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THE EFFECT OF ENHANCED EXTENSIVE READING TO THE INCIDENTAL ENGLISH PREPOSITION ACQUISITION

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Abstract

The English prepositions are still problematic for EFL learners since the existing knowledge of their first language hinders them from understanding the use of English prepositions. This study investigated the incidental English proposition acquisition through the enhanced extensive reading. A total of 16 Indonesian University learners of English as a foreign language participated in this study. The treatment lasted for four weeks and initiated with the pretest. Two weeks after the treatment, the posttest was administered, followed by distributing questionnaires to find out the factors influencing them in doing the posttest. The results showed a significant improvement in the students' incidental acquisition of the targeted English prepositions after they received repeated exposure to the English prepositions through enhanced extensive reading. The factors influencing the improvement of their incidental acquisition involve their existing knowledge of the English prepositions and their built intuition in decision making. It is hoped that teachers and educational institutions are encouraged to add extensive reading to their curriculum.

Keywords: English prepositions, enhanced extensive reading, incidental learning

Introduction

Learning a language is about enhancing skills and working knowledge of its linguistics features, including phonology, lexis, syntax, semantics, and graphology. Those features involve the language components that need to be acquired by language learners to be proficient language users. However, understanding them is not an easy task. It still becomes a challenge for many English as a foreign language (EFL) learners, especially when they are dealing with English prepositions. A preposition demonstrates a relationship from one word to another in the sentence. According to Walker (1982, p.123), the preposition demonstrates how a noun or pronoun, and sentence parts are connected. The relationship acts to connect objects, time, and location. Each English preposition can convey multiple meanings depending on the context. Since the English prepositions are taken to be polysemous, it makes language learners find learning prepositions difficult. They have to be aware of the appropriate meanings and usage when used in specific

contexts. For instance, English preposition, according to Rice and Kabata (2007, p.455), has multiple senses such as allative, locative, temporal boundary, addressee, dative or object, dative of action, perceptual target, conceptual target, experiencer, purpose, accompaniment, result, exchange, and comparison.

In addition, the challenges of learning English prepositions can be accounted for by several factors. First, the different prepositional systems between the first and English languages influence the learning process. For example, the preposition in the Indonesian language, *di,* can be expressed in English by the prepositions in, at, on that denote different meanings depending on the contexts. Students must be aware of which appropriate English prepositions will be used the best. It must share the same meanings as those conveyed in Indonesian sentences. Given another context in which learning English prepositions is challenging, Spanish preposition *por* can be transferred into for, through, by, and during (Lam, 2009, p.2). Second, the functions of English prepositions lead to confusion in which they indicate time and place and abstract situations. For example, the English preposition, *in,* can be used to tell the time in this phrase, *in November*. However, it can also be used to tell a place like in this phrase, *in the post office*, and to tell the abstract situation like in this phrase, *in love*. The problems faced by EFL students are supported by Chrisentia's study in 2019, in which the English prepositions function differently and convey different meanings that appear to be unrelated to one another. Last, English has more than 60 prepositions. It has a greater number than other languages (Koffi, 2010, p.297). That adds to the reasons why learning English prepositions is difficult. In short, it all brings to the notion that English prepositions are complex and challenging for language learners to comprehend this language element.

Concerning the factors of the complexity of English prepositions, the next question will be more intriguing. Is there any other alternative to gain acquisition of English prepositions without conscious purpose? Incidental learning might answer this question. It defines learning without any intention to learn while attention is focused on doing something else (Schmidt, 1994). It is similar to implicit learning proposed by Ellis et al. (2009), in which learners do not realize that learning has taken place and they are not aware of what has been learned. Even though they are learning without awareness, this learning process can result in incidental acquisition because of the continuous exposure to target input. Incidental acquisition, according to Ellis and Shintani (2010, p. 608), is defined as "learning of one second language (L2) feature without intention while attention is focused on some other aspect of the L2 such as semantic meaning." Therefore, to answer the previous question, incidental acquisition of English prepositions can be fostered by extensively reading aiming for pleasure (Ellis & Shintani, 2010) and communicative inputs like conversation and interaction (Pica, 1994).

