

Fostering Constructive EFL Reading Habits and Attitudes

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This paper offers a preliminary report from an ongoing investigation into EFL reading habits and attitudes in a tertiary context in Japan. The first stage of this study (Jones, forthcoming) was a survey of reading frequency and attitudes based on work reported in Crawford Camiciottoli (2001). The expanded study involves experimental and control groups of non-English majors who either did, or did not, have access to a variety of graded readers and teen literature and were, or were not, encouraged to pursue pleasure reading in their spare time. The extended protocol aims to investigate language learning gains as well as related issues such as language learning strategies, beliefs about language learning, and second language learning motivation. Although mostly anecdotal, findings so far seem to support an extensive reading approach.

この論文は、日本の大学でのEFL学習における読書習慣と姿勢に与える様々な影響についての研究の中間発表である。この研究の第一段階では Crawford Camiciottoli (2001)の研究に基づき読書頻度と姿勢に関する調査を行った。次の段階では、多読を奨励した英語を専攻していない生徒のグループと奨励していないグループを比較研究し、言語修得とそれに関連する問題、言語学習戦略、言語学習に対する確信や第二言語学習への動機付けなどを探索している。まだ途中の段階ではあるが、今までに発見した結果は多読の価値を認めている。

Promising signs of the rising status of extensive reading (ER) as a viable approach to second language (L2) pedagogy include, (a) the comprehensive work of Day and Bamford (1998) as part of the Cambridge Language Education series, (b) the growing bibliography of ER-related articles found on <www.extensivereading.net>, (c) dedication of an entire issue of *The Language Teacher* (May, 1997) to ER related topics, and (d) an active online discussion group hosted by Yahoo at <<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ExtensiveReading/>>. Still, many teachers, administrators, and institutions remain skeptical or are not sure how to implement an ER approach. This skepticism is at least partially related to a perceived reluctance or inability to read independently on the part of many L2 learners. To overcome this formidable obstacle requires a better understanding of habits and attitudes, as well as related variables such as language learning strategies, language learning beliefs, and L2 learning motivation. Thus, the present study was designed to explore these issues in an EFL context at Japanese universities and begin gathering a richer source of both qualitative and quantitative data.

Review of Research

The following literature review is intended as an overview of studies and papers that provided inspiration or guidance for the current study.

Extensive Reading in Adult EFL Contexts

Crawford Camiciottoli (2001) designed a 22-item questionnaire to investigate reading frequency and attitude relating to pleasure reading in English, and surveyed 182 business majors enrolled in a required EFL program at a university in Italy. She found that her subjects read English with low frequency, but had quite positive attitudes toward the practice of reading in English. Lack of time was the most often reported reason for not reading, which she judged as reflecting a low priority placed on reading among this group. Crawford Camiciottoli was encouraged though by the fact that about one-third of respondents indicated logistic reasons for their lack of reading in the target language. She felt that more of her subjects could be “won over” to reading, if reading material in English were made available.

Nash and Yuan (1992/93) introduced an ER program as part of a first-year university EFL reading course in Taiwan. Improving reading by reading rather than classroom instruction was one of the main aims, and students were guided to read for meaning and not worry about understanding every word. The authors were most encouraged by the fact that students having access to large amounts of interesting reading material via the ER program developed a habit of reading in the L2 and saw L2 reading as enjoyable.

In their study of a group of 47 Vietnamese government officials studying English in Singapore, Renandya, Rajan, and Jacobs (1999) report that participants responded positively to the ER component of their studies, and thus that ER is indeed a viable option for such learners. The most important finding was that the only three variables to significantly correlate with learning gains were those associated with the quantity of reading, that is, the amount of reading in English done in both home country and in Singapore, as well as newspaper and magazine reading. Of these, only ER done in Singapore was found to be a significant predictor of higher gains. One further finding was that prior language proficiency was not significantly correlated with the amount of ER reading during the program, that is, even less proficient individuals seem to have read extensively.

Yamashita (2004) examined the relationship between both L1 and L2 reading attitudes, and learners’ performance in L2 extensive reading. She identified four attitude variables (comfort, anxiety, value, and self-perception) and found that transfer does occur in the affective domain of reading (attitudes) from L1 to L2, but that this relationship differs somewhat from the cognitive domain. She also found that affective variables are linked to ER performance and highlighted the need for teachers to understand learners’ reading attitudes in L1 as well as in L2.

