Effects of Eliminating Some Demotivating Factors in Reading English Extensively

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This study investigated the effects of removing major demotivating factors from a year-long extensive reading program with 42 EFL Japanese high school students. These demotivating factors had been elicited from interviewing students who participated in extensive reading programs in the previous three years (Takase 2004). Extensive reading is said to be one of the most effective strategies for motivating L2 learners to study, as well as developing their fluency in L2 reading and acquiring vocabulary (e.g., Day & Bamford, 1998; Krashen, 1982). However, as the program proceeded, a great disparity in the amount of English the students read could be observed each year. Interviews with 81 participants out of the 219 students from the above mentioned three years revealed that, among the many participants who developed favorable attitudes toward reading, there were some unmotivated students, who were reluctant to read books. The major variables motivating the participants to read in their L2 were the materials, attitudes toward extensive reading, sense of achievement and self-confidence, and sociocultural environment. At the same time, these same factors worked as demotivating factors for reluctant participants (Takase, 2004). The following year another 42 students participated in extensive reading with some of these demotivating factors removed, which resulted in a tremendous increase in the amount of reading.

本研究は、一年間の多読に取り組む42名の女子高校生から、多読を阻む主な要因を取り除いて多読授業を行った結果を、調査・分析したものである。これらの多読を阻む要因は、当研究が始まる以前に一年間の多読に取り組んだ生徒のうちから、3年間の生徒総計219名中81名の高校生を対象に面接を行い、多読の動機付けを調べた結果得たものである(Takase, 2004)。多読は英語学習への動機付け、およびリーディング力・語彙力を伸ばすのに効果的であるといわれている(Day & Bamford , 1998; Krashen, 1982)。ところが、多読授業が進むにつれて本を読む生徒とそうではない生徒との間で、読書量の格差が大きく広がっていく傾向が、毎年見られた。この219名中、読書量の多い生徒から少ない生徒まで81名に面接を行い、英語での読書に対する動機付けを調査・分析したと

ころ、本の難易度、多読授業に対する態度、達成感及び
自信、社会文化的環境などが挙げられた。また、同じ要因
が、生徒によって、プラスに働いたりマイナスに働いたりし
ていたことが判明した（Takase， 2004）。その翌年、多読
を阻むマイナスの要因をいくつか取り除いて、新たに42名
の生徒に多読授業を行った結果、生徒の読書量に非常
に大きな伸びがみられた。

Extensive reading has been gaining popularity as a means of teaching reading in a second language in many parts of the world. Most of the empirical studies have shown the impact of extensive reading on second language reading, reporting an increase in reading proficiency and affect toward reading, (e.g., Elley & Mangubhai, 1981; Hafiz & Tudor, 1989; Robb & Susser; 1989; Mason & Krashen, 1997; Suzuki, 1996; Takase, 1998; 2001). These studies showed how participants' attitudes changed toward reading in the second language and how students became more interested in reading. However, Takase (2001; 2002; 2003) also found that the disparity between the amount of reading of motivated readers and unmotivated readers became distinct as the program proceeded.

According to Day and Bamford's Expectancy and Value Model (1998), four major variables play a crucial role in motivating L2 learners to read extensively: materials, reading ability, attitude toward reading in the second language, and the sociocultural environment, which includes influence of family and friends. Among these variables, they claim, materials and attitudes toward reading in the second language have stronger influence than the other two.

In order to investigate the causes of the disparity mentioned above, Takase (2004) interviewed 81 out of 219 students who were enrolled in a year-long extensive reading program from 1999 to 2001. She found several factors that motivated her eager readers, such as materials, attitudes toward extensive reading, after-reading tasks, which included summary writing, a sense of achievement and self-confidence, and sociocultural environment. At the same time, she found that some of these same factors also hindered the reluctant students from reading English extensively. In addition, participants in her study showed that L1 reading habits unexpectedly demotivated some participants from reading in English. Table 1 summarizes the results of her study of both motivating and demotivating factors elicited through interviews with the 81 students mentioned above (Takase, 2004).

As seen in Table 1, some factors worked positively for some students and at the same time negatively for other students. In particular, in such factors as Materials and Attitudes toward extensive reading, after-reading tasks, the same items appeared as both positive and negative factors.

