Extramural English and Vietnamese EFL primary school students’ listening and reading proficiency in Vietnam

Dang Thi Thi¹*, Le Van Thinh²

¹Ton Duc Thang University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
²Banking Academy of Vietnam, Phu Yen, Vietnam
*Corresponding author: pkthithi@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

DOI: 10.46223/HCMCOUJS.soci.en.13.2.2805.2023

Many studies worldwide have found correlations between students’ exposure to English outside the classroom and students’ English vocabulary and oral proficiency. However, these studies have mostly been conducted with ESL (English as a Second Language) high school students or older students, while primary school students in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) countries have not been well documented. The study aimed to (1) investigate whether there are any correlations between Extramural English (EE) and listening and reading proficiency of Vietnamese EFL primary school students, and (2) determine their experience with EE. The participants were 101 Vietnamese elementary school students. Both interviews and questionnaires were used to collect information regarding students’ extramural English outside of the classroom and their experiences in EE activities. An English proficiency test, including listening and reading, was employed to examine students’ listening and reading. Findings showed that there was a correlation between extramural English and EFL primary students’ listening and reading proficiency. Most students participated in two main EE activities: using English game-based learning applications and surfing the Internet. The study suggested different techniques, some online games, and materials to support learners in acquiring a new language actively, and teachers could encourage more students to practice extramural English outside the classroom.

1. Introduction

Since English has become a common language used all over the world, many people worldwide have studied English in different ways. With the development of technology and the Internet, learners have a wide variety of valuable language learning resources, including a variety of audio-visual materials as well as various documents, e-books, and software applications (Pasch & Norsworthy, 2001). Sundqvist (2009) coined the term ‘Extramural English’ (EE) to describe the English that students are exposed to through activities they engage in outside the class, such as reading newspapers, playing video games, surfing the Internet, and watching TV (Sundqvist, 2009). Sundqvist and Sylvén (2014) further explained that EE is all kinds of English contributions outside school that can help learners acquire English incidentally. Students participating in many activities through the support of the Internet, such as watching English movies, listening to English music or through social networks such as Zalo and Facebook, had a positive impact on their language acquisition (Englund, 2022).
Up to now, many studies in foreign countries have shown the correlation between EE and its effects on learners’ language proficiency. Specifically, some researchers have demonstrated the correlation between EE and learners’ vocabulary (De Wilde, Brysbaert, & Eyckmans, 2019; Jóhannsdóttir, 2017; Nordnes, 2021; Nordquist, 2022; Sundqvist, 2009; Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2014; Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012; Zeidan, 2020), in which Sundqvist (2009), Sundqvist and Sylvén (2014), Sylvén and Sundqvist (2012) also explored the correlation between EE and learners’ oral proficiency. Some other studies about EE and its effects on learners’ skills have also been carried out so far, such as Sofie’s (2012), which highlighted the positive effect of EE on learners’ writing skills. Another study about EE and learners’ proficiency in terms of the ability to acquire English vocabulary and improve their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills was carried out by De Wilde et al. (2019). These studies about EE showed that watching movies, playing computer games, and using social platforms to communicate in English, etc., had positive effects on learners who interacted with EE activities frequently, especially in expanding the size of their vocabulary and then their speaking and writing proficiency. However, these studies have not evaluated whether EE has any correlations with listening and reading proficiency. In addition, they were conducted with school students in developed countries; therefore, it is still unknown if EE is different in primary schools in other countries, especially in the context of Vietnam. As a result, a study on the effect of EE on primary school students in a developing country like Vietnam is necessary. This study tries to fill the gaps with the following two research questions:

1. Are there any correlations between EE and Vietnamese EFL primary school students’ listening and reading proficiency?

2. How do Vietnamese EFL primary school students experience EE?

2. Literature review

2.1. Implicit learning and explicit learning

Learning a second language is similar to learning a first language in that the former might occur subconsciously (via communicative activities), although the latter is done on purpose (when learners combine their consciousness to learn a language other than their mother tongue). From a cognitive standpoint, L2 knowledge should include implicit learning to support explicit learning (Ellis et al., 2009; Rebuschat, 2013). The following section reviews implicit and explicit learning.