Reluctant Readers

Mason and Krashen (1997) report on three experiments designed to confirm the value of extensive reading in a post-secondary EFL context in Japan. The first experiment involved a group of *reluctant* learners who were introduced

to ER at the start of the second half of the school year and showed greater gains on a 100-item cloze test, compared to the control group who continued with traditional reading instruction. The authors highlighted “clear improvement in attitude shown by the experimental students” as the most “impressive and important” (p. 93) finding.

Day and Bamford (2000) also address the issue of attitudes and motivation as related to reluctant readers. The authors believe the first step in helping these learners develop a positive attitude toward reading in English is to reconsider traditional approaches to EFL reading.

Traditional approaches and classroom practices, with their focus on translating, answering comprehension questions, or practicing skills such as finding main ideas, tend to ignore the larger context of students’ attitudes toward reading and their motivation to read. The result, inevitably, is students with little or no interest in reading English (p. 12).

Motivation

Mori (2002) administered a 30-item Likert scale questionnaire to 447 students enrolled in required EFL reading classes at a women’s university in Japan to investigate foreign language reading motivation. Although the majority of items were expected to cluster into factors that correspond to eight of 11 aspects of L1 reading motivation identified in earlier studies, a principal components analysis clearly identified only Reading Efficacy and Importance of Reading. Reading Curiosity, Reading Involvement, Reading Avoidance and Reading Challenge clustered into one factor, defined as Intrinsic Value of

Reading. The author concluded that, “different facets of reading motivation may be so interrelated that they can be better explained by a more encompassing motivational model such as the expectancy-value theory” (p. 100). Mori’s hypothesis is that integrative motivation as investigated by Gardner (1985; 2001) may not be as applicable in EFL contexts such as Japan.

Qualitative Studies

Cho and Krashen (1994) conducted a qualitative study with four migrant women (3 Korean, 1 Spanish) ranging in age from 21 to 35. The purpose of their study was to test their hypotheses that: 1. adult ESL students would read more if introduced to the right type of material, and 2. more free reading would have a positive influence on vocabulary acquisition. As for their first hypothesis, all participants reported enjoying this kind of reading and expressed a desire to continue. Two of the less proficient students chose to use dictionaries while reading, but still seemed to catch the *reading bug*. Results of vocabulary acquisition assessment showed that all learners made impressive progress, especially the two who used dictionaries. The authors also reported positive comments in terms of language gains in other areas, specifically speaking and listening, and felt the combined results of this study support the value of reading texts in only one genre or by only one author, that is, narrow reading.

Another qualitative study was conducted by Leung (2002), who analyzed her own diary entries as a new reader of Japanese materials such as comic books, children’s stories, and textbooks. She concluded that extensive reading can enhance vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension,

and promote a positive attitude toward reading, “if learners are given the opportunity to read extensively for pleasure and develop a passion for reading, they can become more eager to learn the necessary reading skills and vocabulary they need in order to enjoy what they read” (p. 79).

Initial Study

The initial study (Jones, forthcoming) was based on investigations by Crawford Camiciottoli (2001) with non-English majors enrolled in EFL courses at the University of Florence. A Japanese translation of her questionnaire was prepared and tested for validity and reliability, and the same research questions were used:

- (1) How frequently do students read in English?
- (2) What are students’ attitudes toward reading in English?
- (3) What are the reasons that may limit frequency?
- (4) Which factors may influence frequency and attitude?

In general, findings suggested that this group (n = 212) of non-English majors studying EFL at university in Japan exhibits similar L2 reading profiles to the subjects in the Crawford Camiciottoli study, namely low L2 reading frequency, but rather positive attitudes toward reading in the target language (descriptive statistics are included in Appendix One). At the same time, significant differences were found. For example, students’ beliefs that L2 reading is too difficult to understand was the reason most often cited for limited ER in English after lack of time in general.

Together with 1. no access to English books and 2. not knowing what to read, we have three reasons that are not time-related accounting for a slight majority of responses. This is a promising finding in that all three of these issues are addressed by an ER approach to teaching L2 reading (see, for example, Bamford & Day, 1998).