First, concerning materials, it is generally accepted that *i minus 1* is the appropriate linguistic level for reading English extensively (Day & Bamford, 1998). Nation (1990) suggested choosing a book with less than one unknown word in every two lines, which would be about 5% unknown words per page. However, these criteria did not seem to have worked for Takase's students, probably because, as with Japanese high school students in general, they had been trained to read English using word-by-word translation; therefore, they found it difficult to read books even at an appropriate level without translating each sentence into Japanese. Books they would feel comfortable reading rapidly without using a dictionary or translation would be extremely easy, short books. Sakai

Table 1. Motivating & demotivating factors for reading English books

Factors	Motivating Factors	Demotivating Factors
Materials	Easy to read Good length Different from textbooks Interesting Stories	Difficult to read Too long Too easy English Shallow content No interesting genre
Attitudes toward extensive reading	Free choice of materials Free choice of time No translation No dictionary Sense of accomplishment Self-confidence	Uncomfortable reading speed Uneasy feeling because of no translation Guilty feeling for not using a dictionary
After-reading tasks (Summary writing)	Good way to review Practice of writing English	Annoying Time consuming
Sociocultural environment	Parents' positive involvement or encouragement	Busy school life (tests, clubs, after school classes) Busy with other subjects
L1 reading influence	None Fond of reading	L1 bookworms' devotion to L1 reading

(2002) emphasized in his book the importance of starting with very easy books, including picture books for native speakers of English. He claimed that books with few words on one page would be appropriate level for anyone to begin with in extensive reading.

Second, concerning after-reading tasks, summary writing, in particular, worked positively for some students and negatively for other students. It is quite natural that students who did not like summary writing tried to avoid this unfavorable task. In order to reduce the summary writing work, some students chose a thick book with more than 200 or 250 words on one page, which was often beyond their level. Consequently, they did not enjoy reading, and were not kept motivated to read   On the other hand, those who enjoyed writing summaries spent more time writing than reading per se. This was like putting the cart before the horse. In light of the time students had to read, summary writing could be considered a negative factor.

Finally, as for the sociocultural environment, it seemed that some students had difficulty in finding time to read books outside of class. Although English is considered a high priority subject for most high school students, reading English books for enjoyment is not considered beneficial for study for entrance exams. Japanese high school students in general are occupied with a lot of after school activities, such as club, sports, or cram school. Therefore, they do not want to take more time than necessary for extensive reading.

I assumed that students would read more if some of these demotivating factors could be removed or at least reduced. This study investigated how removing these negative factors affected participants in motivating readers to read English books.

Method

Participants

In this particular study, 42 second-year students aged 16 to 17 at a private girls' high school participated in an extensive reading program for an academic year. However, the purpose of this study is to compare the results of the reading outcome of the 42 students with the former 283 participants, who were enrolled in nine intact classes from four consecutive previous years at the same school, which totals 325 students. The participants from the year 1998 were enrolled in the two highest level intact classes of this school, and the participants in the four years following, including the participants of the present study, were from the second highest level intact classes. The English levels of all the participants were from high beginner to low intermediate based on the reading section of the SLEP (Secondary Level English Proficiency) test, which was administered in April as a pre-test and in February as a post-test. In 1998, the test was administered only once in September. Table 2 shows the results of participants' SLEP tests over the five consecutive years.

Table 2. Participants' reading proficiency (k = 75)

Year	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
N	64	107	68	44	42
Pre-SLEP (SD)	42.4 (6.58)	36.2 (5.89)	34.4 (4.99)	33.6 (6.08)	32.4 (5.21)
Min – Max	20 – 53	18 – 49	21 – 47	23 – 50	18 - 41
Post-SLEP (SD)	-	43.0 (7.02)	39.4 (5.76)	40.6 (5.63)	39.3 (6.04)
Min – Max	-	22 – 60	26 – 55	31 – 55	28 - 51

As seen in Table 2, each year from 1999 to 2002 students' reading proficiency increased after a year of extensive reading. Among them, the minimum score of participants showed the greatest increase in 2002.

