

Empowering the Santri's Reading Skills in Pesantren Mahasiswa Al-Hikam Malang

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Abstract

This study addresses the prevalent challenges in reading faced by santri within Islamic boarding schools and proposes a solution through an extensive reading program. Many santri encounter difficulties in comprehending texts, particularly when dealing with English materials. The primary obstacle identified is a lack of vocabulary, ranging from limited knowledge to a deficiency in mastery. Additionally, deficiencies in reading skills, such as skimming, making inferences, and identifying key ideas, contribute to the overall reading struggle. To address these issues, a method, namely Sustained Silent Reading (SSR), was implemented, assuming that santri would enhance their reading ability and develop an interest in reading through extensive reading. An accompaniment program was conducted to emphasize the importance of reading, aiming to increase motivation and cultivate a reading culture among santri. The theoretical contribution of this program is expected to support existing theories related to the automatic recognition of words, vocabulary knowledge, and learner autonomy. On a practical level, the results can serve as a reference for designing similar programs targeting other language skills, providing an alternative and effective method for language accompaniment. Moreover, the pesantren foundation can use the outcomes as a reference to support the establishment of a reading culture, potentially enhancing the pesantren library.

Keywords: Reading; Reading Skills; Santri.

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Introduction

The trouble with reading not only takes place widely in the society but also infiltrates into classes of *pesantren*. Fixing that situation, an effort is taken through the extensive reading program. But, again reading is not as easy as opening the eyes. Reading is not interesting when it deals with material subject of *pesantren* as it gets worse when it comes to reading in English.

Many *santri* have difficulty in making sense of texts they want to read, seem to read considerably more slowly than they read in their first language, and feel less confident about reading in English. Of course, there are a number of possible reasons for this, but according to Meng (2009) this is partly due to the way reading is approached in the language class. The difficulty faced by *santri* is merely all about vocabulary; the lack of vocabulary, *santri's* limited knowledge of English vocabulary up to deficiency of vocabulary mastery. It worsened as they still have problems with their lack understanding of reading skills, such as skimming, making inferences, finding key words, and finding main idea. This is quite disappointing since these skills are actually taught in their Junior and Senior High School.

Those *santri's* difficulty in reading also occurs in *Pesantren Mahasiswa Al-Hikam Malang*, where the teaching of reading is inserted in the intensive course program. The book used is "Spectrum: A Communicative Course in English" (Warshawky & Byrd, 1993) that provides the practice in all four communicating skills, with a special focus on listening and speaking. This way reading is approached intensively in the language class leads *santri* to reach little benefit. *Santri's* reading skills doesn't not improve as well.

To solve the *santri*'s problem above, it was implemented a kind of method that can help *santri* improving their reading skill, and assists them gaining the new vocabularies by encouraging them to read extensively through a simple reading method the-so-called Sustained Silent Reading (SSR), with an assumption that *santri* will improve their reading ability by reading a lot or at least this extensive reading program will foster their interest in reading.

This accompaniment program on how to make reading become *santri*'s habit is conducted to emphasize the urgency of reading and is purposed to increase the *santri*'s motivation to read in order to create reading culture. This extensive reading program for *santri* is significantly viewed as it yields several reasons. The reasons are related to what this accompaniment program contributes. The contributions are in the form of theoretical contributions and practical ones. In the term of theoretical contribution, the results of this program is assumed to support the existing theory of reading which deals with automatic recognition of words, knowledge of vocabulary and *santri*'s autonomy.

For practical contribution, however, the result of this program can be used firstly as reference to do another accompaniment program in relation to other language skills such as writing or speaking proficiency based on the Sustained Silent Reading method. Secondly, companion of *santri* empowerment can use it as an alternative and effective way of language accompaniment beside the conventional one. The last, the board of *pesantren* foundation can also use it as reference to support the efficiency of establishing the reading culture especially by endowing the *pesantren* library with a large number of readers as a supplement for *santri* in reading extensively.

The accompaniment program is approximately conducted in Tulusrejo, district Lowokwaru exactly located at *Pesantren Mahasiswa Al-Hikam Malang* which is established and oriented for graduates of public school who have reading experiences as they were obliged to learn English for nine years and for graduates of traditional *pesantren*, who have reading ability in comprehending the classical Arabic books but not English texts. The subjects of the accompaniment are *santri* with various discipline studies backgrounds. They all include departments of Science, Humanities, Islamic Studies, Education, Engineering, and Economy. Of course, a wide variety of these different areas of specialization provides scope for comparing and contrasting the result of the implemented program.