Implicit learning

According to Krashen’s studies (Krashen, 1977, 1988, 1994; Krashen, Long, & Scarcella, 1979), the language knowledge of learners could be divided into two distinct concepts: language learning and language acquisition. Language learning is a deliberate process that results in metalinguistic knowledge, while language acquisition is an unintentional process that results in implicit language knowledge. Knowledge of language is a term used to describe implicit L2 knowledge. The implicit understanding is seen as unconscious. In other words, students may not always be aware that they have learned something or are able to express it in words (Ellis, 2005; Rebuschat, 2013; Sonbul & Schmitt, 2012). Learners may refer to implicit information as intuition or emotion since it is tacit.

Ellis (2015) explained that implicit knowledge was procedural, while explicit knowledge, on the other hand, was deliberate and declarative. It is made up of language-related information that students are aware of and confidently able to share. In addition, DeKeyser (2009) argued that implicit learning was a passive process that only took place when the student made no attempt to
learn the structures that the instructor had provided. Additionally, Krashen added another piece of information about passive learning: Information gained via active learning could only be supported by passive knowledge. Although passive learning was a hard thing to do, it made the learner’s knowledge easier to remember (Paradowski, 2008).

In contrast to implicit learning, which occurred subconsciously, explicit learning involves input processing with the deliberate aim of determining if the given information includes regularities (Hulstijn, 2005).

Explicit learning

Explicit learning implies that learners who possess explicit L2 information are able to recall it consciously from memory. The learner is aware of having this linguistic knowledge, and they may express it verbally as a rule or an explanation of L2 usage (Loewen, 2014). It means that explicit learning has the aim of extracting rules and concepts from learned information and that learners are aware of what they are learning, whereas implicit learning occurs wholly unintentionally and without a preconceived purpose (Ellis et al., 2009).

Despite the fact that implicit learning and explicit learning are two separate concepts, implicit learning has been shown to have beneficial effects on language learning, and explicit learning cannot be ignored or replaced. Therefore, the combination of explicit and implicit learning can increase the benefits for students in terms of language comprehension. For example, students learn the fundamentals of a subject through classroom instruction, but if they are also exposed to implicit material like extramural English activities, their language and skill proficiency can be extended.

2.2. Extramural English

Sundqvist (2009) defined EE as “English outside the walls” (p. 1), which implies English that learners acquire outside of the classroom. Sundqvist and Sylvén (2016) further explained that activities that students do outside the classroom are for recreational reasons or their own personal desires. Benson (2013) also agreed that learners’ participation in EE came from their preferences. However, he also added to EE the concept of self-directed naturalistic learning, stating that when learners intended to learn the target language, they succeeded by putting themselves in a natural learning situation. In other words, besides EE activities for enjoyment, learners could also participate in those activities for their purposeful learning activities. In a nutshell, EE learning activities can be understood as activities not given and controlled by teachers in the process of acquiring English. Moreover, learners can participate in these activities based on their interest in learning English or based on their perceived purpose, as long as they are aware that they have learned something, which is also called implicit learning activities (Ellis, 2005; Phan, 2021; Rebuschat, 2013; Sonbul & Schmitt, 2012). According to De Wilde et al. (2019) and Sundqvist (2009) EE activities could be classified into watching English cartoons, using English game-based learning applications, surfing the Internet, reading comic books, and listening to English songs.

2.3. Extramural English and second language acquisition theories

Extramural English activities refer to students’ exposure to the language outside the classroom, which is similar to the input hypothesis by Krashen (1985). In the input hypothesis, Krashen (1991, 1985) supposed that language learners learn the target language through exposure to input slightly higher than their level, and they can acquire the language. He explains that learning a language is like learning a child’s first language with the caregiver. Every day, the child
picks up the language, which is a little more difficult for his level from the caregiver. The second or foreign language learner, similarly, learns the target language through listening and reading the text, which is a bit higher than their level, and he can guess the meaning from the context or other linguistic features in the sentence. If the language in the input is too difficult for the learner’s level, it does not help the learner acquire any language because the learner cannot understand. At that time, students will intake the language. He not only suggested that effective input only works when learners understand it in the context of communication but also argued that the easier the input was to understand, the more successful the acquisition of knowledge was (Krashen, 1991). It meant that when people were trying to learn something new, they were more likely to succeed if they had easy access to the input.