Materials

Reading materials used for the program were mainly graded readers from Cambridge, Heinemann, Longman, Oxford, and Penguin (200 - 1,800 word levels), and easy reading books from several Japanese publishers. In 1998, all the books (about 300) were kept by the teacher in the teachers' room, and they were taken to the classroom to be checked out twice a week. The following two years, 1999 and 2000, the books were kept in the classrooms, and at the same time, the school library purchased approximately 100 – 200 graded readers of different levels and series each year (e.g., *Heinemann Guided Readers Level 1, 2, and 3*). At the beginning of 2001, all the books in each classroom were transferred to the school library and they were kept there during the year of the present study. Toward the end of 2001, the easiest graded readers (*Penguin Readers Easystarts*) were purchased , and in 2002, approximately 200 easy graded readers (e.g., *Oxford Bookworm Starters*) and children's picture books (e.g., *Oxford Reading Tree, Curious George Series, & I Can Read Books*) were added to the school library.

Procedure

Extensive Reading was carried out in the English Reading class for approximately eleven months, including summer and winter vacations. The class met twice a week, and participants mainly read books outside of class. During and after the treatment, interviews were carried out with 81 of the 219 participants from 1999 to 2001 (Takase, 2004). According to participants' comments and requests about the program elicited from these interviews, some changes were made each year. Table 3 indicates the differences in reading practices each year.

Table 3. Differences in reading practice each year

Year	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Materials (level*)	300-1800	300-1800	300-1800	200-1800	200-1800 & Picture Books
Available Books	300	300-500	500-600	600-700	700-900
Summary Writing	English	English	Jap->Eng	Jap->Eng	Short Comments
Place Books Kept	Teacher's Room	Classroom & Library	Classroom & Library	Library	Library
In-class Reading	None	Rarely	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes Summer Session**

*level = word level ** Approximately one-third of the participants attended a summer reading session.

Table 3 shows several features that differentiated the extensive reading practice in 2002 from earlier years. First, the amount of material, including some books of easier levels, increased each year. In 2002, in particular, approximately 200 picture books were added. Second, in 2002, the requirement for writing summaries of the books was changed to short comments. Third, in 2002, approximately one third of the participants experienced in-class reading for 10 consecutive days for about an hour each day during the summer session.

Results

Change in reading materials

The most important factor that seems to have influenced participants to read in greater amounts was providing them with more reading material at an easier level such as Oxford Reading Trees and picture books (e.g., *Curious George Series*, *I Can Read Books*). The number of books participants read greatly increased in 2002. Not only the average amount of reading, but the minimum amount showed a surprising increase. Table 4 indicates the average amount of English participants read, as well as the minimum and maximum amounts read each year for the past five years. Figure 1 also shows the average amount of English read by participants each year.

As shown in Table 4 and Figure 1, participants in 1998 read 108,789 words (20.0 books) on the average, which is the second highest in a given year. These participants aside, participants in 2002 read almost twice the amount read by participants in 1999, 2000, and 2001.

Table 4. Amount of English participants read

Year	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
N	64	107	68	44	42
M words	108,789	70,123	73,319	69,608	149,315
Min –	4,140	6,119	3,660	600	29,836
Max words	296,716	152,145	311,142	240,847	491,261
M books	20.0	17.0	23.1	21.3	65.6
Min-Max books	1-42	2-50	2-34	1-39	19-180

Figure 1. Average amount of English read ($\sum$ of words)
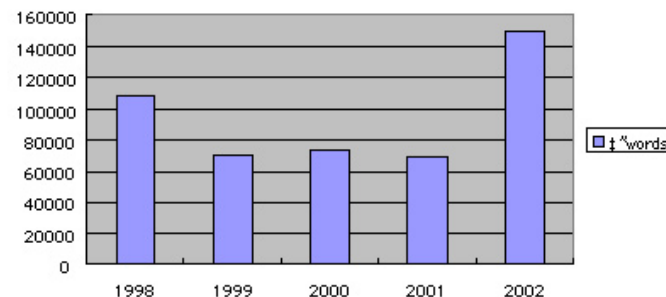
Table 5. Graded readers and picture books read by participants each year

Head Words	1998 (N=64)	1999 (N=107)	2000 (N=68)	2001 (N=44)	2002 (N=42)
PBs*	-	-	2.6	-	11.8
200 - 250	-	-	-	1.0	17.8
300 - 400	3.6	3.5	8.7	10.4	22.1
600 - 800	4.1	2.0	4.2	4.7	12.0
1000-1200	1.7	0.7	1.0	0.8	1.3
1400-1700	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.3	0.0
J Pub**	10.4	10.7	6.2	4.2	0.9
TOTAL	20.0	17.0	23.1	21.3	66.0

Note: Each figure represents the average number of books read per participant. Dash (-) shows that no books were available.

