

Teachers motivated by students' extensive reading: A case study of teachers' motivation to start reading English books

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This study introduces three high school teachers who were motivated by a students' extensive reading program to start reading English books on their own. The researcher started the Extensive Reading (ER) program at a girls' private high school in Osaka 8 years ago. With only a few exceptions there was little support for the program. Most of her colleagues simply ignored what she was doing. Then, one English teacher, who at first had been skeptical about the ER program, noticed students' attitudes toward ER and began to show some interest in reading English books extensively. At about the same time, a chemistry teacher and a librarian, who were eager to study English and had tried several methods in vain, saw students reading English books with great eagerness. Motivated by students' reading attitudes and materials, these three teachers began ER themselves. They started from beginner level and gradually proceeded to higher levels of books, feeling a great sense of joy in reading as well as a sense of self-confidence and accomplishment, and discovered the effectiveness of ER for language acquisition. Now they are all promoting the ER program, and encouraging students to become good readers.

この研究は、生徒が多読をしている様子を見て刺激を受けた3人の高校教師が、自ら英語の多読を始め、多読の楽しさ、英語学習における有効性、英語力向上を自ら経験した結果多読推進者となり、授業で多読を取り入れたたり、生徒に刺激を与えたり、生徒へ多読に関する助言をあたえたりするようになった経緯を報告する。大阪のある私立高校では1998年以来、高2生の数クラスを対象に一人の非常勤講師によって多読授業が行われているが、初期の数年は、わずかな例外を除いては多読授業に賛同する同僚はいなかった。殆どの教師は、易しいテキストを使う多読指導を冷ややかな目でみたり、無視したりしていた。ところが2002年頃から、多読授業に懐疑的であった一人の英語教師と、それまでは他の方法で英語の自学自習をしていた化学の教師、図書館の司書の3人が、生徒が楽しそうに英語の本を読む様子を見て、生徒と同じ初歩のレベルの本を読み始めた。それ以来3人とも英語の本を読みつけ、英語での読書の楽しみ、自信、達成感を味わい、多読が英語学習に効果的であることを実証した。現在では3人3様に多読授業促進に協力的であり、生徒に直接間接に、多読を勧めている。

Recently the ER approach has been gaining popularity in second and foreign language curriculum all over the world. In Japan, in particular, many people from elementary school children to adults have started reading English books in various institutions including private English classes, *juku* (cram school) (Nakazawa, 2004) and offices. However, the ER approach has not yet been adopted in the curriculum of most junior and senior high schools in Japan.

According to Day and Bamford (1998), some of the reasons for ER not being common in second language programs include:

- cost
- the work required to set up a program
- the difficulty of finding time for it in the already-crowded curriculum
- the different role of the teacher
- the “light” nature of the reading material (p.46)

A survey conducted by Kyoto Reading Research Project Team (Hashimoto, Takada, Isobe, Sakai, Ikemura, & Yokogawa, 1997) reported that the major reasons for not employing an ER approach in high school were limited class time, lack of students' reading proficiency, and not enough evidence of its effectiveness. A questionnaire administered by the researcher to 20 private high school teachers in 2005 at the Osaka Private High School Teachers' Association for English Language Teaching elicited similar results but also included the uneasiness of not knowing the teacher's role. Many teachers feel intimidated by the implementation of

an ER program, or face difficulty in getting support from colleagues and administrators.

However, some of the above-mentioned negative factors in implementing ER may be caused by teachers' lack of experience in reading English extensively. Once teachers themselves experience ER in English, some anxiety concerning the teacher's role and the effectiveness of ER may disappear. This study reports examples of teachers who practiced ER after being motivated by students' attitudes while reading, and who have become great supporters of the ER program. The following is the brief description of the students' ER program (Takase, 2005).

Students' ER program

A year-long ER program has been carried out in an average of two classes of second-year students for the past 8 years at a girls' private high school in Osaka. At the time of implementation, the idea of ER was totally new at this school, where grammar-translation had been the mainstream of English teaching. After persuading the then head of the English department to include reading materials in the budget, the researcher implemented an ER program amidst strong criticism for using such easy materials that did not need the use of a dictionary or translation.

The books students read were graded readers of 200–1800 levels (e.g., Heinemann, Oxford, Penguin), picture books and leveled readers for L1 children. Approximately 100–300 books have been purchased each year in response to the requests of the researcher and some other teachers who became supporters of ER in the later years.

For the first four years of the program, students were required to write a summary of each book they read, and to keep a record of their reading. After reading summaries and writing comments, the researcher took them to each homeroom teacher to return them to their students. Thus, the homeroom teachers became aware of their students' ER program.

The study

Research questions

1. What was the participants' motivation to start reading English books?
2. What were the major effects of reading extensively for the participants?
3. How did their roles contribute to the success of the ER program?