In response to Krashen’s input hypothesis, Long (1996), in his Interaction Hypothesis pointed out that negotiation in the conversation results in the reformulation of the utterance to make it more comprehensible to the interlocutor, which fostered the language input and output. When the interlocutors understand the content of the conversation, they pay much attention to the unknown linguistic form. The negotiation for meaning has functions: confirmation check, clarification request, and comprehension check (Gass & Mackey, 2007). During these processes, the language learners notice their linguistic errors and the target language to convey the meaning.

However, Swain (1985) also argued that although input plays an important role in language acquisition, it is not enough for acquisition to happen. Swain argued that language learners try to focus on the semantic features of the language without paying much attention to the form. For example, if learners are exposed to the language comprehensive input, they will try to comprehend the language, and when they often make extensive mistakes in their output. Output promotes ‘noticing’ in the linguistic features when the language learners are asked to produce their language. For example, when the learners are asked to produce what they will do tomorrow, they will pay attention to the future tenses; otherwise, they won’t pay much attention to it.

For EE activities, EE input refers to learners’ extramural media habits and routines, such as playing video games, using social media, or accessing online streaming (Halvorsen & Haaland, 2022). Much evidence has proven that EE activities not only develop learners’ vocabulary while playing computer games (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2014) but also improve speaking skills through using social media as an interactive input to connect with other players and speak in English (De Wilde et al., 2019). The following section will review the studies on EE.

2.4. Previous studies on EE activities

2.4.1. Watching English cartoons

Several studies have shown the positive effects of watching cartoons in English on learners. Poštić (2015) concluded that children who were exposed to English cartoons at an early age performed better in their pronunciation and communication skills than other children who were not. In Vietnam, students who watched cartoons outside the classroom outperformed students who did not in speaking and listening skills (Le & Tran, 2020). One of the reasons is that cartoon watching is regarded as a beneficial practice for young learners of English since it enhances their language abilities and motivates them to study the language. Cartoon viewing aids with topic comprehension, vocabulary memorization, and the efficient acquisition of additional grammatical structures (Lin, Chen, & Dwyer, 2006; Sarko, 2008). Cartoons may also promote a good learning atmosphere in the classroom and foster greater student-teacher and student-student relationships, which can help students in language classes feel less stressed and anxious (Kirkgoz, 2011).
2.4.2. Using English game-based learning applications

Game-based learning applications have been proven to be beneficial for learning languages. In his study, Gamlo (2019) concluded that by using Great Reader, Game to learn English - EnglishTracker, and Learn English Vocabulary Pop Quiz as the main and most useful materials to learn English, university students in Saudi Arabia learned English and improved their motivation.

Games are also regarded as an effective and engaging resource for studying foreign languages since they may rapidly capture students’ interest (Gaudart, 1999; Muhanna, 2012). Steel (2012) discovered that many students utilized apps to improve their language learning and were better at writing, grammar, readability, vocabulary, and other skills. Zeidan (2020) also studied Swedish upper secondary school students using Internet games to study English outside of class and found that these games helped students perform better on vocabulary assessments. In addition, computer games were reported to enable online players to interact with each other outside the classroom in English, which resulted in more opportunities for students to use English and learn vocabulary and student’s progress in speaking skills (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2014; Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012). However, Nordnes (2021) found that there was no link between single-player games and the growth of the participants’ vocabularies. On the other hand, games that required more than one player increased the gamer’s vocabulary.

2.4.3. Surfing the Internet

Today’s Internet provides many extramural resources for language learners because of its quick development. According to Kapoor et al. (2017), numerous social networks in all fields are widely used worldwide. Users can engage in online activities based on social platforms, and these platforms are regarded as a means of communication when people connect and interact with others globally and create an environment using the English language. The Internet environment can be used as a tool to acquire more vocabulary and higher fluency (Sundqvist, 2009). Students perceived developing their reading skills through reading materials on the Internet (Bana, 2020); however, the study only examines students’ perceptions but does not investigate whether students’ actual reading skills improve or not.

