

Teachers' Motivation to Implement Extensive Reading in Class



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Uozumi, K., & Takase, A. (2012). Teachers' motivation to implement Extensive Reading in class *Extensive Reading World Congress Proceedings, 1*, 62-64.

The purpose of this study is to investigate teachers' attitudes and motivation toward Extensive Reading (ER). A survey was conducted with ER practitioners and non-practitioners at various seminars and conferences from 2010 to 2011. The results were also compared to those of the previous surveys conducted in 2006 and 2008. The latest survey revealed a large gap between what the practitioners found in practice and the non-practitioners' expectations. In addition, while the non-practitioners were more worried than before about the practice of ER, especially in terms of class management and teachers' work, inflated expectations on improvement in students' proficiency became apparent in their responses. To avoid possible disappointment and frustration of new practitioners after the implementation of ER, the researchers conclude that teacher training is necessary for a successful ER program.

Despite the gaining popularity of ER as an effective teaching methodology, it is often the case that some start an ER program and then fail, and thus conclude that ER is not an effective enough strategy for English language learning. In order to investigate the reasons for this, survey questionnaires were conducted on various occasions such as at JACET, JALT, and JERA conferences, as well as at ER seminars in 2010 and 2011. The results were also compared to those of the previous surveys conducted in 2006 and 2008. Two study questions were offered in the surveys:

- 1) What are the differences in motivation and attitudes toward ER between ER practitioners and non-practitioners?; and
- 2) Is there any change in teachers' attitudes toward ER as it is getting more popular?

Positive Effects and Problems in ER Programs

Data in 2010-11 were collected from 55 practitioners and 55 non-practitioners at various institutions from elementary schools to universities. Sixty percent of the practitioners had experiences with ER in class for over three years and almost all of them practiced Sustained Silent Reading.

Comparing the Positive Effects Reported by Practitioners and Non-practitioners

Table 1 shows the positive effects that the practitioners (Ps) actually found in practice and what the non-practitioners (NPs) expected.

Table 1. Positive Effects of ER Programs in 2010-11 (%)

ITEMS	P	NP
1. Ss enjoyed (will enjoy) reading.	80.0	49.1
2. Ss became (will become) confident in English.	47.3	52.7
3. Ss' English proficiency has improved (will improve).	38.2	72.7
4. It became (will become) easier to teach Ss of different levels.	36.4	40.0
5. T has read (will read) a lot of books.	32.7	16.4
6. Communication btw T & Ss has been promoted (will be promoted).	25.5	9.1
7. Positive effects on other skills are (will be) expected.	18.2	32.7

As Table 1 shows, there is a big difference between the two groups. It should be noted that as many as 80.0% of the Ps responded that students (Ss) enjoyed reading, whereas the expectation of the NPs was only 49.1% (Item 1). On the other hand, the NPs' expectation of Ss' improvement in proficiency (Item 3) and other skills (Item 7) were much higher than those of the Ps. Interestingly, however, in regard to teachers' (Ts') involvement in reading (Item 5) and communication between Ts and Ss (Item 6), the NPs' expectation is about half or one-third of those of the real experiences of the Ps.

Comparing the Problems Reported by Practitioners and Non-practitioners

Table 2 illustrates the problems that the Ps experienced in the programs and those the NPs expected to face in implementing an ER program.

Table 2. Problems in ER Programs in 2010-11 (%)

ITEMS	P	NP
1. Little budget for ER materials	40.0	54.5
2. Time-consuming work	32.7	36.4
3. Some reluctant Ss	30.9	29.1
4. Not sure of how to evaluate Ss	27.3	43.6
5. No support from colleagues	25.5	18.2
6. Few Ss to continue ER after the course	21.8	5.5
7. Not sure of how to practice ER in class	10.9	47.3
8. Little progress in Ss' proficiency	9.1	0
9. Limited class time in the curriculum	5.5	20.0

The NPs were more worried about budget for reading materials, teachers' work and curriculum (Items 1, 2 and 9), as well as the ways ER was conducted in class (Items 4 and 7). The most remarkable results are, however, that none of the NPs were worried that Ss' proficiency would not improve (Item 8), and only 5.5% of the NPs were worried that Ss would stop reading after the course (Item 6). Their expectations of Ss' performance can be seen to be very high, not only in terms of the positive effects shown in Table 1 but also in terms of the problems experienced (Table 2), and this was significantly different from what the Ps found in practice.