Participants (*participants' names are all pseudonyms.*)

The participants of this study were two female teachers whose homeroom students had an ER program and one female librarian who managed all the English reading material. Eiko, a full-time English teacher, was originally skeptical about the ER approach because of the easy English and light material that students were reading. Rikako, a full-time chemistry teacher, had been enthusiastic about studying English. Toshiko, a full-time teacher librarian, was never a hard-working student at high school or junior college. Thus, she showed little interest in English at first.

Procedures

The researcher began observing and interviewing the participants informally since they began to show interest in ER in the middle of 2002. The starting period and times of interviews varied from participant to participant. An open-ended questionnaire was constructed by the researcher and conducted in June 2005 (Appendix A).

Data collection

The data were collected by observation, interviews, and an open-ended questionnaire. Observation and plural interviews have been conducted whenever possible in order to investigate the participants' reading attitudes, transition of their reading materials, and change in attitude toward ER since the beginning of their ER. Each interview lasted from 10 to 40 minutes depending on the interviewees' schedules. The interviews were not tape recorded, partly because they were in many cases abrupt due to the difficulty of arranging a set time, and partly because they were conducted in the teachers' room or the library, which made it difficult to run a tape recorder. Instead, interview answers were jotted down.

The open-ended questionnaire contained 22 items regarding motivation, reading history and habits, difficulty and effectiveness of ER, the students' ER program, and English education of students. Based on the participants' answers, the final interviews were conducted for clarification and further understanding of their present reading habits and their English studies.

Case of Eiko

Eiko, who is in her early 50s, has been teaching English at the present junior and senior high school for more than 25 years. She received communicative English lessons as well as lessons based on the traditional grammar-translation method at the same high school where she works. She was an enthusiastic teacher, who tried various ways in order to improve her teaching methodology so that her students would enjoy learning English. However, when she read an English textbook or any English material, she always consulted a dictionary for the meaning of any unknown word she encountered. Consequently, in spite of her enthusiasm, her teaching methodology was similar to what she was taught at school, grammar-translation, in which she felt most secure and comfortable. Therefore, she felt uncomfortable to find students reading such light material in the ER program. Later, she recalled what she had thought at that time, saying, “What on earth is she doing letting high school students read such easy English books?”

One year, her homeroom students had an ER program by the researcher. Sitting close to each other in the teachers' room, they often exchanged information about students' attitudes in the ER class. Noticing many students eagerly reading English books, Eiko's attitude toward ER gradually changed from a negative one to a more favorable one. There was a surprising incident that led her to this change in her thinking. One day, she substituted in one ER class. When she went to the classroom, she was amazed to find the students reading English books by themselves in complete silence. She was hesitant even to call the roll for fear that she would disturb them. After that, she gradually began to

show an interest in implementing ER in her English class. In order to understand ER better, she read the book “*Kaidoku 100 Mango*” (Toward One Million Words and Beyond) (Sakai, 2002), and began from the very beginning with the Oxford Reading Tree (ORT) series and other picture books. She continued reading book after book until she reached one million words. She has found the same joy of reading English books that her students had already experienced and has felt an improvement in her reading speed, realizing the effectiveness of reading books extensively.

Now Eiko uses part of her class time in 1st year junior high class for story telling, which is considered as an introduction of ER, and sometimes takes her 2nd and 3rd year students to the library to give them Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) time. She also looks for interesting books and orders them for her students through the library. She is gradually spreading ER to other junior high teachers.

Case of Rikako

Rikako, who is in her early 30s, has been teaching chemistry at the present high school for about 10 years. She graduated from a well-known public high school and a prestigious national university, where grammar-translation method was the primary English reading strategy. Although she was forced to learn vocabulary by using a wordbook, rote learning was not her favorite method for learning vocabulary.

Several years ago, Rikako had an enthusiastic foreign exchange student in her class, who was eager to learn chemistry. In order to satisfy the student's need, Rikako studied technical terms in English and used them in class

so that the student would understand her lesson. However, her problem was communication. As the student had not learned Japanese well enough to understand her lesson, communication between Rikako and the student was not successful. Gradually the student lost interest in chemistry. This inspired Rikako to study communicative English. While attending a private conversation school, she took the TOEIC test, scoring around 600.

In 2002, Rikako's homeroom students had an ER program for part of their English reading class. She noticed that her students were enjoying English books during lunchtime or recess. To her great joy, she found one student reading "Curious George", which was one of her favorite childhood books. Upon finding out that there was a series of the Curious George books in the library, she began reading them with a little difficulty. Feeling the sense of joy in reading English books, she started to read other English books from the very beginning level such as ORT and the Longman Literacy Land (LLL) Series, and proceeded to leveled readers and L1 children's books, such as the Magic Tree House (MTH) series and Magic School Bus (MSB) series. She experienced an increase in her vocabulary through reading these books. During these two years she raised her TOEIC score by 160 points and passed the pre-second and second grades of the STEP (Society of English Proficiency: Eiken) Test.

Now she has been studying for the pre-first grade of the STEP test, competing with her students. Realizing the effectiveness of ER, she encourages her students to read not only to make progress in English, but in the long run, to succeed in university entrance examinations. Interested in

science books as a chemistry teacher, she orders non-fiction science books for students through the library.