The outcomes are the changes or results that the *pesantren* expects to be achieved after the successful completion of the accompaniment program of extensive reading. The outcomes could be quantitative or qualitative or both. It is quantitatively showed not only on the quantity of the number of books, magazines, journals, websites within displayed the accumulation of pages *santri* read, but also the vocabulary achievement. The content of what *santri* read is summarized and orally reported weekly as they mention the author, year of publication, publisher, and one important thing, in this case, is the messages of what they have read. Those reading reports are qualitatively described.

This program address the needs of how extensive reading program should be implemented as it already demonstrates the positive contributions toward the establishment of reading culture, improvement of reading skills, development of reading interest, acquisition of the unfamiliar vocabulary and the authority of *santri* as a reader. Implementing this community service program is critical to addressing the obstacles that *santri* at *Pesantren Mahasiswa Al-Hikam Malang* encounter in enhancing their English reading skills. Regardless of prior English schooling, many *santri* struggle with limited vocabulary proficiency and reading methods like skimming, making inferences, and identifying important concepts.

The Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) method is presented as an effective approach to fostering a reading culture, improving vocabulary acquisition, and improving reading fluency through autonomous and extended reading activities. This program helps *santri* by increasing their confidence, acquiring important skills, and contributing to their academic and personal development. Furthermore, it provides practical insights for empowering *santri*, an alternative teaching technique, and contributes to the *pesantren*'s goal of developing a strong reading culture.

Methods

This program lasted one semester and encouraged *santri* to read a variety of literature based on their interests and background knowledge, including short tales, magazines, novels, articles, and book chapters. *Santri* were free to choose alternative books instead of uninteresting or difficult ones, with the goal of increasing their motivation to read. Weekly meetings consisted of 30 minutes of silent reading followed by 60 minutes of activities such as oral storytelling, discussions, and writing tasks. Out-of-class reading was also required, with *santri* submitting written summaries to help with comprehension and tracking progress.

Santri kept notebooks to record unusual words or idioms and actively engaged with literature by highlighting, summarizing, and recording keywords. Reading reports contained book names, authors, release dates, content descriptions, reading motivations, and language difficulty levels. The companion's purpose

was to provide advice, feedback, and support during and after class, so enhancing comprehension, vocabulary, and writing abilities. This method ensured active involvement and consistent improvement in reading competence.

The action procedure of extensive reading program by implementing Sustained Silent Reading was described in the table below:

Table 1. Table of Teaching Procedure of Extensive Reading Program

Reading stage	Companion's activities	Santri' activities
Pre-reading activity	1. Leading the <i>santri</i> to the reading time.	1. Paying attention to what companion said.
Reading activity	1. Acting as a reader for <i>santri</i> . 2. Monitoring the <i>santri</i> to ensure all <i>santri</i> are reading and engaging the <i>santri</i> to read silently and actively.	1. Following companion by starting to read. 2. Involving with the text of book being read by underlining and highlighting, note key words or vocabulary, and summary.
Follow-up activity	3. Mediating <i>santri</i> 's retelling a story	3. Reporting what is read orally.
Post-reading activity	1. Collecting the <i>santri</i> 's diary. 2. Checking and commenting on written summaries that <i>santri</i> did of their reading. 3. Asking the <i>santri</i> 's feedback as reflection.	1. Submitting the individual reading report. 2. Recognizing the mistake in their summary and fixing them. 3. Giving conclusion of the lesson.

This accompaniment program is targeted at Islamic boarding schools students (*santri pesantren*) with the consideration that in addition to easy access to implementation, it is also due to the reading culture among Islamic boarding schools which is conditioned in such a way that only through listening to the reading of the *kitab turats* known as *kitab kuning* by means of being translated into the mother tongue, it has been formed so that it is considered capable of forming the reading of another foreign language manuscripts or books independently.

Result and Discussion

Reading progress report could be traced back from the number of material *santri* read and kind of material *santri* chose included number of various titles and total amount of pages they reached. In relating to the level of language difficulty, perhaps language difficulty demonstrated the small number of pages *santri* read, while easy level was explaining the change of graded reader to ungraded one.

