparation to ensure that higher scores consistently represented more positive attitudes across all statements. The question items were grouped according to three dimensions (cognitive, affective, and conative) so that calculating the mean score for each group allowed for a deeper understanding of students' attitudes within each component.

Then, pre- and post-project data were compared to examine how the participants' attitudes evolved across cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions, as well as the overall change in students' reading attitudes over the course of the project.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Results

Comparison of attitudinal dimensions

Increases in mean scores were observed across all three dimensions of attitudes (Figure 3). The pre-project mean scores for cognitive (3.7) and conative (3.5) dimensions were relatively high and were strengthened to a higher level at 4.2 and 4.4 respectively after the project.

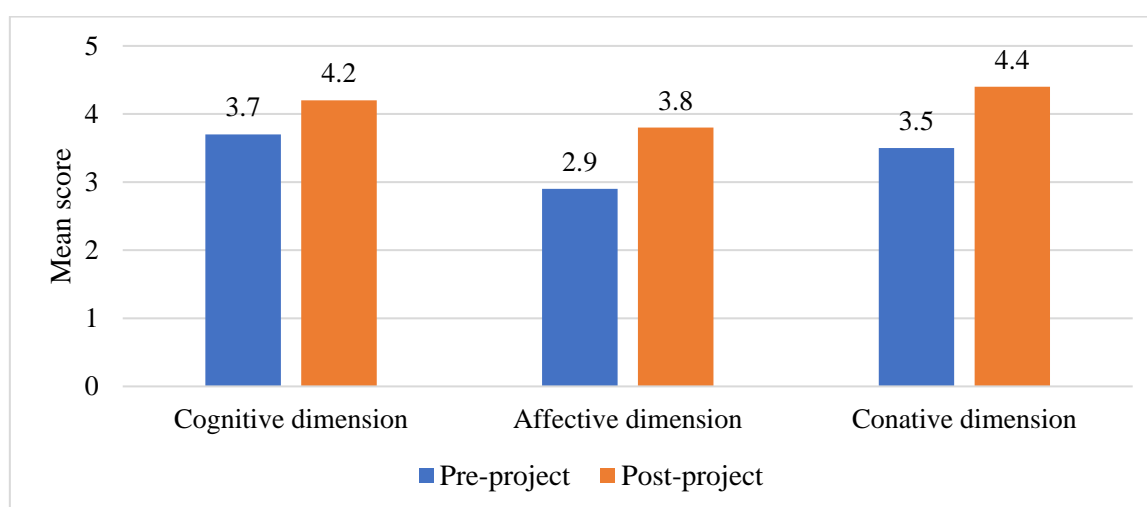


Figure 3. Pre- and post-project overall mean scores of the three attitudinal dimensions

The pre- and post-project mean scores for the affective dimension were lower than those of the cognitive and conative ones. However, the encouraging rise from a negative 2.9 to a relatively high 3.8 post-project suggests a positive shift in students' affective response to reading.

The cognitive dimension of students' attitudes towards reading

Table 1. The cognitive dimension of students' attitudes toward reading pre- and -post project

Statements		1	2	3	4	5	Mean scores	
		Strongly disagree				Strongly agree		
Cognitive Dimension	3. I believe that reading many English books is advantageous for my future career	Pre	0	0	31%	46%	23%	3.9
		Post	0	0	15%	35%	50%	4.3
	4. I consider reading English to be useful for gaining new knowledge	Pre	0	0	19%	50%	31%	4.1
		Post	0	0	4%	42%	54%	4.5
	9. I think practicing reading English helps me increase my reading fluency	Pre	0	0	42%	23%	35%	3.9
		Post	0	0	19%	27%	54%	4.3
	5. I feel that spending time reading in English is a waste of time	Pre	27%	57%	8%	8%	0	4.0
		Post	54%	42%	4%	0	0	4.5
	8. I think my reading ability is satisfactory	Pre	15%	27%	42%	8%	8%	2.6
		Post	8%	15%	12%	46%	19%	3.5

(n=26; Scale: 1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neutral; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree)

The cognitive dimension of the students' reading attitudes is manifested in their perceived benefits of reading, the value they place on time spent reading, and their self-evaluation of reading ability (Table 1). For statements 3, 4 and 9, which concern the benefits of ER for future careers, knowledge acquisition, and reading skills improvement, it is interesting to observe that there were no negative responses both before and after the project. The pre-project percentages of students expressing agreement or strong agreement (scales 4 and 5) were relatively high, 69%, 81%, and 58% respectively. Following the project, these percentages increased to 85%, 96%, and 81%. Remarkably, more than half of the respondents consistently chose the highest rating (scale 5 - strongly agree) for all the mentioned statements.