Research Question Number 1: How frequently do students read in English?

Almost fifty percent of respondents answered that they never read something in English for pleasure. This hints at a lack of motivation to read in English or an unwillingness to devote time to this pursuit. Findings by Mori (2002) suggest that, “foreign language reading motivation closely resembles more general forms of motivation laid out in expectancy-value theory” (p. 101). If this is true, we need to find ways to help our new readers succeed and at the same time raise awareness concerning the value of L2 reading. The advantages of an ER approach to L2 reading instruction in addressing the former issue are apparent, but may also have potential in relation to the latter. New readers who are actually reading (as opposed to using reading for language study) are more likely to notice the positive influence of these efforts on their other language skills in the target language.

Research Question Number 2: What are students’ attitudes toward reading in English?

This group seemed to have similarly favorable attitudes toward reading in English as the students in the Crawford

Camiciottoli study. A clear majority of respondents answered that they would definitely (20.8%) or probably (57.5%) like to read more books in English for pleasure. Most respondents also recognized reading books for pleasure in English as either very important (41.2%) or fairly important (52.0%). The reasons selected by this group for why reading English is important provide some support for the assertion by Mori (2002) that for Japanese students an integrative orientation, as described by Gardner (2001; 1985), may not be “such a distinct construct, at least when it comes to motivation to read in a foreign language, and may be better explained . . . by a more all-embracing motivational construct, namely Extrinsic Utility Value” (p. 100). The most often extrinsically-oriented reasons cited were useful for English course and to acquire wider vocabulary, but an encouraging number of intrinsically-oriented reasons also emerged, namely enhance general literacy and learn about other cultures. A better understanding of the motivational orientations should help teachers find ways to highlight the value of L2 reading for individual learners. Finally, these learners clearly perceive reading books in English as a personally rewarding experience, 49.8% very much so and 45.7% fairly so. The implications are that this teaching context is fertile soil for an ER approach. The challenge then is how to nurture these positive attitudes into a flourishing L2 reading habit.

Research Question Number 3: What are the reasons that may limit frequency?

One encouraging finding was that so many students cited factors other than time for their limited efforts at reading

in English. Parents, educators, and the students themselves need to find ways to make interesting materials of the appropriate level available. Students also need to be encouraged through repeated successes in their L2 reading endeavors. The strength of ER in this area is again fairly well documented (Cho & Krashen, 1994; Day & Bamford, 1998; Renandya, Rajan & Jacobs, 1999). Following time-related reasons for limited reading in English, the second most common response was the perception that this endeavor was too difficult. For these learners in particular, an ER approach may help them on their way to developing an L2 reading habit.

Research Question Number 4: Which factors may influence frequency and attitude?

Two key factors related to L2 reading frequency and attitude were found: *past access to English books* and *self-rating of reading ability*. This relationship does not suggest cause, but as concluded in the Camiciottoli study, L2 learners in this context, and likely many others, need to have exposure to target-language reading materials. Day and Bamford (1998) also highlight the need for a wide range of books and other reading materials that will attract students. This includes different genres as well as difficulty levels. A wide range of levels will help ensure that more learners find something at an appropriate level and “progress upward in small steps as their reading fluency develops” (p. 97). One puzzling finding that requires further consideration was that the number of books read in Japanese in the last 12 months correlated with only attitude. One possible explanation for this finding is that many of these first-year students may be experiencing

burn out from the Japanese university entrance exam system (Berwick & Ross, 1989).

A more detailed report of findings can be found in Jones (forthcoming).

Follow-up Study

To further investigate some of the issues surrounding L2 reading habits and attitudes, an expanded study and extended protocol were designed. This follow-up study involves three experimental groups (n = 33, 36, & 38) of first-year non-English majors who were encouraged to read for pleasure in their spare time and provided access to a large selection of graded readers and teen literature. The extended protocol for these experimental groups and control groups include the following:

- (1) Pre- and post-tests of vocabulary (Beglar & Hunt, 1999) and reading comprehension (Mason & Krashen, 1997)
- (2) Writing samples collected over a period of one year
- (3) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (Oxford, 1990)
- (4) Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (Horwitz, 1987)
- (5) Observation notes
- (6) Exit survey (including items related to the ER component for experimental groups)

Preliminary Results

Data collection is still underway, but the aim is to examine the relationships among as many language-learning variables as possible (see, for example, Brown, Robson, & Rosenkjar, 2001). In addition to testing for reliability (Cronbach alpha analysis) and validity (factor analysis), discriminant function analysis will be used to explore whether or not any of the variables reliably predict language learning gains or positive L2 reading habits and attitudes.

