



Potential of Extensive Reading as a Means of Intercultural Education: A Pilot Study

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The purpose of this paper is to investigate the potential of extensive reading (ER) as a method of intercultural education (IE). IE aims to encourage people to learn how to respond to cultural differences. Not surprisingly, language learning is considered a vital part of IE. While ER has been recognized as an effective pedagogy for language acquisition, not much research has focused on sociocultural learning through ER. This paper tries to answer what can be learned through ER for learners to prepare for intercultural communication. For this research, a survey and a succession of interviews were implemented at a university in Japan. Those results are analyzed in reference to Intercultural Communicative Competence, which is an intended outcome of IE. The survey results suggest ER can be an effective means of IE. Moreover, the interviews indicate ER can provide opportunities for learners to consider world history and cultures from various viewpoints.

Extensive reading (ER) has been recognized as an effective pedagogy to teach English. Its efficiency for language acquisition has been widely reported, for example, improvement in reading proficiency (Takase, 2012) and building vocabulary (Day, Omura & Hiramatsu, 1991). However, not much research has focused on learning from the content of the reading itself in spite of the fact that ER asks learners to read many more books than any other pedagogies. Since learners get information and enjoy stories in a foreign language, it can be predicted that they will have gained intercultural skills as well as language skills through ER. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the learning from the content of the ER reading materials as a type of Intercultural Education (IE). The two research questions for this study are as follows:

1. Can ER be a means of IE?
2. What can be learned through ER from the perspective of IE?

At the beginning of this paper, the concept of IE and related terms are introduced. After stating the methodology of this research, the findings about learning IE through ER will be explained. The results show that ER can provide opportunities for learners to become aware of various viewpoints towards world history and cultures. Finally, the author discusses some challenges of an ER program from the perspective of IE.

Theoretical Background

Language Education in the Era of Globalization

There has long been an active discussion about the relationship between globalization and education. This originated from a call for education for world peace proposed by UNESCO after the Second World War.

Uemura, A. (2020). Potential of extensive reading as a means of intercultural education: A pilot study. *Extensive Reading World Congress Proceedings*, 5, 41-49.

Since then, various terms have been used depending on their focus such as global learning (Pike & Selby, 1988), education for cosmopolitan citizenship (Osler & Starkey, 2015) and Global Citizenship Education. Currently, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) seems to be the most popular term to describe this field of education.

Intercultural Education and Intercultural Communicative Competence

IE is a concept which is often discussed as being closely related to ESD. It aims “to allow learners to react thoughtfully” to otherness (Beacco, 2013, p.3). Its main focus is on how to teach language for intercultural understanding by teaching sociocultural skills as well as linguistic skills. A justification for employing IE in this research is that it is proposed to enhance language education. In fact, there is a discussion as to what extent language education should be involved in ESD. Some claim that language education should fully incorporate ESD while others claim language education should fundamentally focus on language skills. However, even in the latter case, it is commonly accepted that intercultural communication skills should be attained from language teaching.

Specifically, Byram (2008) proposes the following five dimensions of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) which should be attained in IE (pp. 230-233).

- Attitudes: curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one’s own.
- Knowledge: of social groups and their products and practices in one’s own and in one’s interlocutor’s country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction.

- Skills of interpreting and relating: ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one’s own.
- Skills of discovery and interaction: ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction.
- Critical cultural awareness/political education: an ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one’s own and other cultures and countries.

This framework is the main theoretical reference to plan and explain the findings of this study.

Methodology

Location

This research was conducted at a university in Japan. Students are required to take at least eight credits of language classes and they tend to take two classes a week in the first two years of college. English Communication (EC) are the fundamental English classes offered mainly for freshman and sophomore students and they are taught by several teachers. Although each teacher teaches their EC classes in their own style, ER is a common mandatory assignment for all EC classes. Students borrow books from the library, read them and take quizzes online. When they pass the quizzes, they receive credit for the number of words in the books they read. The minimum number of words required to receive full credit for the ER program, 10% of their class grade, is 40,000 words per semester for freshman

and 50,000 words per semester for sophomores. This task is basically done at home and very little instruction for ER is implemented by teachers. Levels and length of books they read vary according to the learners' English levels.