Learners who read extensively are exposed to input-rich and enjoyable learning that can help them incidentally gain vocabulary development, reading comprehension, reading fluency, writing skills, listening and speaking skills, and grammatical competence. As cited in Renandya (2007), Carrell and Carson (1997:49-50) illustrated that in extensive reading people read vast amount of material or longer readings for general comprehension by putting an emphasis on the meaning of the reading rather than on the language. Besides, Bamford & Day (2004) added that in extensive reading, they read for enjoyment and are allowed to

change what they read if the material is not interesting or too difficult. It is different from intensive reading in which teachers choose the readings that are normally short with close guidance to find detailed information found in the text. "The aim of intensive reading is to help students obtain detailed meaning from the text, to develop reading skills, and to enhance vocabulary and grammar knowledge" (Renandya, 2007, p.135). Intensive reading is normally followed by some comprehension questions to help students obtain detailed information. Some studies have widely investigated the effect of input on incidental gains through extensive reading. Pigada and Smith (2006) figured out in their study that extensive reading helps students expand vocabulary, improve spelling and meaning, and acquire grammatical knowledge. Bell (2001) claimed that extensive reading could significantly work on learners' reading speeds. Lai's study (1993) showed that after summer reading program for 4 weeks, learners show great comprehension in reading, read fast, and develop their writing skill. In their case study, Cho and Krashen (1994) showed that extensive reading motivated learners to read and improved their ability to speak and understand everyday English. To conclude, language learners receive greater awareness from a wide range of reading texts. They are exposed to the enjoyment of reading for pleasure that accelerates the incidental acquisition of linguistic features, vocabulary knowledge, output activities, and grammar.

Since incidental acquisition can be facilitated not only through extensive reading but also through conversation and interaction, this present study attempts to investigate whether extensive reading equipped with communicative output activities (enhanced extensive reading) could also contribute to students' incidental grammar acquisition, especially in this case, specific feature: English prepositions. Enhanced extensive reading is reading for pleasure, followed by post-reading activities done by students and teachers after reading. Bamford and Day (2004) mentioned some post-reading activities involving predicting content based on the title, vocabulary journal, discussion, and oral presentation. These mentioned activities aim to encourage students to respond creatively to the text and motivate them to focus on the information in the text. Wahjudi (2010, p.92) reported that "through a variety of post-reading activities, students are expected to recycle certain learning aspects of language skills and components so that their communicative competence can be developed well."

Similar studies have been conducted by Song and Sardegna (2014) and Altakhanineh & Ibrahim (2019). Song and Sardegna (2014) examined whether enhanced extensive reading influenced the twenty-four students' incidental acquisition of English prepositions in Korea's third year of secondary school. The results showed that they reached significant gains in acquiring English prepositions. In one semester, the participants were divided into a regular instruction group and an enhanced extensive reading instruction group. In this study, pre-and post-achievement scores were obtained, and it shows that the experimental group experienced improvements in noticing and correcting wrong prepositions and constructing correct prepositions. In contrast, the group that did not receive the additional instruction reached minor improvement only in noticing wrong prepositions. Then, it was followed by a retrospective interview in which the responses revealed five factors influencing the acquisition of English prepositions through enhanced extensive reading, such as increased reading comprehension,

vocabulary knowledge, frequent encounters of prepositions in meaningful contexts, increased intuition for preposition use, and opportunities for using the new input in output activities. In short, their study showed that enhanced extensive reading can effectively contribute to EFL secondary schools' incidental acquisition of English prepositions.

The study conducted by Altakhanineh and Ibrahim (2019) justified the influence of post-reading activities to help the students in the United Arab Emirates incidentally learn English prepositions. This study examined their incidental acquisition of English prepositions. The students were treated by doing reading comprehension exercises and then pre-and posttest were administered to examine the effectiveness of post-reading activities. The participants were divided into two groups, experimental and control groups, in which the students engaged in reading comprehension exercises and did not engage in the exercises, respectively. This study showed that reading by post-reading activities followed in the more significant incidental acquisition of English prepositions.

Therefore, this study attempted to investigate the enhanced extensive reading on the students' incidental acquisition of English prepositions *in, on, at,* in Extensive Reading class. This study was conducted to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there any significant improvement in the students' incidental acquisition of the English prepositions, *in, on,* and *at,* after they received enhanced extensive reading?
2. What influences the improvement of their incidental acquisition of the English prepositions, *in, on,* and *at*?

Method

The study used pre-experimental design with one group pretest posttest approach. A total of sixteen students aged 18-20 years participated in this study. The participants of this study were first-year students in the English Language Education Department, Atma Jaya Catholic University of Indonesia. They took an extensive reading course once a week for 100 minutes. In this extensive reading course, the students selected the provided reading articles they liked to read, predicted the content of the articles based on the title, discussed questions prepared by the lecturers of this class, prepared a vocabulary journal, and presented the vocabulary list and the content of the reading articles. Adapting ten principles by Bamford and Day (2004), this course allowed the students to select and read their own graded non-fiction readings from magazines that were provided by the lecturers with wide range of topics at their own pace, aimed only for pleasure and information, required them to complete follow-up activities to monitor and figure out how the students understood and experienced the readings. It was different from intensive reading in which teachers provide comprehension questions to help students gain the detailed information.