Material to read comprised four different sources with different level of language difficulty. Mostly, *santri* preferred to read books than to read three other sources. There were 23 books, included 1 novel. Nine of sixteen *santri* felt that language used in those books were difficult. Only three *santri* said that level of language difficulty of the books they read were medium. One *santri*, who read 6 books, asserted that 1 of 6 books was easy to read, 2 of them were medium, and 3 books were difficult. While *santri* who were reading 3 books, stated that 1 of 3 books was easy to read, 2 of them were difficult, one *santri* read only one book confessed that the book he read was in between medium and difficult. Unlike those 12 difficult books, 2 other sources; novel and magazines were medium and easy to read. One *santri* reads one novel and three *santri* took magazine as material to read. Another source was web. Three *santri* felt that the languages used in websites were difficult; two others thought that it was medium, and one was easy to read. It was predicted before that internet would be an interesting reference that *santri* preferred to read through since most of *santri* had personal computer with a free access to internet provided by school. However, it was found out that web couldn't replace book.

Total materials to read were 32, consisting of 22 books, 1 novel, 3 magazines, and only 6 websites. Various titles *santri* read were 76 titles. *Santri*'s reading continued to 740 pages. *Santri* often read those materials more than twice. On average, they reread 3 times and even 5 times. This frequency of reading

showed that santri are challenged to read, to dig more knowledge information contained in books, novel, magazines, and web. One important thing to be reported here that was *santri's* curiosity. Their high curiosity reasoned why *santri* continues reading though they realized that materials they read are difficult enough.

Level of language difficulties was noted that 12 of 22 books were difficult and 3 of 6 web's articles were difficult too. Total amount of difficult materials to read were 15, while medium level were 11 material consisting of 7 books, 1 novel, 2 magazines, and 2 web's articles and easy one was only 4 taken from 2 books, 1 magazine, and 1 article in internet. This small number of easy materials indicated that when *santri* easily finished easy reading (graded reader), they abandon it for another level; medium to difficult (ungraded reader).

In the follow-up activity, reluctantly many santri were so shy to report their reading orally when they requested to share or to retell. The psychological barrier hindered them to come forward. They admitted that they were nervous. A strategy to break this congealment was that companion appointed a funny *santri* to be a volunteer in oral report. The result showed that it worked. A funny *santri* became an ice breaker. The next reporter was motivated to share or retell and the following report ran smoothly except a reluctant *santri*, who preferred to conference face to face to the teacher than to retell at class. Perhaps he was known as a lazy reader before his friend's eyes and he was afraid of being mocked whenever he was required to share in front of class.

A noisy class could not be avoided. It was in contrast of the beginning of class that was so silent. The atmosphere of class got hot as if a *santri* provoked with a cynical question and reporter was really engaged in answering not because he could answer but he tried hard to defend on what he told. Unexpected debate happened and what companion could do was just letting this situation until both of them agree with an unanswered question. In response to the presentation, it was important to be noted that santri preferred to ask than to comment or gave suggestion. As observer asked why, *santri* answered that it was easier to ask than to comment. It was assumed that a question was a trigger to start a conversation. Unlike comment and suggestion, question was usually used in responding the retelling a story. However, companion should encourage them to try to comment.

The result of spoken summary showed that no one fails in summarizing. These scores attached below showed the *santri's* ability on how to convert a long text becomes short one. The indicator of that developed skill of summary could be seen from the number of scores where *santri* were able to come to the conclusion that summaries the main ideas. There were seven *santri* reached this criterion. Unfortunately, if not because of the lack of attendances that reduced the score, the score 3 would be probably attained by fourteen *santri*. But, comparing with the written summary, this achievement proved that the spoken modality produces descriptions shorter than the written one. It was not so easy to retell longer than to rewrite. However, *santri* were motivated to demonstrate what was read through spoken summary. The spoken summary situation was also rather dynamic than the written one.

Unlike spoken summary, *santri* who missed the class were still required to completely summarize what they read for eight meetings. There were 128 diary sheets cover title of the book to read, author and year, pages, content: summary, reasons to read, and level of language difficulty. These oral reports were done by sixteen *santri*. For this reason, *santri's* absences didn't influence the score they gained.

The scores on the average points were in between a scale of 4 to 2. Seven santri got point 4, four *santri* reached to conclusions that summarize the main ideas (point 3), and five *santri* got point 2; the minimum limit of criteria of success. Those scores showed santri's progress in clear understanding of texts. But, comparing with spoken summary that only one *santri* got point 4, in written summary seven *santri* reached the same point. This proved that written summary was obviously attained and were clearly improved than in spoken one. This achievement was justified by that the written descriptions would be more precise than the spoken one.