The exit survey for experimental groups included nine additional questions related to the extensive reading component of the course (see Appendix Two). The following student comments were gleaned from answers to the two open-ended questions (1) *Please add your own comments about the reading component of this class*, and (2) *Please add your suggestions for how to make this course more useful and enjoyable*. Students were allowed to write responses in English, Japanese or a combination of both.

I had never read the book in English, but I am very interesting in English book now! I would like to read more and more.

I enjoyed this class very much!! I had never read English book before this class. I enjoyed reading English book, and I can read more faster than before. I think if we have more time to talk about the books with our friends, we can enjoy more.

Reading easy books is useful and fun to me.

I dislike English, but I can have this class cheerfully.

I think my skill of summary has developed through this class.

I'm glad to read various books. I would like to read more.

We need more time for reading and writing.

Reading easy stories is very useful for me. I enjoy to read better than before by reading every week.

In this class, my reading level grew. I could read various books and enjoyed them. Book report were bother sometimes, but it was useful to me.

My suggestion . . . is to have a reading time. Someone read a book in front of class.

We had to write book report, I didn't concentrate on reading book.

Despite the limitations of self-report instruments, the above comments suggest that these learners, for the most part, appreciated having the extensive reading component available to them. Most participants also seemed to recognize the language learning value of such reading and develop a more favorable attitude toward reading in the L2. Although most comments were favorable, the anonymous nature of the survey makes it impossible to tell how much reading each respondent actually did. It might be useful to include on the survey a question regarding the number of books and book reports completed.

Observation notes point to increased interaction among participants. Learners in the experimental groups were regularly seen discussing the books among themselves in pairs or small groups. This occurred most frequently when

learners were returning books and selecting new ones, but was also noted on several other occasions, such as before class or during short down times between activities. Granted, much of this interaction was in the L1, but learners were obviously engaged in the stories and were interested in sharing their opinions and impressions.

Conclusion

The study is still underway and a more thorough analysis of the data is not yet possible. Still, the author feels these preliminary findings support the notion of affective benefits from an extensive reading approach. Further research in other specific learning contexts are of course needed, but a compelling case continues to be formed for an extensive reading approach to L2 reading instruction. Day and Bamford (1998) use the bootstrap hypothesis to explain the positive influences of extensive reading on affective variables:

The extensive reading bootstrap hypothesis works like this: Students' initial successful experiences in extensive reading result in the discovery that they can read in the second language and that it is rewarding and pleasurable. This stimulates the development of positive attitudes toward reading in the second language and the growth of motivation to read in the second language. These positive beginning experiences then feed back into subsequent extensive reading experiences and assignments, resulting in greater gains in reading ability and positive attitudes, and increases in motivation and enjoyment (p. 30).

If we recognize that target-language reading is one of the most useful and worthwhile pursuits for L2 learners, especially in foreign language contexts where learners may have less access to input, then finding ways to help learners become enthusiastic fluent readers should be toward the top of the L2 teacher's list of priorities. With an ER approach, at least some of these learners may catch the reading bug and begin to take advantage of both the affective and language learning benefits.

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Appendix 1

Descriptive statistics for answers to questionnaire. Numbers in parentheses are percentages.