The data of this study were the scores obtained from the pretest and the posttest and the students' responses from the distribution of the questionnaires to figure out what influenced their improvement on the incidental acquisition of English prepositions in, on, and at. The instruments of this study were the question items about the targeted English prepositions that were adapted from Song and

Sardegna (2014). The test items were taken from the reading articles used in the course and divided into three parts, namely notice, notice+know, and notice+produce. In part A, notice, the participants were asked to decide whether the prepositions in the sentences were correct or incorrect. They were instructed to write "I don't know" if they were clueless. In part B, notice+know, they were asked to fill in the blank by choosing the appropriate prepositions from the provided options. In part C, notice+produce, they were asked to analyze the short reading passage, identify the incorrect prepositions in the text and correct them. The test items in the pretest and the posttest were identical in format, but the items were scrambled to prevent them from remembering. The purpose of having three parts in the administered tests was to have different difficulty levels, starting from noticing to producing.

Moreover, there was a significant time difference (seven weeks) between the pretest and the posttest to make it hard for the students to remember any items in the test. The posttest was administered two weeks after the instructions to measure the retained knowledge. The other instrument was the open-ended questionnaire to determine the factors influencing their incidental acquisition. It was distributed after they completed the posttest.

The pretest and posttest data were analyzed using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test due to the small number of participants. Also, the open-ended questionnaire was analyzed by categorizing the students' responses into factors influencing their decision to answer the posttest.

Findings and Discussion

The pretest was administered to determine the students' acquisition of the English prepositions *in, on,* and *at* before the treatment. Then, the scores in the pretest were compared to those in the posttest. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the students' acquisition in the pretest and posttest. Before the treatment, the mean average of the pretest was only 51. After four-week treatment, their acquisition of *in, on,* and *at* increased almost 30% shown in the mean average of the posttest that reached 66.25 with a mean difference at 15.25. Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was conducted, and the results showed that the improvement of the students' acquisition of the English prepositions *in, on,* and *at* in the pretest and in the posttest was statistically significant ($Z=-3.516$, $p<.05$).

Table 1. A comparison of the pretest and the posttest scores

Pretest Mean (SD)	Posttest Mean (SD)	Z (post-pre)	P
51 (10.17)	66.25 (12.47)	-3.516	.000

In order to find out the students' levels of preposition knowledge from noticing to producing, each part of the preposition test and the effect sizes were examined using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test. Cohen's (1988) conventions were used to interpret the effect sizes. If the effect size is .10, it is considered small. .30 is medium, while .50 is large. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the students' acquisition based on the levels of preposition knowledge, the Wilcoxon test of difference, and the effect size.

Table 2. A descriptive statistic, Wilcoxon test, and effect size of the difference between pretest and posttest scores in each type of preposition knowledge

Preposition knowledge type	Pretest Mean (SD)	Posttest Mean (SD)	Z (post-pre)	*P*	Cohen's D
Part A: Notice	60 (12.469)	71.87 (9.105)	-2.390	.016	0.69
Part B: Notice + Know	52.31 (12.783)	64.06 (13.660)	-2.861	.004	0.76
Part C: Notice + Produce	36.87 (23.012)	61.87 (25.876)	-3.015	.002	0.84

Table 2 shows a significant difference between pretest and posttest in each type of preposition knowledge performed by the students. In part A in which the students were asked to decide whether the prepositions in the sentence are correct or incorrect, it indicates that there is a significant improvement in this type of preposition knowledge (Z=-2.390, $p<.05$) with a large effect size ($r=.69$). In part B, in which the students were asked to fill in the blank with the correct preposition, the result shows a significant difference between the pretest and the posttest (Z=-2.861, $p<.05$). It was supported by the observed standardized effect size reaching 0.76, indicating that the difference between pretest and posttest in this type of preposition knowledge is large. Interestingly, part C, where they were asked to find incorrect prepositions from the reading passage and expected to be able to correct them, shows improvement significantly (Z=-3.015, $p<.05$) with a large effect size ($r=.84$), indicating the magnitude of the difference between pretest and the posttest in this type of preposition knowledge is considerable. Above all, the improvement of the students' acquisitions in English prepositions in, on, at is statistically significant.

This study proves that the students can learn the English prepositions in, on, and at incidentally by extensive reading instructions and post-reading activities. The findings of this study support the results in Song and Sardegna (2014), in which the students experienced significant improvement in all three sections with large effect sizes of more than .80. Similar to Song and Sardegna (2014), this present study also shows the scores in the third section (notice+produce) in which the level of difficulty in the notice+produce section is more challenging than the others show the most significant improvement. It indicates that the incidental learning through enhanced extensive reading instructions gave greater effect on the students' knowledge to identify the incorrect prepositions in the reading passage and on their knowledge to correct them and replace them with appropriate prepositions. Besides, the result of this study is in line with the findings of Resketi and Bagheri (2014) that investigated the use of enhanced extensive reading to EFL learners' incidental acquisition of English Phrasal Verbs. In their study, the English phrasal verb acquisitions of the students treated using enhanced extensive reading were then compared to the results of the control group treated using unenhanced extensive

reading. The results show that the enhanced extensive reading improved the students' acquisition of English phrasal verbs incidentally. The improvement outperformed those who received unenhanced extensive reading instruction. This study can also support the findings by Aka (2020), indicating that unconsciously students are giving close attention to the language forms, although their emphasis is on comprehending the text.