2.4.4. Reading English comic books

Reading comic books is one of the activities that can connect with learners’ interests because comic books appear to be a common substitute for “fun reading” (Krashen, 2004). English comics, in particular, and comics in general, contain a vital visual component that stimulates readers’ imaginations and aids in memory formation (Eisner, 1985). The use of comics in foreign language instruction has a favourable psychological impact on students because it lessens their worry about learning other languages, which can impede their ability to acquire and retain knowledge (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). On the other hand, it can support learners’ relaxed comprehension by using comic books with L2 vocabulary engagement. Several studies confirmed that reading newspapers or magazines had effects on enhancing learners’ vocabulary and reading skills (Krivosheyeva, 2022; Rao, 2019; Șimon & Suciu, 2014). In addition, reading comic books also showed the same effect on learners’ vocabulary (Zahra, 2019) and their reading comprehension (Mei-Ju, Yung-Hung, & Ching-Chi, 2015).

2.4.5. Listening to English songs

Many studies found that listening to English songs had a positive correlation with
vocabulary sizes. De Wilde et al. (2019) and Nordquist (2022) found that Swedish students improved their vocabulary sizes when they listened to music outside the classroom. In the same vein, Dutch students were found to improve their vocabulary (De Wilde et al., 2019).

In summary, many studies above have shown the correlation between EE and its effects on learners’ oral proficiency and vocabulary (De Wilde et al., 2019; Jóhannsdóttir, 2017; Nordnes, 2021; Sofie, 2012; Sundqvist, 2009; Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2014; Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012; Zeidan, 2020). However, research has only found a positive correlation between EE and learners’ skill development in terms of oral proficiency and writing skills; it has not been determined whether EE can assist in the development of listening and reading skills. Moreover, except for two studies with primary school students, all of the above studies were conducted on research subjects, the majority of whom were high school to university students in Sweden, where English is currently considered a second language (Sundqvist, 2009). Some researchers mentioned that Swedish students were exposed to English not only at school but also in daily life (De Wilde et al., 2019; Jóhannsdóttir, 2017), which was considered a more significant impact on the students’ quality of English learning. As a result, a study is needed to determine whether there is any correlation between EE and EFL students in primary schools in developing countries like Vietnam.

3. Methodology

In order to (1) investigate whether there are any correlations between EE and EFL primary school students’ listening and reading proficiency and (2) find out the experience of EFL primary school students toward EE activities, a mixed-methods design was used with three main instruments (Table 1).

3.1. Participants

An invitation letter to participate in the study was delivered to the parents of 150 fifth-grade students (eleven years old) at a primary school in Phu Yen province, Vietnam during a meeting involving researchers, school authorities, and parents and students. Nevertheless, only 101 parents consented to participate in the study. The fifth graders were invited to participate in the study because they were the oldest students at the primary level, so they could perceive what they were doing and gave valuable answers that were more reliable than those of other younger students.

3.2. Research design

The research design used a mixed-method approach with quantitative and qualitative data (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007) with three main instruments: questionnaires, tests, and focus-group interviews.

To answer the first question about whether there are any correlations between EE and EFL primary school students’ listening and reading proficiency, two main instruments were used: the proficiency listening and reading tests and a set of questionnaires examining who participated in EE activities and who did not, what types of EE activities they were engaged in, and how much time they spent on those activities each week in total. The interviews were used to explore more in detail how EFL primary school students experienced their extramural English activities, such as the kinds of English songs, the names of English game-based learning applications, the aims of surfing the Internet, etc.

Table 1

Summary of data collection instruments
### Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Quantitative</th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A proficiency test</td>
<td>to measure information about the participants’ background and EE activities (types of EE and the time they engage in EE).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>to investigate participants’ listening and reading proficiency.</td>
<td>to find out their experiences when doing extramural English activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source:

3.2.1. The proficiency test

Listening and reading tests were extracted from Movers from Cambridge Young Learners of English test series of the University of Cambridge (Cambridge ESOL, 2007). The test for Movers students was chosen because this test was designed for students between 8 - 11 years old, and the proficiency level of the 5th graders in the study was equivalent to the Movers level (MacGregor, 2001). The listening part had four parts with 20 questions within 25 minutes; each correct sentence would correspond to 5 points, and the total was worth 100 points. The listening recording was repeated twice. After completing the listening test, the reading comprehension part was conducted within 25 minutes. Students were asked to complete five reading parts with 25 questions; each correct answer was worth 4 points; the total score of the reading test was 100 points.