Participants

The number of freshman and sophomore students who participated in this study was 121. They major either in International Culture, Cultural Policy and Art Management, or Design. Students learn English with classmates of the same department. In general, students in International Culture have more interest and ability in English than students in the other two departments. Also, they have more opportunities to take classes which are related to IE. There are two levels of EC classes according to the students' TOEIC score. All the participants in this study were in lower level classes and not many participants had overseas experiences. While most students were working on ER as homework, the participants in this study had fifteen minutes for ER in each class for one year. Although the instructor introduced books which matched the learners' levels and interests, there was no explicit instruction related to the contents of books.

Methodology

In this research, both quantitative and qualitative research methods were utilized. After one or two years of EC classes, the participants completed a survey which tried to assess the outcomes of ER as IE in general. The participants did not fill in the survey after reading each book but the survey was conducted once at the end of the academic year.

After that, several learners who answered "Strongly Agree" to all the four questions in the survey sat for interviews in order to investigate their learning through ER more closely. In the interviews, the participants introduced ER books which interested them and what they thought when they read those books, to explain the answers to the questions in the survey more precisely.

Basic information about the interviewees is introduced in Table 1. The survey and interviews were conducted in Japanese so that the students were able to correctly understand the questions and fully express their thoughts. The interviews were recorded and translated into English after explaining the purpose of the research and obtaining the participants' permission.

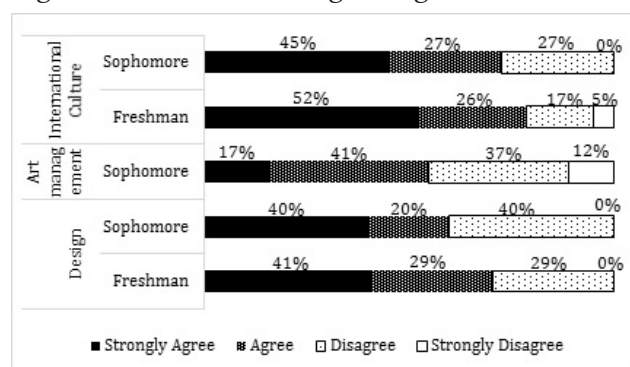
Table 1: Information about interviewees

	Gender	Year	Department	Words read in a year	Favorite genres
Student A	Male	Freshman	Design	1,474,414	biography, novel
Student B	Female	Freshman	Design	85,318	movie
Student C	Female	Freshman	International Culture	74,049	college story
Student D	Female	Freshman	International Culture	94,885	biography, novel
Student E	Female	Freshman	International Culture	101,687	school story
Student F	Female	Freshman	International Culture	86,347	fantasy, classics

Findings

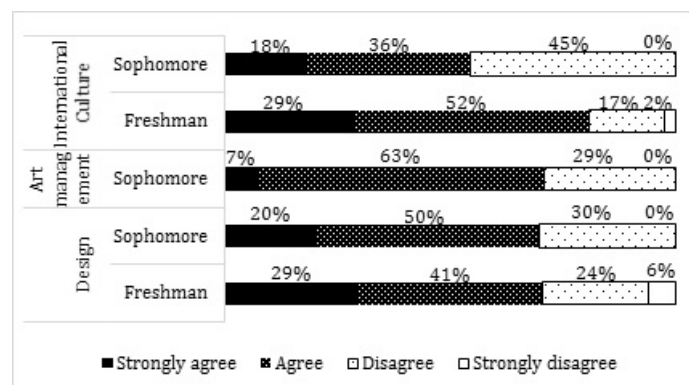
The survey results could answer the first research question. It clearly shows the possibility of ER as a means of encouraging IE. The first question in the survey was set to determine if ER can provide opportunities for learners to cultivate their ‘attitude’ in ICC. More than half of the participants were encouraged to consider going abroad because of their ER (see Figure 1). This result suggests that ER fosters curiosity about other countries. A limitation of this investigation is that a survey cannot illustrate why they were encouraged to go abroad. Successive interviews are needed to follow up on this result.