1. Sex: M: 117 (52.9), F: 104 (47.1)
2. Age: 18: 89 (40.3), 19: 86 (38.9), 20: 30 (13.6), 21: 8 (3.6), 22: 4 (1.8), 24: 1 (0.1), 26: 1 (0.1), no answer 2 (0.9)
3. How many years have you studied English? (sum together past and present studies)
2 – 3: 0 (0.0), 4 – 5: 5 (2.3), 6 – 7: 141 (63.8), 8 – 9 (or) over 10: 75 (33.9)
4. What other English classes are you currently taking at school? (Data omitted)

5. Have you ever attended private or extra-curricular English courses or lessons?
yes, more than 1 year: 65 (29.5), yes, a few months: 38 (17.3), yes, a few weeks: 8 (3.6), no, never: 109 (49.5)
6. During your previous studies, did you have access to books in English to read for pleasure?
yes, often: 6 (2.7), sometimes: 72 (32.6), rarely: 94 (42.5), no, never: 49 (22.2)
7. In the past, were you ever encouraged to read for pleasure in English by a teacher?
no, never: 52 (23.5), hardly ever: 53 (24.0), sometimes: 104 (47.1), yes, very much: 12 (5.4)
8. In reading for pleasure in English, how would you rate your comprehension level?
low (rely heavily on dictionary): 64 (29.1), average: 117 (53.2), good: 30 (13.6), very good: 9 (4.1)
9. If you do not know the meaning of all the words when reading in English, are able to understand the gist of what you read?
yes, almost always: 21 (9.5), sometimes: 153 (69.2), rarely: 39 (17.6), no, I always rely on a dictionary: 8 (3.6)
10. Have you spent any time in a country where English is the dominant language?
no, never: 135 (61.1), yes, less than 3 wks: 69 (31.2), 1 - 6 mos.: 6 (2.7) more than 6 mos.: 11 (5.0)

11. What was the purpose of your stay?
tourism/vacation: 47 (56), study: 32 (38.1), part-time work: 2 (2.4), business: 3 (3.6) *n = 84
12. In your leisure time, how often do you read books **in Japanese**?
once a week or more: 47 (21.3), once every 1 – 2 months: 38 (17.2) rarely: 98 (44.3), never: 38 (17.2)
13. In the last 12 months, how many books have you read for pleasure **in Japanese**?
1 – 2: 71 (32.1), 3 – 5: 78 (35.3), 6 – 8: 28 (12.7), more than 8: 44 (19.9)
14. How often do you read something **in English** for pleasure?
once a week or more: 19 (8.6), once every 1 – 2 months: 12 (5.4), rarely: 84 (38.0), never: 106 (48.0)
15. What do you usually read in English during your leisure time?
lyrics of pop, rock songs: 46 (40.7), magazines: 30 (26.5), newspapers: 14 (12.4), books: 23 (20.4) *n = 113
16. In the last 12 months, how many books in English have you read for pleasure?
0: 26 (22.6), 1 – 2: 62 (53.9), 3 – 4: 17 (14.8), more than 4: 10 (8.7) *n = 115
17. Would you like to read more books in English for pleasure than you do now?
definitely yes: 46 (20.8), probably yes: 127 (57.5), probably not: 42 (19.0), no: 6 (2.7)
18. Why don't you read more books in English for pleasure?
19. If you had access to interesting books that were suitable to your comprehension level, how many hours per week would you be willing to dedicate to reading in English?
0: 3 (1.4), 1: 87 (40.5), 2 – 3: 87 (40.5), more than 3: 38 (17.7) *n = 215
20. Do you think reading books for pleasure in English is important?
yes, very important: 91 (41.2), fairly important: 115 (52.0), not so important: 14 (6.3), not important at all: 1 (0.5)
21. Why do you think reading books for pleasure in English is important?
22. Without considering possible lack of time or limited comprehension, would you find reading books in English for pleasure a personally rewarding experience?
yes, very rewarding: 110 (49.8), yes, fairly rewarding: 101 (45.7), only slightly rewarding: 8 (3.6), not rewarding: 2 (0.9)
23. What type of books in English would you like to read? From the list below, rank three preferences. (Data not included)

Appendix 2

1. I enjoy reading in my first language.
6 5 4 3 2 1
2. I was confident in my English reading ability before this class.
6 5 4 3 2 1
3. I am more confident now as compared to before this class.
6 5 4 3 2 1
4. Easy reading should be a part of language study at school.
6 5 4 3 2 1
5. Writing the book reports helped me understand the story.
6 5 4 3 2 1
6. Writing book reports is important and useful.
6 5 4 3 2 1
7. I plan to continue reading graded readers for pleasure.
6 5 4 3 2 1
8. Please add you own comments about the reading portion of this class.
9. Please add suggestions for how to make this course more useful and enjoyable.