3.2.2. Questionnaire

Participants were asked to complete closed-ended questionnaires about the type and frequency of the EE activities they were engaged in after school. The questionnaire was adopted from the questionnaires of Sundqvist (2009) and Phan (2021); however, the questionnaire was adapted so that it was relevant to the current study context. The questionnaire consisted of two distinct sections: (1) personal information; (2) types of EE the respondent engaged in; and the duration of each activity.

The questionnaire was distributed to the 101 study participants before they finished the listening and reading proficiency tests. The researcher visited each class during their English lesson and asked students to participate in the study. The students who consented to voluntarily take part in the survey were given the questionnaire so that they could complete it. The questionnaires were administered in Vietnamese to make sure that all the participants could understand and give the answers easily. In addition, to ensure the validity of the participant’s responses, the researcher explained the questionnaire to all students so that they could comprehend and select the answer that best suited their situation. Within thirty minutes, the participants completed and returned the questionnaire.

3.2.3. Interview

The main purpose of the interview was to get more information about the participants’
experiences with EE activities that they were involved in. The information from the interview was used to answer research question 2 about how students experience extramural English activities. The 20 participants who had high scores on the listening and reading proficiency tests and reported participating in extramural English were invited for semi-structured interviews because the researcher wanted to explore how these students experienced their EE activities. The interviews were conducted one week after students completed the questionnaire. All the interviews were in Vietnamese.

3.3. Data collection procedures

The study was divided into two phases. In the first phase, all participants were given a questionnaire, and the researcher explained each question to students so that participants could clearly understand and give the correct answer within 30 minutes of reading and answering.

After that, to the participants continued doing the listening and reading proficiency test. They then took the proficient test with listening and reading tasks.

In the second phase, the semi-structured interviews took place three days after the tests; when the test scores were collected, twenty participants who had high scores on the tests and reported participating in extramural English were invited for semi-structured interviews. They were asked a set of questions to answer within 15 minutes to explore their experiences in extramural English beyond the classroom. Each student was interviewed individually and encouraged to share their opinions freely. The interview was recorded and transcribed. After that, the interview was coded to answer the research question about students’ experiences in terms of EE activities.

3.4. Data analysis procedures

For the quantitative approach, the results obtained from the proficiency test and the questionnaire data were statistically calculated using the Pearson function in SPSS (to find the r). It was examined by descriptive statistical analysis to calculate the mean and standard deviation. Then, the results of SPSS analysis from the scores of the participants who did some EE and the scores of those who did not were compared to find the answer to research question 1 about whether there are any correlations between EE and EFL primary school students’ listening and reading proficiency.

For the quantitative approach, the information was recorded throughout the interview for research purposes, and the answering, which includes all unfinished and interrupted speech, very brief extracts of speech will be transcribed carefully by using https://app.transkriptor.com/ and then classified into contents and calculated to conduct a qualitative content analysis process.

4. Result and discussion

4.1. Result

Figure 1 shows that the majority of the participants (71.29%) played English game-based learning applications, being the most popular activities among the participants surveyed, while just over a third (36%) read comic books in English. Although a significant number of learners participate in five EE activities each week, the amount of time they devote to these activities each week is minimal. Reading comic books was the least popular activity, at 35.64%. Most of the students participate in EE activities from less than 01 hour to 03 hours per week.
To answer the first research question, whether there were any correlations between the listening and reading scores of learners and EE activities, the Pearson correlation analysis was used. The findings found that there was a significant positive correlation between listening and reading scores and EE activities, and indicated that learners who participated in more EE activities had higher listening and reading scores. The following section presents the correlations between extramural English activities and students’ reading and listening scores.