When it comes to their self-evaluation of reading abilities before the project, 42% of the participants displayed a lack of confidence (as indicated by scales 1 and 2), while another 42% expressed uncertainty. However, the post-project responses reveal a notable boost in their confidence levels, with 65% of the students now self-assessing that their reading ability was satisfactory.

The affective dimension of students' attitudes towards reading

As for the affective statements 1, 2, 6 and 7, prior to the project, 61% of the students reported being anxious and tired while reading in English (Table 2). The statistics notably decreased to less than 1/3 for these issues following the project. The proportion of students encountering problems in English reading also dropped by half, from 42% to 19%.

All of the students linked their accomplishment and comprehension of English texts to the feelings of happiness both before and after the project. Nevertheless, the degree of certainty increased substantially from 15% strongly agreeing pre-project to 85% after the project.

Table 2. The affective dimension of students' attitudes towards reading pre- and -post project

Statements			1	2	3	4	5	Mean scores
			Strongly disagree				Strongly agree	
Affective Dimension	1. I experience anxiety when I encounter new words*	Pre	4%	15%	19%	42%	19%	2.4
		Post	12%	46%	12%	23%	8%	3.3
	2. I feel happy when I can read and understand books in English	Pre	0	0	0	85%	15%	4.1
		Post	0	0	0	19%	81%	4.8
	6. I encounter lots of problems when reading in English*	Pre	8%	8%	42%	27%	15%	2.6
		Post	12%	46%	23%	19%	0	3.5
	7. I become tired when I have to read texts in English*	Pre	8%	27%	4%	38%	23%	2.5
		Post	15%	50%	8%	19%	8%	3.4

(n=26; Scale: 1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neutral; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree)

The conative dimension of students' attitudes toward reading

The conative aspect of reading attitudes pertains to the students' intention to read more in English, as expressed in statement 10 and 11 (Table 3). After the project, an extra 20% of students expressed a desire to do more reading, and an additional 50% of students showed an intention to share books with others.

Table 3. The conative dimension of students' attitudes towards reading pre- and -post project

Statements			1	2	3	4	5	Mean scores
			Strongly disagree				Strongly agree	
Conative Dimension	10. I will make an effort to read English books as much as I can	Pre	0	0	27%	54%	19%	3.9
		Post	0	0	8%	42%	50%	4.4
	11. I tend to try to share what I read in English with friends or others	Pre	8%	23%	31%	23%	15%	3.2
		Post	0	0	12%	38%	50%	4.4

(n=26; Scale: 1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neutral; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree)

4.2. Discussion

The significant increase in mean scores across all three dimensions indicates a positive impact of the ER project on enhancing reading attitudes. The project effectively influenced the students in the cognitive, affective, and

conative aspects, contributing to an overall improvement in their attitudes towards English reading. Prior research exploring different components of reading attitudes yields varied results. Park (2017), Salameh (2017) and Shumaila and Khan (2021) observed positive shifts across all facets of students' reading attitudes, aligning with the findings of the present study. Conversely, Yamashita (2013) and Porkaew and Fongpaiboon (2018) highlighted an improvement in the affective realm but presented inconsistent effects in the cognitive dimension, reflecting an increase in intellectual value but no significant impact on practical value. Nonetheless, all these empirical studies collectively conclude the overall positive impact of ER on student's attitudes towards reading.

Regarding the cognitive aspect, the ER initiative bolstered students' awareness of ER benefits and improved their self-perception of reading ability. The data show that the participants already acknowledged the benefits of English reading before the project commenced, and the perceived benefits appear to have developed in parallel with the project implementation. The substantial number of students selecting scale 5 (Strongly agree) when evaluating English reading benefits for future careers, knowledge acquisition, and reading skills improvement underscores a strengthened perception following their engagement in the project. Besides, the shift in the students' assessment of their own reading ability from negative (2.6) to more positive (3.5) suggests the project's role in enhancing students' self-confidence in foreign language reading. These outcomes are consistent with the research conducted by Nguyen (2021) at a university in Vietnam, which also observed a notable increase in mean scores regarding the students' appraisals of extrinsic utility value of reading, importance of reading, and reading efficacy. According to Chien and Yu (2015), students often perceive intensive reading as challenging and stressful, which contributes to their aversion to reading in English. Therefore, the introduction of ER reading with easy-to-read materials becomes crucial in shaping a positive perception of reading ability.