As the purpose of writing a summary was to accurately represent what the author wanted to say, *santri* had correctly cited anything directly quoted from the text. Firstly many *santri* rewrote any quotations for the accuracy by copy-paste strategy and for simplification that highlights the major points, it seemed like they just recalled the main ideas of texts that were explicitly written as they were. These mistakes naturally happened so that *santri* could learn that in summary only indirect speech is used and *santri* have to write on their own language.

In their summarizing, there were two possibilities of shortening occurred. Both showed that first, *santri* were smart enough to keep a summary short since people are always eager to read something short than somewhat long, and the longer something is, the greater a chance there is of including mistakes or misinformation within piece of writing. Second, too short summary confirmed that *santri* were tired of writing since they were required not only to read but also to write. However, this truth of possibility in shortening explained the reading achievement as it shown in their both spoken and written summary.

Comparing with written report that *santri* summarized, oral report needed more time allocation. Written report could be done out of class while *santri* were also required to read extensively. This double job explained why many *santri* summarized what they read in class in the time when they should be audiences. Another explanation of what *santri* reported in written was that they really shortened as short as possible. They argued that they were tired of writing while they were busy in reading. However, summary was needed to demonstrate that *santri* clearly understood the texts they read and that they could communicate that understanding to classmates.

The reading comprehension test evaluated how well *santri* understood the texts. The test was intended for only one topic taken from various different sources of *santri*'s reading. The questions were focused on *santri*'s comprehension of the global information from the text they read and how clear they found the main points of the text.

The test result would be an evidence of *santri*'s reading achievement. *Santri*'s score proved their successful reading. This test confirmed the truth of *santri*'s reading report that were in both written and spoken summary. The result showed that only one *santri* with a score that meet the lowest minimum limit of criteria of success. It meant that all of *santri* were able to comprehend the texts they read. This attainment pointed that *santri*'s reading comprehension was frosted through the continuity of active reading inside and outside class. *Santri* can acquire a more extensive vocabulary, build their reading ability, and access to background information through extensive reading.

Number of unfamiliar or new words *santri* collected during their independent reading was various. The variety of numbers showed that the big number of unfamiliar words a *santri* collected is 268 words and the small one is only 23 words. This variety of words collection related to the level of language difficulty of materials of *santri*'s choice. There were 1386 words. The number of word collection justified that the more *santri* collect the unfamiliar words the more they will get their chances to enrich their vocabularies. To know how high they acquired the new words, *santri*'s vocabulary acquisition were tested.

The test was conducted in written and spoken. For the written test, test taken from the selected new words *santri* found in one title of their readings. The result showed that *santri* acquire 89.9 percent of new words they collected. The total of vocabulary gains was 708 of 787 words. The high score was 100 attained by five *santri* and only two *santri* with scores that were close to the minimum limit of criteria of success.

Comparing with the spoken test where all *santri*'s new words collections were tested, the result showed the decline of vocabulary acquisition to 13.2 percent. A total of word gains were 1064 of 1386 words equal with 76.7 percent. This declination of vocabulary acquisition made sense due to the different total number of words being tested and different situation of both spoken and written test. For *santri*, spoken test was more difficult than written one since they were required to memorize all the words they collected and forced to answer spontaneously. This did not happen in written test where *santri* were more relax to answer as they got enough time to think and gave the best answer. However, the accuracy of *santri*'s vocabulary acquisition was measured through two different ways. The final scores *santri* got were that the accumulation score of written test and spoken one divided by two. The result showed that the lowest score is 69 and the highest one is 97.8.

Another way to recall *santri*'s memory was that *santri* were asked to trace back the unfamiliar words by writing them completely in their sentences, detailed with what page *santri* read, also publisher and author. This way was aimed to confirm partially *santri*'s vocabulary acquisition. The task was taken only on one selected reading material as its vocabulary was written tested.

There was also shift in attitude that serious negative attitude towards reading such as *santri* shy away from reading aloud changed into confident to read silently. *Santri*'s self-confidence was built as they were required to write a retelling story and to share their previous reading. Instead of their retelling and summarizing, *santri* were appreciated to be as readers for what they read. This appreciation indirectly helps *santri* to improve the reading like.

Santri's attitude towards reading was expressed in positive sight on reading. Reading was not like somewhat threatening anymore. *Santri* might beat that stigmatization of reading since they could enjoy the new way of the teaching of reading.