4.1.1. Listening to English songs

Table 2 shows a correlation between listening to English songs and the listening test scores with a significant value of .000. This means that those students who listened to music beyond the classroom had higher scores than those who did not. Similarly, the Pearson correlation test between listening to music and their reading scores was .000, which was statistically significant. These findings suggest that listening to English songs could effectively improve both listening and reading skills among language learners.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listening to English</th>
<th>Listening Score</th>
<th>Reading Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.463**</td>
<td>.460**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students reported in the interview that most of them (16 out of 20) often listened to English songs at home. They all confirmed that they listened to music on YouTube, with two main categories: English songs for kids and contemporary youth music on YouTube. Contemporary youth music is more popular than the other one. One of the students answered:

I often listen to contemporary songs, [I listened to them] on YouTube. They had subtitles in Vietnamese and English. Watching movies or TV shows with subtitles in Vietnamese can be helpful for those who are learning the language or for Vietnamese speakers who want to improve
their reading skills while enjoying their favorite content (Student I17).

However, the other students responded that they only focused on listening to English songs because the songs they listened to did not have Vietnamese subtitles. Student I1 answered:

The kinds of English music I like to listen to are English songs for kids and pop music, and I listen to them on YouTube. And they did not have subtitles, I listened to English (Student I1).

In addition to listening to English songs, student I1 was involved in other EE activities like reading books.

4.1.2. Reading English comic books

Table 3 indicates that the correlation between reading comics and listening was statistically significant (significant value = .001), while the significant value in the Pearson correlation test is .06, which meant that there was no significant value between reading comic books and reading scores. These results suggested that incorporating English comic books into language learning activities could improve learners’ listening skills. However, using English comics might not have the same effect on reading skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading comic books</th>
<th>Listening Score</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>.339**</th>
<th>Reading Score</th>
<th>.274**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.006</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>101</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>101</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of the interview showed that only eight out of 20 people said they read comics at home; three students said they read the comics on paper at home, and the other five students said they regularly read English comic books on the Internet, and although they reported that these English comics included both English and Vietnamese-translated parts.

The English comics were also translated into Vietnamese. When I read the comics, I focused more on the English parts. [The English comics I read] on the web (Student I2).

This could explain why students did not improve their reading skills while reading comic books because they might have read a lot in Vietnamese when there was Vietnamese in the textbook.

4.1.3. Watching English cartoons

Table 4 shows that watching English cartoons was popular among the students surveyed. More than half of the students (54/101) watched English cartoons. There was a positive correlation between the English cartoon and students’ listening and reading scores. The sig value for reading and listening is .000, which means that the more time they spent watching the animation, the better they could do the exercises related to listening or reading.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The correlation between watching English cartoons and scores in listening and reading</th>
<th>Listening Score</th>
<th>Reading Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.339**</td>
<td>.274**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the 20 interviewees with high listening and reading scores, 15 said they regularly watched English cartoons after school. Nine said the cartoons they watched had Vietnamese subtitles below and were spoken in English. Student I7 said: “The English cartoons I watched had Vietnamese subtitles, but I only focused on listening to English.” The other six students said that the English cartoons they watched had no Vietnamese titles; to understand the content of the story as well as the words of the characters, they had to pay attention to listening and guessing through images and situations and sometimes read the English titles below. Student I8 said.

The English cartoons I watched had no Vietnamese subtitles. When I watched English cartoons, I practiced listening, trying to understand the content of the film with the images and reading the English words below.

4.1.4. Using English game-based learning applications

According to the questionnaire response, the majority of students (72/101) have utilized game-based English learning applications. Table 5 represents Pearson’s result about the correlation between Using English game-based learning applications and scores in listening and reading.

The Pearson correlation test showed a positive correlation between game-based learning applications and their listening and reading scores with the significant value = .000, which means that students who used English learning apps to play performed much better than those who did not.