It is also evident that the post-reading activities could improve the students' acquisition of English prepositions in, on, at. Even though this study did not compare the group results with the enhanced extensive reading instruction to those without its post-reading activities, it can support the study conducted by Altakhanineh & Ibrahim (2019). Their study shows that reading with post-reading activities gave more significant effect than reading without ones in the students' incidental acquisition of English prepositions.

Through this study, it can be said that combining pleasure through extensive reading and post-reading activities like predicting content, vocabulary journal, discussion, and oral presentation (Barmford & Day, 2004) is effective to enhance the students' incidental acquisition of English prepositions, in, on, and at. Post-reading activities in class allow interactions between text and students or students, making communicative inputs possible. The results of this study are in line with Ellis & Shintani (2010), mentioning that reading for pleasure can foster English preposition acquisition and with Pica (1994) arguing that communicative inputs like conversation and interaction can increase incidental acquisition. Wahjudi (2010, p.92) reported that "through a variety of post-reading activities, students are expected to recycle certain learning aspects of language skills and components so that their communicative competence can be developed well."

The results gained from distributing questionnaires show that the improvement of their incidental acquisition of the English prepositions, in, on, and at is influenced by their knowledge of the prepositions and their intuition on which appropriate prepositions should be used. The students know the function of English prepositions in, on, at. They mentioned that in, on, and at are used to give detailed information about time and place. Even though they know the basic concept of English prepositions, they still have problems differentiating one another. The following samples were taken from student C's responses and student A's of the questionnaire.

> *"I know about prepositions, commonly we use prepositions to show a relationship in space or time or a logical relationship between two or more people, places, and also things." (student C)*

> *"I'm able to answer it but not all of it because there are some question that made me confused because I don't know well about English prepositions and the difference to using on and in because what I know is they have the similar signal in the sentence." (student A)*

The other factor influencing the students to use appropriate English prepositions is their intuition involved. This point conforms to Song and Sardegna's (2014) findings that the increased intuition for preposition use becomes the factor affecting

acquisition. This result is supported by Plessner & Czenna (2008), who mentioned that "incidental learning will most likely produce intuitive decisions." In this study, the students were exposed to books they read for their extensive reading class and exposed to the comprehensive inputs gained from its post-reading activities. According to Krashen (1985), the students will understand grammar if they are exposed to enough comprehensible input. The results are interesting. Whereas the differences between one English preposition and another still confuse the students, the increased intuition leads them to the decision-making in answering the question items in the posttest. The following sample was taken from student B's responses to the questionnaire.

> *"I don't know. Because I feel it is more suitable to use that preposition in the questions." (student B)*

That extensive reading and its post-reading activities become evident in improving the students' English preposition acquisition. It shows that they allow the students to get exposed to a large quantity of comprehensible input that helps increase their linguistic knowledge. The comprehension hypothesis was proposed by Krashen et al. (2018), stating that people acquire the components of language, the "skills" such as vocabulary and grammar, when they gain comprehensible input. Then, they added that "the evidence for the Compelling Input Hypothesis are the numerous cases of unexpected improvement in the language without conscious effort, but merely by being very interested in reading, or watching films and television programs" (Krashen et al., 2018) as cited in Ng et al., (2019). The study conducted by Celik (2018) shows that extensive reading makes the readers aware that the uses of prepositions do not match their first language, so they have to learn them as they are in the target language. Aka (2020) added that learners exposed frequently to the target grammar items could notice a grammatical rule in her study. This frequent exposure significantly contributes to their incidental grammar acquisition.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is proven that extensive reading instructions significantly improve the students' incidental acquisition of the English preposition, in, on, and at. The post-reading activities also affect their linguistic knowledge. The improvement of their incidental acquisition is influenced by their understanding of English prepositions and their intuition to decide the appropriate English preposition use. The incidental acquisition of the targeted English prepositions can be fostered through repeated encounters in their extensive reading and communicative inputs gained through post-reading activities. However, there are two study limitations in this study. The first limitation is the subject's size, which was only 16 participants. The results of this study cannot be generalized, and further research must be conducted to figure out the impacts of enhanced extensive reading instruction on EFL learners. That this study did not compare the results between extensive reading treatment only and extensive reading with its post-reading activities becomes another limitation that the further study can research this. It is hoped that this study will benefit teachers and encourage educational institutions to add enhanced extensive reading instruction in their curriculum.

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