Reading achievement was gradually attained from the *santri*'s reading progress which was shown in their number of materials they read, pages they reached and level of language difficulty the faced. The *santri*'s reading product was shown from their reading report in both written and spoken summary supported *santri*'s reading achievement as they finished their reading report.

Relating to the small number of the pages *santri* reached, the consequence of chosen materials that were difficult to read was that *santri*'s readings were too slow. The language difficulty forced *santri* to reread in often. The result of this, extensive reading with difficult language used in hasn't shown to be effective in increasing *santri*'s reading speed. Reading speed depends on many factors. One is individual reading speed,

because *santri* cannot change their original reading speed through reading a lot of materials. Another is individual reading comprehension. If *santri*'s reading comprehension is quite good, they will easily get the main point in a short time. These factors can affect *santri*'s reading speed. Therefore, extensive reading is shown not to improve *santri*'s reading speed (Bell, 2001).

Concerning about the *santri*'s reading report that was done through activities like retelling the stories orally to the class, information transfer and 'read and write' or summarizing, the extension of *santri*'s reading occurs as the lecturer provides the *santri* with an opportunity to share their stories with their classmates and to practice their oral English (Meng, 2009). In line with this, Bell (1998) asserted that in considering that all of *santri* have sufficient time to report orally, it requires regular follow-up exercises such as story summaries or discussions. *Santri*'s discussion with their lecturer or classmates and share their opinions with classmates after reading is an effective and pleasurable way for them to learn to read English. By allowing *santri* to read material which they are interested in and asking them to share their opinions after reading with classmates or write a summary about the article, with greater *santri* motivation in reading English materials, there arises the opportunity for teachers to ask *santri* to read more difficult articles or materials which *santri* may not have been attracted to originally. All of which presents a more positive learning environment to both teachers and *santri* of English as a foreign language environments.

For the term of *santri*'s writing summaries, it is valuable not only to provide a means for lecturer to check comprehension, but because the writing of summaries improves comprehension. Written summaries give *santri* an opportunity to demonstrate that they are, in fact, doing their reading. The fact, this practice helps *santri* improve their writing ability (Lopez, 1989; Smith, 1988; Hedge, 1985; Susser & Robb, 1989, in Susser & Robb, 1990).

The result of reading comprehension test that confirmed the *santri*'s reading achievement shown in their reading report progress indicates that if *santri* read more, their vocabulary recognition will be developed. Once the *santri*'s ability in vocabulary has been built-up, it will become easier for them to get the main idea from articles and other texts. For this reason, *santri* think that extensive reading can improve their reading comprehension (Shang, et al. 2010).

In the process of extensive reading, *santri* can read some words which show up frequently in the article. When *santri* read more and more, they will become increasingly familiar with the words to which they are frequently exposed; *santri*'s vocabulary recognition will be developed in such a process. They can acquire these words and memorize them more easily. In addition, *santri* have greater motivation to learn some special or interesting words through reading. Consequently, extensive reading can enhance *santri*'s vocabulary (Shang, et al., 2010). According to several research studies, effects of Sustained Silent Reading on *santri*'s reading include improvement in reading skills and vocabulary acquisition, as measured by reading test scores, developing a positive attitude towards reading and cultivating a better reading habit.



Figure 1. Santri's Reading Activity Captured in Photos

Active reading was shown in how a *santri* reads, highlights, notes, and uses a dictionary silently. Oral report presented individually through retelling the story and summarizing with feedback raised by the audiences in response to the presentation. This, an independent reading followed by sharing or retelling, and summarizing has a paramount potency to lead them to the love of reading when *santri* were given the opportunity and encouragement to read and allowed to select their own reading materials. The shift in attitude will be more prominent if the Sustained Silent Reading programs are run for 6 months or more (Chow & Chou, 2000).

Conclusion

The extensive reading program based on Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) illustrates that this method is a fun and successful alternative to intense reading courses for learning English as a foreign language. Allowing *santri* to select resources depending on their interests encouraged them to participate in reading, even if the books were difficult. While no gains in reading speed were noted, and some *santri* stopped reading after the program, the fact that they loved the experience is noteworthy. Many *santri* wrote in their journals that the materials were engaging and exciting, and even reluctant readers rated their books positively. The approach encouraged curiosity, increased self-confidence through retelling and summarizing, and improved *santri's* attitude toward reading. With long-term implementation, SSR provides significant potential to develop lasting reading habits.

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