Table 5
The correlation between Using English game-based learning applications and scores in listening and reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English game-based learning applications</th>
<th>Listening Score</th>
<th>Reading Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.454**</td>
<td>.415**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the interview, students reported that the most popular app was Duolingo (15 out of 18 participants). Students said that they recognized a lot of new vocabulary, practiced listening and reading skills, and enjoyed the gamification aspect of the app, which motivated them to continue learning. Students also perceived that using English learning apps, particularly Duolingo, could improve learners’ reading and listening. One of the students reported:

I used the Duolingo app. On the app [Duolingo], there were tasks to listen to and tasks [in the form of reading] to arrange. I did most of the tasks that were suitable for my level. (Student I19).
Three other students also downloaded a different app (Edupia) to their phones to practice the lessons in their textbooks. Students did some activities on the apps because these exercises were similar to the exercises in the textbook, and the app also had some ‘animated videos’ that they could watch. Other learners reported using different apps such as Elsa, Lingo Bee, Futureland, and Live Worksheets. The interesting thing was that there was a student who revealed that he had used Roblox, an application to play online games. Although Roblox is not specifically designed for language learning, the student said that he could practice his English skills by interacting with other players in the game because he had to join this game in English.

4.1.5. Surfing the Internet

Table 6 shows the analysis results from Pearson showed that there was a positive correlation between surfing the Internet and their listening scores, and it was also the activity that had the most effect on the learners’ listening and reading proficiency, with the significant value = .000.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Surfing the Internet</th>
<th>Listening Score</th>
<th>Reading Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.597**</td>
<td>.496**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to interview data, six of 20 students participated in activities on the Internet to learn English, and each of them could participate in many different web pages. They participated in the websites Cambridge.com, Vietjack.vn, loigiaihay.com, hoctot.hocmai.vn, Iggvietnam.com, and liveworksheet.com. These websites offered a variety of study materials and interactive exercises that catered to different learning styles. They affirmed that on this website, they had the opportunity to review knowledge they had learned in the textbook at school and prepared for new lessons before going to school. One student said:

“[The websites you use to learn English are] Vietjack and loigiaihay. [On these websites], I listened and read to prepare new lessons [in the textbooks]. I also could revise my previous lesson on these websites” (Student I4).

In summary, the findings show that EE activities and the duration of learners’ participation in EE activities are proportional to the test scores obtained. The Pearson correlation test result indicates a positive correlation between EE activities and learners’ listening and reading proficiency; the more time students spent on EE activities, the higher scores they got in listening and reading. Among these activities, English-learning applications and surfing the Internet were popular activities. Students accessed many different materials online to practice their English.

4.2. Discussion

The current study found that students participating in EE activities with high frequency could help them improve their listening and reading proficiency. Among these extramural English activities, using English game-based learning applications had the most effect on the learners’ listening and reading proficiency. The current study found that students engaged in the five above activities because of their interest, similar to previous studies (Nordnes, 2021; Sofie, 2012;
Sundqvist, 2009). However, students in the current study participated in surfing the Internet because of their deliberate study purpose and not only because of their interest in fun, which is totally different from previous findings.

The studies about EE by Sundqvist (2009), and De Wilde et al. (2019) clearly found that students did a mixed variety of activities such as listening to music, watching TV, playing video games, watching films, surfing the Internet, reading books, reading newspapers or magazines, using the social network, etc. However, the students in this study did not do all those activities, and the time they spent on these EE activities in this study was less than the time students spent in other studies. Despite these above differences, the study had a similar result that there were correlations between EE and the learners’ proficiency, especially in listening and reading.

On the other hand, the current study showed different findings from the previous study on EE activities with university students in Vietnam by Phan (2021). As she mentioned, the English proficiency of university students did not have any correlation with the EE activities they participated in because they were exposed to EE quite late and because of many other external influences, such as their different personal backgrounds and their learning motivation differences. In the current study, when comparing the proficiency in listening and reading skills of students at the same level and with the same background, students who participated in EE activities showed more progress in listening and reading skills than learners who did not participate in EE activities.

Giving supplementary information about the relationship between EE and learners’ listening and reading proficiency, which was not mentioned in previous studies, the study also suggests that teachers can encourage students to participate in activities beyond the classroom, such as reading English comic books, watching English cartoons, using English game-based learning applications, surfing the internet to exercise, and listening to English songs. These activities can motivate students to read more and to have more exposure to English, as Krashen (1985) hypothesized. When students have more exposure to English input, such as listening or reading in English, they can progress in their skill proficiency, especially in listening and reading.