The ER project proved to have a role in constructively changing the students' affective attitudes, even though this dimension initially presented more difficulties. The affective mean scores were lower than the other two dimensions both before and after the project, indicating that the freshmen faced more challenges concerning feelings and emotions. The study identified measurable impacts of ER on elevating students' happiness levels while reducing the negative feelings related to anxiety, reading problems, and tiredness. Similarly, Bui and Macalister's (2021) interviews with first-year students revealed how ER helped students counter a prevalent stereotype that English reading demands substantial effort, massive vocabulary, and advanced language skills. Van Schooten and De Gloppe (2002) concluded that the most effective approach to stimulate students to read is by fostering enjoyment in their reading experience. In line with this principle, the ER project within the current research tried to create a favorable condition for students to enjoy reading by providing them with a wide range of books which suit different tastes and reading abilities, empowering them to make decisions and emphasizing overall understanding and reading for pleasure.

The project also induced conative changes, evident in the participants' heightened inclination to read more. This aligns with Bui and Macalister's (2021) study on Vietnamese freshmen, which reported that ER motivated students to form a reading habit. Further evidence of conative changes in the present research was noted in the students' intention to share books. There was a 50% increase in the number of students willing to exchange books post-project compared to the pre-project period. This progression implies that the ER project not only influenced the students' current reading habits but also extended its impact beyond individual preferences to include social aspects of reading behavior. The developed sense of community is simultaneously reflected in the students' post-project recommended collaborative activities such as book discussion, group reading, online feedback sharing, etc. Day and Bamford (1998) proposed that ER potentially shapes foreign language reading attitudes by impacting the English classroom environment. In this project's context, the non-judgmental nature of ER and collective engagement in reading by all classmates may have positively fostered student's reading behavior and action readiness.

Considering the three components separately enables teachers to comprehend diverse facets of students' attitudes and devise measures to help them overcome challenges. However, these components should also be viewed in their interrelation to further promote English reading. According to van Schooten and de Gloppe (2002), the cognitive, affective and conative dimensions constitute a chain of causal connections: belief in an outcome influences enjoyment, enjoyment then influences the intention to read, and the intention ultimately predicts actual reading. Given that ER demands a significant time commitment (Grabe & Stoller, 2011), an eight-week period might not be adequate to fully engage all students. Nevertheless, the behavioral statistics - with 81% meeting or exceeding weekly

book targets and many expressing a desire to continue reading – proved the ER project’s effectiveness in altering the students’ attitudes towards foreign language reading.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the research extends the knowledge of reading attitudes in relation to extensive reading. The findings indicate that engaging in extensive reading can notably enhance the student participants’ positive attitudes towards reading in English, implying that the teacher’s implementation of extensive reading strategies was effective. Thus, it is recommended universities integrate extensive reading into curriculum for students, especially freshmen with their inherent intensive reading strategies. It could be helpful to scaffold students with ER gradually and expose them to the fun, short, but regular reading excerpts over time (Habib & Watkins, 2023).

There are two main limitations associated with this current study. First, the generalisability of the above findings is limited due to a small sample size of 26 student participants. Further research should target a bigger sample size in a context where ER is implemented on a large scale so that the findings are applicable to a larger population. Another potential limitation is that the eight-week duration of the ER program might not fully capture the dynamic evolution of practices and attitudes towards extensive reading in all participants. Future work could extend the length of the project, diversify the selection of reading genres, and incorporate collaborative activities.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the study sheds light on various facets of students’ reading attitudes, aiding teachers in supporting students to overcome negative attitudes and cultivate positive ones towards English reading. These significant points make it possible for the students to turn reading into a recreational activity, to be aware of sharing it with their peers, and at the same time to understand the importance of ER.

Conflict of Interest: No potential conflict of interest relevant to this article was reported.

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