Figure 1: “I was encouraged to go abroad.”



The second question (Figure 2) was if they learned world history or issues via ER.

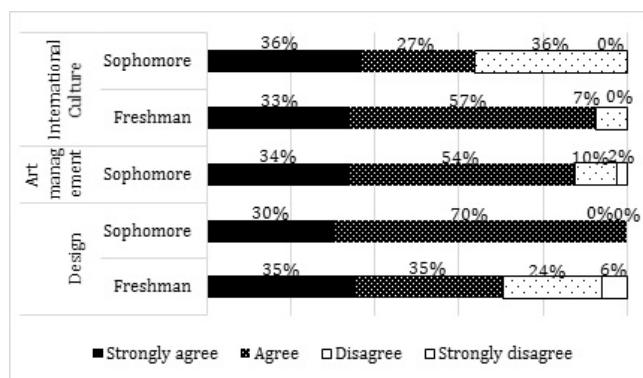
Figure 2: “I learned world history and/or social issues.”



The majority of the participants answered “agree” despite having selected books by themselves. In fact, there are many ER books which introduce history and social issues. Because ER learners need to read many books, the possibility of reading books about those topics is high. This question is related to ‘skills of interpreting and relating’ in ICC. Before ER, most of the learners should have learned world history or issues in Japanese. The experience of learning world history or issues in English can be a kind of practice to acquire skills to understand events from another perspective.

The third question (Figure 3) was about learners' findings about various cultures. This question tries to examine the possibility for learners to gain 'skills of discovery and interaction'. Interestingly, all sophomore students in the Design Department agreed or strongly agreed with this question. Traditionally, students in the Design Department have usually been the least interested in English and other cultures. These results suggest that ER can be an opportunity to think about other cultures even for those students who did not have much interest in them up until then. In ICC, 'skills of discovery and interaction' are the ability to obtain new knowledge of a culture and to utilize the knowledge in real-time communication. Although it may be impossible to operationalize the skills, it shows that the learners could acquire new knowledge of a culture through ER.

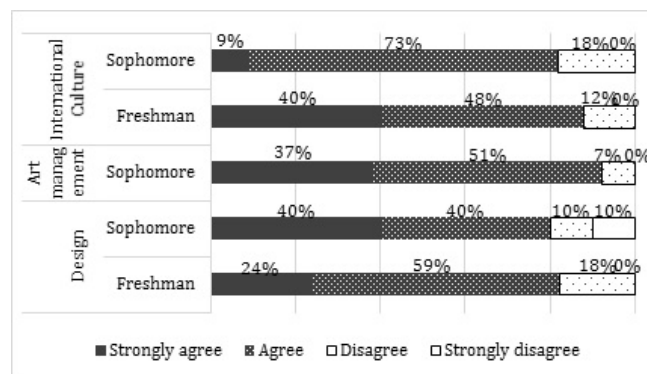
Figure 3: "I found something new about my and/or other culture."



The last question (Figure 4) asked learners if they had encountered a sense of values which was different from their own. This question is concerned with 'knowledge' in ICC. When people encounter other value systems, they often reflect back on their own values and recognize that they were formed as a function of their social groups. Therefore, the result implies that learners had chances to cultivate 'knowledge' of how social groups and identities function.

Figure 4: "I met sense of value or ways of

thinking which were different from mine."



