

Analysis of an Extensive Reading Approach with Japanese Nursing College Students

Rieko MATSUOKA and David EVANS

National College of Nursing, Japan

matsuokar@adm.ncn.ac.jp

evans@adm.ncn.ac.jp



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This paper analyses an Extensive Reading approach conducted as a part of reading course for Japanese nursing college students. How students perceive this approach is examined through a questionnaire. The questionnaire has two parts: evaluation and feedback. The evaluation part was developed based on Day's (2002) ten principles for Extensive Reading. The feedback revealed students' in-depth reflections about their experience with Extensive Reading. A vocabulary test at the 3000 word level written by Nation (2010) was administered before and after three months' Extensive Reading to measure the effects on student vocabulary size. Pedagogical implications are discussed related to the findings.

Extensive Reading started from the idea of Krashen's (1982) comprehensive input hypothesis. With the help of commercial publishers' graded readers, students whether strong or weak in English, seem to have taken a great deal of advantage of Extensive Reading. Regular textbooks have extracts from some readers and sometimes look jumbled as Brown (2009) points out. Some participants for this study mentioned that they prefer to read a complete story instead of a portion. Richard Day and Julian Bamford established ten points for evaluating the success of an Extensive Reading approach in 2002. For this study, the first questionnaire was based on their criteria. In the area of motivation, as Mori (2002) states, some motivational effects are also expected. Takase (2010) investigated how to apply an Extensive Reading approach in regular classes, including using log-books. The Extensive Reading approach has sometimes been discussed in incidental vocabulary acquisition (e.g., Waring & Nation, 2004). The purposes of this study are to examine how the participants evaluate in-class Extensive Reading, how they feel and what they think of it. It also explores how to integrate the Extensive Reading approach in fostering autonomy, raising motivation, improving vocabulary size, and how to apply Extensive Reading in English education.

Methods

Participants

Forty-nine Japanese college students majoring in nursing participated in this study. They were from two reading classes consisting of 25 and 26 students respectively. Out of 52 students, 49 responded to the

questionnaire (94.2%). Forty were female and nine were male.

Instruments

The instruments used for this study were a questionnaire and a vocabulary test.

The questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part is an evaluation of the Extensive Reading approach made of ten items (4-likert scale) based on Day and Bamford's ten principles (2002) in both English and Japanese. They are 1) the reading material is easy, 2) there are enough kinds of topics, 3) you can choose your books, 4) you can maximize your reading time, 5) you can enjoy reading, 6) you can read for reading's sake, 7) speedy reading is possible, 8) you can read individually and silently, 9) the teacher gives you enough guidance, and 10) the teacher is a role model for reading. Open space for comments is provided. The second part was for feedback comments, some measured on a scale from one to ten. The items are: 1) Has your attitude to reading changed after doing Extensive Reading? Describe how it changed. 2) Do you think keeping a log book is helpful? Describe how useful it is and how it can be improved. 3) How many books did you read? Which levels? 4) Has your reading level gone up? From which level to which level? (e.g. 1-3-5) Do you feel Extensive Reading is a good use of class time? What percentage of class time should be devoted to Extensive Reading? Why? 6) What did you most enjoy about Extensive Reading? and 7) How could your experience of Extensive Reading be improved?

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Evaluation

| Question item numbers | df | Minimum | Maximum | Average | Standard Deviation |
|---|----|---------|---------|---------|--------------------|
| 1. the reading material is easy | 49 | 1 | 3 | 2.18 | .727 |
| 2. there are enough kinds of topic | 49 | 1 | 4 | 3.24 | .804 |
| 3. you can choose your books | 49 | 1 | 4 | 3.43 | .707 |
| 4. you can maximize your reading time | 49 | 1 | 4 | 2.51 | .711 |
| 5. you can enjoy reading | 49 | 2 | 4 | 2.94 | .719 |
| 6. you can read for reading's sake | 49 | 1 | 4 | 2.71 | .866 |
| 7. speedy reading is possible | 49 | 1 | 4 | 2.12 | .781 |
| 8. you can read individually and silently | 49 | 1 | 4 | 3.12 | .832 |
| 9. the teacher gives you enough guidance | 49 | 2 | 4 | 3.02 | .777 |
| 10. the teacher is a role model for reading | 49 | 1 | 4 | 2.84 | .800 |

The other instrument was a vocabulary test (first 3000 words), from Paul Nation's webpage (2000). Nation's tests are composed of 10 items for each 1000 word level, and the first three tests which cover first 3000 words have thirty items altogether. By counting each item as one point, a perfect score is thirty points.

Procedure

Two reading classes were chosen and this experimental Extensive Reading program ran for 10 weeks. Since there was one class session every two weeks, five class sessions were used for this study. For each class, the participants were provided with 10 minutes for Extensive Reading. A small library of approximately 300 books (Oxford and Cambridge graded readers) was made accessible for the participants' selections. Small notebooks were also provided for use as reading logs. In order to find the effect on vocabulary, the participants took Nation's vocabulary test (1000 to 3000 word level) before and after this project. After 10 weeks Extensive Reading, they responded to the questionnaire.

Findings and Discussion

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the evaluation part for Extensive Reading approach by the students.