The Change in Teachers' Attitudes toward ER over Five Years

Similar surveys were conducted at ER workshops in Osaka and Tokyo in 2006 and also at JERA and JALT conferences in 2008. Data were collected from 98 respondents (P: 58, NP: 40) in 2006 and from 41 practitioners in 2008. Table 3 shows a comparison of the positive effects that the practitioners observed in ER programs between 2006, 2008 and 2010-2011.

Table 3. Positive Effects of ER Programs (Practitioners, 2006, 2008 & 2010-11) (%)

ITEMS	2006	2008	2010-11
	P	P	P
1. Ss enjoyed reading.	72.4	70.7	80.0
2. Ss became confident in English.	43.8	53.7	47.3
3. Ss' English proficiency has improved.	56.9	48.8	38.2
4. T has read a lot of books.	37.5	48.4	32.7
5. Communication btw T & Ss has been improved.	36.2	43.9	25.5
6. T's English proficiency has improved.	-----	34.1	14.5

The three most significant effects concerning Ss'

performance (Items 1 to 3) are the same among the three groups, but the percentage of Ss' proficiency most sharply dropped in the latest survey. Items 4, 5 and 6 concern the positive effects on Ts, but the percentage of all these effects also dropped in the latest data, and the percentages are the lowest for each item.

Table 4 presents a comparison of the problems that the Ps had in ER programs in 2006, 2008 and 2010-2011.

Table 4. Problems in ER Programs (Practitioners, 2006, 2008 & 2010-11) (%)

ITEMS	2006	2008	2010-11
	P	P	P
1. Little budget for ER materials	48.3	46.3	40.0
2. Time-consuming work	41.4	46.3	32.7
3. Some reluctant Ss	37.9	36.6	30.9
4. No support from colleagues	22.4	19.5	25.5
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8. Little progress in Ss' proficiency	10.3	7.3	9.1

Though the percentages slightly vary, the Ps in the three surveys shared the same kinds of problems: budget, time-consuming work, reluctant students and colleagues. In Items 1, 2 and 3, however, the percentage dropped in 2010-11 compared to that of the other two groups. It may be due to an increase in information about ER which possibly caused administrators' interest in ER, as well as an increase in the variety of reading materials and book guides that could make it easier for the Ps to manage books and encourage Ss to read. Yet, approximately 10% of the Ps in each survey still felt that ER really did not work to improve Ss' proficiency.

Table 5 shows a comparison of the NPs' expected problems in 2006 and 2010-11 (unfortunately there are no data on the comparison of NPs' expected positive effects and data of NPs in 2008).

Table 5. Expected Problems in ER Programs (Non-practitioners, 2006 & 2010-11) (%)

ITEMS	2006	2010-11
	NP	NP
1. Little budget for ER materials	45.7	54.5
2. Not sure of how to practice ER in class	10.9	47.3
3. Not sure of how to evaluate Ss	-----	43.6
4. Time-consuming work	15.2	36.4
5. Limited class time in the curriculum	37.0	20.0
6. Some reluctant Ss	-----	29.1
7. No support from colleagues	15.2	18.2
8. Little progress in Ss' proficiency	-----	0.0

Some changes over five years can be found here. In contrast to the decrease in the Ps' concerns about budget and extra work as shown in Table 4, the NPs' concerns, mostly about teachers' problems, have increased. These problems, however, could be solved by teachers' preparation and information.

As the results of the surveys have indicated, there is a big gap between what the ER Ps found in practice and what the NPs expected. The Ps' biggest motivation to practice ER in class was that students enjoyed reading. The Ps also read themselves and found positive effects on their reading and teaching. The NPs, on the other hand, had inflated expectations of the increase in students' proficiency and the positive effects on their other English skills, such as listening, writing or speaking. However, their expectations of positive effects on themselves were much lower than the Ps'. The clear difference was also observed between what the Ps regarded as problems in the programs and the NPs' expected problems.

At the same time, when the data were compared in 2006 and 2010-11, the percentage of the Ps who found problems in the budget or book management has dropped, but against this reality, the NPs' concern over these problems, along with concern about teachers' problems, has increased over five years since 2006. Therefore, it is necessary to bridge these gaps. To avoid possible disappointment and the frustration of new Ps after the implementation of ER, teacher training is essential for a successful ER program, even after its implementation.

References

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