The findings from the survey show that ER can be an opportunity to promote learners' ICC. However, it does not necessarily mean learners had actually obtained ICC skills. In addition, the core skill of ICC, 'critical cultural awareness', could not be assessed by the simple questions in the survey. In order to clarify what they can learn through ER, which is the second research question of this study, six participants who answered "strongly agree" to all the questions in the survey were invited for further interviews. The results illustrate what and how they learned ICC in ER.

Encouragement to Go Abroad

A majority of the learners were encouraged by their reading to consider going abroad. The following interview showed that many learners had a will to go to the places located or explained in books. Also, an interviewee explained:

"I wanted to go abroad when I could smoothly read English. I could recognize myself actually using English and felt like using it in a real situation."

Reading in English without translation is one of intended outcomes of ER (Takase, 2010). It can be said that ER is a pedagogy which can encourage learners to use the language in a real situation. This means ER can be a part of IE as it can motivate learners to communicate interculturally.

Learning World History and Social Issues

The interviews also show that learners had studied world history and social issues from biographies and historical novels as well as non-fiction series. Moreover, it illuminates that they had learned world history and issues from a viewpoint which they had not had before reading. An interviewee clearly said:

"I want to learn history from the viewpoint of foreign countries."

Another interviewee who read a biography of Gandhi commented:

"I had had an interest in European countries. But now I also have an interest in countries which had been colonized by European powers."

Those two comments show they noticed the need for 'skills of interpreting and relating' in ICC, which is the ability to understand a document or event from another culture.

Also, some students gained knowledge about the functions of social groups. An interviewee learned about the social gap among black people in South Africa by reading a novel. He explained that white people used to separate black people into two social groups so that they could easily rule them. Another learner read about Vikings in Northern Europe and noticed that there was a large amount of world history which was not taught in Japan. Through these experiences, learners may be prompted to notice that history was formed and described by social groups such as ethnic races or nations.

By reading many books about various places around the world written by different authors, learners can study world history and issues from various viewpoints

and notice the importance of knowing different perspectives.

Experiencing Cultural Encounters in Books

Learners who preferred casual stories discovered a communication style which was different from their own. Some learners were surprised that the characters in books clearly stated their opinions and often argued. In contrast, Japanese people sometimes hesitate to express their opinions especially when the other person has a different opinion or idea. Thus, it was a culture shock for those learners. This may be a first step to gaining 'skills of discovery and interaction' in ICC, the ability to find new knowledge of cultural practices.

A benefit of those experiences is that the learners are not directly challenged. Intercultural encounters in reality often involve culture shock or sometimes mental crisis (Zhou, Snape, Topping & Todman, 2008). When reading books, learners can be in a safe position while they learn intercultural communication from stories. Also, readers can be more objective when they watch intercultural encounters in books while it is often difficult to stay calm in actual communication as they tend to be more emotional. Additionally, multiple viewpoints are sometimes described in stories. In the field of children's literature, it is explained that readers can enrich their experiences through the main characters in stories (Matsuoka, 2015). It can be said that learners can enrich their intercultural experiences in ER and prepare for real culture shock by reading.

Reconsidering their Own Culture

ER can also provide opportunities for learners to reconsider their own culture. One participant commented as follows:

"It was interesting to see the images of Japan. In the book, Japanese ninja were cool, quiet and unfriendly. I think those images may come from Japanese comics. I think it was a bit different from reality."

Reading about their own culture in a foreign language can be a chance to think of the image of their own culture and how it is formed. Another example concerns the concept of Christmas. For many Japanese college students, Christmas is just a day to enjoy presents or parties. However, reading *A Christmas Carol*, some students noticed that Christmas had a deeper meaning in many cultures and questioned the Japanese way of celebrating it.

To sum up, learners encounter new viewpoints about familiar things such as their own culture or events and start reconsidering them. In this way, they may be able to attain 'critical cultural awareness', described as "the ability to evaluate critically on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, and practices and products in one's own culture or another cultures or countries" (Byram, 2008, p. 233).