To be more specific, teachers can suggest some educational movies and animated movies for students to watch every day for thirty minutes each. However, to protect their eyes and to make sure they are not addicted to movies, teachers should advise them to watch less than an hour a day. Besides that, the study also figured out that listening to English songs also helped students improve their listening. Teachers need to recommend some songs that are appropriate for their ages and encourage them to listen to English songs frequently in their free time. Moreover, watching English cartoons can enable learners to develop their listening skills while expanding their knowledge, as the explanation by Alghonaim (2020) about the three critical advantages of watching cartoons for language learning: The first advantage was that when students heard English spoken by cartoon characters, they could improve their listening skills. The second advantage was that through viewing cartoons, students became more familiar with indigenous culture, including traditional attire, common meals, courteous manners, etc.; and the last advantage was that viewing animation encouraged language learning since viewers often acted out cartoon characters and desired to converse with them in the same language (Harmer, 2001).

As the study found that reading comic books also has correlations with students’ listening proficiency, teachers should find out many reliable sources and suitable types of comics that are fit for their students’ age on the Internet before introducing them to students. Teachers can also encourage students to write a brief summary or journal about the stories or comics they read in
English to help them revise the content of the stories and also improve their writing skills. The school library should provide a variety of English comics and books so students can easily borrow and read them to enrich their knowledge.

Similarly, game-based learning applications and educational websites should be introduced to students. Some online games using English as instructions or allowing gamers to use English to contact each other should be under parents’ control to make sure that students can learn English without being addicted to online games.

Finally, because of the limited time for English learning activities under the guidance of teachers in class, the study recommends learners take some EE activities after school to support their active learning at school since the more time they expose themselves to English after school, the more passive knowledge and skills they can enlarge, including listening and reading skills. However, instead of mechanically participating in any EE activities, learners can join in any EE activities that they find interesting. Teachers should also introduce useful EE activities and their positive impact on learners’ language and skill proficiency so that students can choose appropriate EE activities for their context.

5. Limitations

The study has a few limitations. The first limitation is related to the sample size of the study. Because the sample of this study was convenient sampling, all participants were from a primary school, and the selection of the sampling was based on learners’ parents’ consent in the class that the first author taught. Therefore, it should not be generalized to the whole population of all students in Vietnam. Future studies should expand research subjects of different ages, such as junior high school students or high school students in different regions, such as urban, mountainous, and rural areas.

Secondly, there was a correlation between extramural English activities and student listening and reading scores; however, the extramural activities might have cofounding impacts on students’ listening and reading skills; therefore, it cannot be concluded that one factor has a stronger impact than the other ones. In addition, one of the main goals of this study was to find out if there was a link between EE and how well the participants could read and listen in English. Because the research is limited to only two skills, it does not fully and comprehensively reflect the learner’s level. Future studies can learn more about the correlation between EE activities and other skills, such as speaking and writing skills, of learners in Vietnam. Furthermore, studies can explore whether EE activities interact to improve learners’ language and skill development.

Lastly, while the study has shown that there are correlations between EE and learners’ listening and reading proficiency, there is not enough evidence to conclude that EE is the main cause of learners’ improvement in developing listening and reading skills. Therefore, it is hoped that larger-scale and better-funded studies will not only explore the correlation between EE activities and different areas of learners’ linguistic and skill proficiency but also examine whether EE is the main cause for their improvement in linguistic and skill proficiency. Further research could also explore the extent to which other factors, like the genre of music or the way they listen to English songs, may impact the strength of this correlation.

References


De Wilde, V., Brysbaert, M., & Eyckmans, J. (2019, February 18). Learning English through out-of-school exposure. Which levels of language proficiency are attained and which types of input are important? *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition, 23*(1), 171-185. doi:10.1017/s1366728918001062


Le, N. T. T., & Tran, D. D. V. (2020, December 28). Impacts of using cartoons as an instructional tool on English communicative skills of young learners at a Vietnamese primary school. *Social Sciences, 10*(2), 78-86. doi:10.46223/hcmcoujs.soci.en.10.2.553.2020


Şimon, S., & Suciu, L. (2014). English loanwords in some Romanian online newspapers and magazines. *Scientific Bulletin of the Politehnica University of Timișoara Transactions on


