

Effects of Extensive Reading on EFL Learner Motivation

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THIS PAPER REPORTS ON THE EFFECTS OF EXTENSIVE READING (ER) on the motivation and reading attitudes of EFL learners at a Japanese university. ER is an approach involving language learners reading large amounts of easy, usually self-selected material in the target language and has been claimed to promote positive L2 reading attitudes. As reading attitudes have been identified as having a strong influence on learners' motivation to continue reading (Day & Bamford, 1998; Yamashita, 2013), a crucial factor in academic success, this effect could be very beneficial for many learners. While some studies have explored the effects of ER on learners' L2 reading motivation (e.g. Fujita & Noro, 2009; Matsui & Noro, 2010; Stoeckel, Reagan & Hann, 2012; Takase, 2012; Yamashita, 2013; Dickinson, 2017), little research exists on how ER affects learners' overall L2 motivation, especially over a longer time period.

The current study addresses this gap by examining the effects of ER on the L2 reading attitudes and motivation of English language learners at a Japanese university over one academic year. In order to examine these issues we conducted three learner surveys during the year. This enabled us to see the effects of ER over a longer time period than previous relevant research, which has been limited to approximately 3-4 months. Based on the assumption that learning conditions, which includes things such as the

curriculum, teacher, and peers, together with enjoyment can greatly affect learner motivation, our hypothesis is that ER should lead to positive changes in L2 reading attitudes and motivation. To test this hypothesis, we developed a questionnaire including items from Yamashita's (2007) reading attitudes questionnaire and Ryan's (2009) Motivational Factors Questionnaire (MFQ) on the Ideal L2 self, a key factor in the Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2009). This paper reports the results of the three learner surveys using the questionnaire. We hope that our paper provides some insight into the effects of ER on learners' L2 motivation and reading attitudes.

Previous Research

L2 Reading Attitude

Attitude is a complex construct, which in general definitions usually involves notions of evaluation. For example, one definition refers to attitude as “*a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor*” (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, p. 1, cited in Day & Bamford, 1998, p. 22). Reading attitude can be defined as “*a system of feelings related to reading which causes the learner to approach or avoid a reading situation*” (Alexander & Filler, 1976, p. 1, cited in Yamashita, 2013, p. 249). Fortunately for teachers, attitudes are subject to change, so learning conditions have the potential to foster positive attitudes. As reading attitude is formed by learners' reading experiences we can expect doing ER to affect language learners' reading attitudes. In Day and Bamford's (1998) model of the acquisition and development of L2 reading attitudes, four sources form L2 reading attitudes: L1 reading attitudes, previous L2 reading experiences, attitudes to the L2 and the related culture and people, and the L2 classroom environment. In this model we can expect ER to be able to influence the final two components. If the ER program involves reading books covering various topics, it is likely to influence learners' attitudes to the culture and people. As ER is based on reading for pleasure, with learners usually choosing books to read based on their own interests and no high pressure testing, a positive classroom environment can be

expected. A successful ER program is therefore likely to foster positive L2 reading attitudes as learners are able to explore other cultures and people according to their own interests in a less stressful classroom environment.

Several studies have investigated the effects of ER on the L2 reading attitudes of Japanese EFL learners. Fujita and Noro (2009) found that ER enhanced intrinsic and extrinsic components of high school EFL learners' reading motivation. Matsui and Noro (2010) examined the influence of ER on junior high school students' EFL reading motivation using an ER and a control group. Intrinsic motivation and exam-related extrinsic motivation were found in both groups, but a factor named *self-confidence* appeared only in the ER group. In a study of a 3-month ER program with university learners, Takase (2012) found that almost all participants, including reluctant readers, improved their reading attitudes and motivation to read English books. Yamashita (2013) explored the effects of 15 weeks of ER on university EFL learners' L2 reading attitudes. Five attitudinal variables were measured: Comfort, Anxiety, Intellectual Value, Linguistic Value, and Practical Value. Results showed increases in Comfort and Intellectual Value and a decrease in Anxiety, with no effect on Practical Value. Finally, Dickinson (2017) found that a 15-week ER program at a Japanese university had positive effects on reading attitudes, especially those related to difficulty and enjoyment. Although these studies have shown that ER can positively affect EFL reading attitudes, as they all investigate a relatively short time period we do not know if the effects continue. As Yamashita (2013) points out, although her study of the effect of ER on reading attitudes "*identified a positive effect of ER, how long the effect continues is a crucial question*" (p. 258). The current study aims to provide some evidence addressing this key question by investigating the effects of ER over one academic year.