Discussion

In summary, the survey results suggest that ER can provide opportunities to foster ICC as a means of IE. Moreover, the following interviews clarify what and how the interviewees had learned through ER as IE. The participants gained 'attitude' or curiosity about the countries they read in books, 'skills of interpreting and relating' and 'knowledge' of how social groups function by reading biographies or historical novels, 'skills of discovery and interaction' by experiencing intercultural encounters in books, and 'critical cultural awareness' by questioning or reviewing something they had taken for granted such as their own culture or customs through ER.

From these findings, it can be concluded that ER has potential to be a method of IE. However, this study also has some limitations. First of all, the number and variation of the participants were limited. Furthermore, it must be said that that learning might be partially strengthened by reflecting back on their reading while doing the survey or during the interview. Further research should be conducted to study the learning process and educational outcomes of ER as IE. In particular, more qualitative research such as interviews or book diaries should be implemented. Based on this research, effective methods of instruction should be investigated in order to maximize the potential of ER as IE. However, there seems to be some challenges to relying on an ER program to encourage IE.

Eliminating Stereotypes

One of the challenges of ER from an IE point of view is how to eliminate stereotypes. For instance, a learner found some characters in books who clearly expressed their opinions and noticed it as a communication style culturally different from her. However, it could also be a personal difference rather than cultural. If the learner were actually in another culture, she could have found many different personalities. Since the information contained in books is limited, it can often be difficult for readers to encounter diversity.

Stereotypes can be diminished by reading about diverse people in various kinds of books through ER. On the other hand, learners may also become persuaded that their assumptions are correct as they meet many characters with similar traits in many books. If learners read a limited number of materials, there is less possibility of generalization. On the contrary, ER learners may generalize their limited images in books

towards a particular culture as they read one book after another.

One way to avoid this is to recommend various books in terms of series, publishers and locations. Finding a favorite series is beneficial for learners to enjoy, read smoothly and learn words or phrases which appear repeatedly. Still, from the point of view of IE, instructors should recommend various books so that learners can have a wider view without generalization. Another way to avoid raising stereotypes is post-reading activities such as discussions and worksheets. There are a number of teaching materials for learners to challenge stereotypes (Byram, 2008; Andreotti & Souza, 2007). These can be applied to post-reading activities in ER.

Moving Learning from Passive to Active

Another challenge of ER as IE is how to foster learning after reading books. The final goal of IE is to actually react thoughtfully to people with different cultural backgrounds. In order to achieve this goal, the learning should be moved from passive to active. Activities such as roleplay or networking projects can be combined with ER programs so that learners can actually utilize the communication skills which they learned in books.

In addition, an ER practitioner in IE needs to consider how to raise 'critical cultural awareness' of learners. Cultural awareness is attained by critically evaluating the material. It cannot be easily achieved unless learners are asked some critical questions. Learners also need time for deep consideration. However, this may conflict with the policy of ER which encourages reading as many books as possible.

Considering these challenges, the balance between reading and post-reading activities seems to be a key to a successful ER program as IE. It has been reported that post-reading activities can either promote or hinder reading (Takase, 2004). ER practitioners should carefully consider the amount of post-reading activities so that they do not discourage learners to read but, on the contrary, actually promote learning.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to answer the following two research questions:

1. Can ER be a means of IE?
2. What can be learned through ER from the perspective of IE?

The survey results illustrate that ER can be an effective means of IE. Furthermore, the interviews have shown four educational outcomes of IE through ER. First, learners were encouraged to go to the places they read about. Also, they were motivated to go abroad to use their English in practical situations when they can read smoothly. Second, they have learned world history and other issues from new perspectives. Third, they have experienced cultural encounters in books without personal crisis. Finally, they had opportunities to reconsider their own culture through reading various books.

This pilot study reveals that learners can improve all five dimensions of ICC through ER without any explicit instruction. Successive studies should investigate the learning process and outcomes of ER as a means of IE. Also, effective ER teaching methods should be developed. Once they are established, ER should be further acknowledged as an important way of learning English.

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