Case of Toshiko

Toshiko, a school librarian in her late 40s, has two children, one in college and the other in junior high school. Although she hardly studied English much in high school or at junior college, her desire was that her children would be good at English. She was transferred to the present high school library about ten years ago, where she met a native speaking English teacher, and was motivated to speak with her in English. Although she began studying English, she had little success in continuing her studies with any of the methods she had attempted, such as studying vocabulary and practicing sample questions by using a STEP test textbook, and listening to an English radio program.

Looking at ER books that were placed in the library, she found many interesting books, some of which were easy enough to understand even without a high level of English proficiency. Noticing students' attitudes toward reading English books in the library, she observed the books they checked out, and studied about ER books. Being greatly interested in children's picture books and easy graded readers, she formed a group of mothers in her neighborhood to read English books. They purchased a great quantity of books and shared them among the group. At first, they were hoping to influence their own children; however, they gradually started to enjoy reading for themselves. Some members were English majors; however, they began reading books for the very beginners. Toshiko's family members began to notice what she was doing. To her delight, her

daughter showed interest in reading English books and began reading with her mother. After reading 100,000 – 200,000 words, Toshiko's score for the 3rd grade STEP test showed a significant improvement. Also a series of L1 children's leveled science books, which she read after reading one million words, greatly enlarged her vocabulary size.

Now she finds it much easier to listen to English on the radio and can even practice shadowing without looking at a test. As empirical research shows, ER enables gains in listening as well as reading (Elley & Mangubhai, 1981). She also finds herself greeting foreign exchange students in English in the library. Toshiko has been helping the researcher by taking on some of the responsibility for making a better and more effective ER program as well as giving advice to students on English books and providing them with a good reading environment in the library.

Findings

In examining the data generated from the questionnaire and the interviews, several similarities and some differences were found.

First of all, all the participants had the same answer to research question 1: that is, all the participants were motivated to read English books by students' reading attitudes and the materials they were reading. Students were joyously reading interesting books written in English easy enough for the participants to cope with.

Concerning research question 2, they all realized the joy and effectiveness of ER after reading a certain number of books on their own. One big difference was that whereas

Rikako and Toshiko took some standardized tests which measured their improvement in vocabulary growth, listening ability, and reading speed, Eiko, an English teacher, did not take any test to measure her improvement. However, she also felt a great improvement in reading speed.

Concerning the third question, experiencing the effectiveness of ER, each participant is promoting the ER program, and encouraging students to become good readers in their own way. Being an English teacher, Eiko is directly influencing students to read extensively by implementing an ER program in her class and promoting it to other colleagues.

Conclusion and implication

In conclusion, what motivated the participants of this study to start reading English books was their students' reading attitudes and an abundance of interesting materials written in easy English. The major effects of reading were improvement of English which lead to success in TOEIC and STEP tests as well as reading enjoyment. Thus, these participants now help promote the ER program by providing a better reading environment, encouraging students to read English extensively, and by introducing ER to students in class.

The findings of this study suggest that it is important for teachers to experience ER before refusing to implement it in a high school curriculum. Whatever their reasons for not adopting ER are, once teachers participate in ER for themselves, and experience its effectiveness, they would be less resistant to the idea of implementing ER in their

English classes. Once they look at their students' eager faces and their reading attitudes while reading, it would be almost impossible to keep quiet and not try to persuade their colleagues and school to introduce ER to the curriculum. Where there is a will, there is a way!

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Appendix A

Questionnaire on Extensive Reading

- 1 When did you start extensive reading? (year month)
- 2 What motivated you to start reading English books extensively?
- 3 How much have you read? (Words: Books:)
- 4 Had you read English books before you started extensive reading? (Yes / No)
- 4-a. If yes, what kinds of books did you read?
- 4-b When did you read them?
- 4-c How did you read them?
(example: I read a novel using a dictionary during my college days.)
- 5 What was the most difficult part of extensive reading?
- 6 What was the best part of extensive reading for you?
- 7 What part of ER did you find most valuable?
- 8 Are you studying English in any ways besides extensive reading? (Yes / No)
If yes, what kind of English study are you doing?

- 9 Do you think your English has improved after reading books extensively? (Yes / No)
If yes, in what way? (e.g., Reading speed, listening skills, vocabulary size)
- 10 Do you intend to continue reading extensively?
- 11 Do you believe high school students need extensive reading? (Yes / No)
If yes, give reasons.
- 12 What are your criteria when choosing books?
- 13 What kinds of books have you found easiest to read?
- 14 What kinds (or series) of books were the most interesting and fun to read?
- 15 Name some of your favorite books.
- 16 At what time(s) of the day do you do most of your reading?
- 17 How long do you read in a day (or in a week)?
- 18 Where do you do most of your reading?
- 19 How many Japanese books do you read in a month on an average?
- 20 Please write your opinion of students' English study.
- 21 Please write your opinion about English education in Japan.
- 22 Other comments.