*PBs = Picture Books (e.g., Oxford Reading Tree, I Can Read Books, Curious George)

**J Pub = Books published by Japanese Publishers (e.g., Kirihara Shoten, San'yusha)

Table 5 shows the summary of books in different levels read by participants during the past five years.

As seen in Table 5, participants from 1998 read books of 300 to 1200 headwords (*Penguin Readers Levels 1, 2, and 3* and *Oxford Bookworm Stage 1, 2, and 3*). As mentioned earlier,

due to their high reading proficiency (Table 1), and despite the lack of easy books, they seem to have read the available books without any feeling of discomfort.

On the contrary, participants in 2002 read a great number of picture books and easy graded readers. For example, 11.8 picture books and 17.8 books of 200 – 250 headwords (*Penguin Readers Easystarts* and *Oxford Bookworm Starters*, respectively) were read per person on the average; that is, an average student read about 30 very easy books including picture books and the easiest graded readers for beginners (level 0). As these picture books or the easiest graded readers such as *Oxford Bookworm Starters* and *Penguin Readers Easystarts* were not available in the previous years, none of the participants from the previous years had a chance to read them, except for the participants from 2001. However, *Penguin Readers Easystarts* were the only easy books available in that year, and as the books were purchased toward the end of the school year, students did not have enough time to read many of them. The picture books read in 2000 were brought to school by some students and shared with many friends.

It should be noted that the books read in 2002 were not only picture books and the easiest levels of graded readers, but also books of 300 headwords (*Penguin Readers Level 1*), 400 headwords (*Oxford Bookworm Stage 1*), 600 headwords (*Heinemann Guided Readers Beginner* and *Penguin Graded Readers Level 2*), 700 headwords (*Oxford Bookworm Stage 2*), and even from 1000 headwords (*Oxford Bookworm Stage 3*). The number of these higher level graded readers read showed a great increase compared to the participants' reading in the previous three years. The participants in 2002 proceeded to more difficult books after becoming more comfortable with reading easy English books.

Extensive reading practice

Summary writing

The second biggest factor that might have caused this great increase in the amount of reading of the participants in 2002 is the replacement of the summary writing requirement with the less time-consuming task of having students merely write short comments. Until 2001, participants were required to submit a summary of the book they read. However, interviews revealed that summary writing was time consuming, annoying or a burden to many participants, and consequently deprived them of the joy of reading. As a result, I gave participants in 2002 the choice of whether or not to write summaries, suggesting that they use the time they would have spent on writing summaries to do more reading. All they were required to do was to write a short, one or two sentence opinion of the book they read.

In-class reading

Another factor that can be considered to have caused the great increase in reading is a 10-day summer session, which included one-third of the participants from the year 2002 reading class. Approximately 40-50 minutes of a 90 minute class were utilized for silent reading each day. As many participants complained of having busy schedules, which is one of the demotivating sociocultural environment variables, setting aside a specific time for reading gave them a good opportunity to experience the pleasure of reading in English, and encouraged them to continue reading for the rest of the vacation. Amazingly enough, several students continued reading for the whole summer, finishing 50 – 60 books. By the end of the school year six students had read over 100 books (107-180), and they acquired a reading habit in their L2.

Conclusion

This study concludes that in order to motivate EFL learners to read English extensively, it is necessary to remove the demotivating factors or negative factors that hinder learners from reading English. This study found that the most crucial factor was reading materials. In particular, providing an abundance of extremely easy reading material of high interest is needed for the less motivated students. These results are in accordance with Day and Bamford's (1998) model, and Sakai's claim (2002). Another factor that could have demotivated some participants from reading English or have taken their time from reading was summary writing. Writing short comments instead of writing summaries enabled them to spend more time reading. In addition, participants were able to choose short easy books at their own level, once they were freed from writing summaries. Finally, in-class reading in the summer intensive course worked remarkably well and encouraged most participants to continue reading for the rest of the year. For most high school and college students who lead a very busy life outside of class, it is a good idea to provide them with in-class reading time to help them form the habit of reading in English.

Thus, in order to motivate learners to read English extensively and help them develop a good reading habit, it is necessary to provide them with a variety of books of interest at their level, some time to read in class, and remove the stress or burden of summary writing assignments so that they can devote themselves to reading with enjoyment.

Acknowledgments

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