As the highest score in this Likert scale is four, numbers above 3.00 may be interpreted as being felt strongly. The highest score is 3.43. for item 3, 3.24 for item 2, and 3.12 for item 8. Therefore, these results indicate that the participants strongly felt that they could choose their own books, there are enough kinds of topics, and that they can read individually and

silently. On the other hand, the lowest was for item seven (2.12), then the next lowest for first item (2.18). The number 2 in this Likert scale means 'slightly disagree'; therefore, the participants may not feel that they can do speedy reading or that the reading material is easy.

As the proficiency level seems to have some effects on student evaluation of the Extensive Reading approach, a Pearson Correlation Coefficient between their proficiency levels as measured by Computer Assisted System of English Communication and each item score was calculated. Table 2 shows the results of this analysis.

Table 2. Evaluation items vs. proficiency levels: Pearson Correlation Coefficient

| | |
|---|-------|
| 1. the reading material is easy | -.14 |
| 2. there are enough various topics | -.18 |
| 3. you can choose your books | .09 |
| 4. you can maximize your reading time | -.09 |
| 5. you can enjoy reading | .215 |
| 6. you can read for reading's sake | .326* |
| 7. speedy reading is possible | -.91 |
| 8. you can read individually and silently | .116 |
| 9. the teacher gives you enough guidance | .02 |
| 10. the teacher is a role model for reading | .084 |

*p <.005

The result shows only one significant positive correlation coefficient, between the proficiency and item 6: Reading for reading's sake. This may be interpreted that the more proficient participants feel more strongly about item 6 after experiencing an Extensive Reading approach. The value -.91 is

not statistically significant, but the largest negative correlation coefficient was produced with item seven: That speedy reading is possible. This result suggests that the more proficient students feel less confident about speedy reading after an Extensive Reading experience.

The second part of a questionnaire generated the following findings for each item.

Has your attitude to reading changed after doing Extensive Reading? Describe how it changed.

The average score was 6.16 out of 10. The range was from 2 to 10; 19% of the participants marked 4 or under and 53% marked 7 and over.

Half of student comments were about a change in attitude. Six participants used to dislike reading and now like it whilst four others said they now felt positive. This result indicates that Extensive Reading enhances learners' motivation as a self-fulfilling prophecy or expectancy value theory suggests. Three students said reading had now become a habit, with two reading on the train. Twenty percent said they could see improvement in their reading, saying they were either faster, better at predicting what would follow, more able to guess, and less likely to give up. A sense of accomplishment from being able to read a book from cover to cover in English was gained by some participants. A quarter of the students felt there was no change in their reading ability. Interestingly, these were the more able students.

Do you think keeping a log book is helpful?

The average score was 6.16, with the a range from 2 to 10. Twelve percent marked 4 or under and 41% marked 7 and over. Just under 50 percent said the log-book was motivating. Students could see an improvement in their reading speed and in the degree of difficulty as they changed one book for another.

How many books did you read? Which levels?

The average number was 4.66, and 71% read between three and five books. Only 10% read less than three. Regarding the level of the books read, 81% of students noted that they moved up at least one level and 37% moved up by two or more levels.

Do you feel Extensive Reading is a good use of class time?

Whilst nearly half (23 participants) replied in the affirmative the most interesting finding was that 22 participants gave no answers or comment. Although this could have been an oversight, it might be that

these students chose not to respond. Looking at the names of these students it was apparent that it was the higher level students. This suggests that higher level classes do not need class time for reading. It is, however, important to consider the majority and it might be that classroom reading time is best done with beginner or lower level classes.

What percentage of class should be devoted to it?

Why?

Just under half the 22 felt that 10 minutes was the right amount and just under a quarter wanted 15-20 minutes. These participants said that it was enjoyable, perhaps more enjoyable than regular classes. Others highlighted the autonomy of choosing your own book, own level, and own speed as well as not having to do questions and exercises. It is important to note that reading class is ostensibly to help students read, but teachers seldom give students the opportunity to do that unhindered.

What did you enjoy most about Extensive Reading?

Nearly fifty percent said they were better at reading, mentioning that they enjoyed learning vocabulary and expressions naturally, and guessing words and reading faster. Nine students said they now feel comfortable with English and found it satisfying to read long stories. Eight other students said it was good just to spend time in English with no questions to answer.

How could your experience of Extensive Reading be improved?

There were only a few comments, focusing on getting more interesting books, with more dialogue, and more characters known to students, or about famous people, or Japanese novels in English.

The last findings are from vocabulary tests. The average score of the pre-test was 19.9 and of the post-test was 20.8. The t-test of these two scores showed a statistically significant difference under the level of $p = .05$. This result means the Extensive Reading approach may be effective in raising vocabulary size.

Conclusions

Based on the ten principles for Extensive Reading (Day & Bamford, 2002), reasonably good scores for all ten items (2.12 to 3.43) were gained, which means the Extensive Reading approach was evaluated in a favorable way. The majority of participants felt it was helpful for them to increase their motivation in

learning English and they thought it was an effective and useful way to learn English.

Regarding the way of integrating the Extensive Reading approach for fostering autonomy and raising autonomy and motivation, freedom in choosing books and use of a log book for keeping reading records should be provided. A large library of graded books as well as other books that the students desire to read should be accessible for students. The time in class spent on Extensive Reading depends on students' needs.

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