L2 Motivation

In this research, Ideal L2 self is a key motivational factor to see how ER activities can have an impact on the students' reading attitude and motivation of learning English.

Ideal L2 self is the one of three components of the Motivational Self System proposed by Dörnyei (2009). He proposed a new Motivational Self System, which is united with Higgins' 'possible selves' theory based on a learner's *ideal self* and *ought-to self*. Possible selves are captured as 'the future-oriented aspects of self-concept' which includes the positive and negative selves that are 'the desired and feared images of the self already in a future state' (Oyserman & James, 2009). In addition to the Ideal L2 Self and Ought-to L2 Self, which relate to the traditional concepts including integrative motivation and extrinsic motivation, Dörnyei (2009) suggests a third constituent in the ongoing learning environment, since some learners' motivations are triggered not by self-images but by successful learning experiences. Dörnyei (2001) also pointed out that motivation could be promoted both by providing a certain choice through implied guidance and by showing learners a concrete way to achieve goals. He also maintained that some people might be easily motivated given the right opportunity. "*Motivation is responsible for why people decide to do something, how long they are willing to sustain the activity and how they are going to pursue it*" (Dörnyei & Ushioda 2011, p. 4). What is particularly important in the theoretical model is the inclusion of a third constituent, L2 learning experience, in relation to the ideal and ought-to L2 self, because these self images are incessantly influenced by ongoing learning experience.

In Japan, according to Taguchi (2014) using a mixed method survey on over 1500 domestic Japanese university students, the Japanese learners are not good at having a positive image using English for academic and business purposes and their ideal L2 self had no influence on their 'intended learning effort'. His result also showed that even the students with positive attitudes both towards learning English and their English classes did not show effort in learning English. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) mentioned that having a self-image of becoming a proficient language user is not enough, and certain conditions are needed to exert motivational capacities. They pointed out several necessary conditions to activate the motivating capacity of the ideal L2 self. One of the conditions is to make the future image elaborate and vivid, that is, a self-image with insufficient

specificity and detail may not lead to an indispensable motivational response. ‘Language-related enjoyment/liking’ and ‘Positive learning history’ are also strongly related to learner motivation (Ushioda, 2001). Through the ER activities, we hoped to evoke the learners’ motivation of reading by giving them an opportunity to have positive self-image and enjoyment of reading.

Materials and Implementation

Participants

The participants in this study were 40 first-year Foreign Studies students (11 male, 29 females, ages 18-19 years) learning English at a Japanese university. The English proficiency of the learners in terms of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) was estimated to vary from A2 to B1. Participants did ER for two 15-week semesters in English reading classes of approximately 18 students, which met for 90 minutes once a week.

Implementation of ER

Although the learners took other English language skills classes, ER was their main English reading experience during this study. Following an introduction to ER, students began reading self-selected graded readers, which they mostly borrowed from the university’s self access learning center and library. The main ER activity consisted of learners reading as many graded readers as possible both in and out of their reading classes. Learners were encouraged to read books that were interesting to them, which they could read and comprehend at a reasonably fast speed (i.e. without often stopping to look up unknown words). Assessment of ER was based on the amount of words read during a semester, with a required minimum of 70,000 words for a passing grade and 150,000 words or more for the maximum grade. The ER grade was worth 30% of the overall reading course assessment. Apart from the standardized assessment, teachers had freedom over how to implement ER in their classes. Most teachers dedicated around 20

minutes per lesson to silent reading and had learners do follow-up speaking and/or writing activities, such as mini-presentations or discussions about books or written book reports. In order to monitor progress and support learners in developing a reading habit short term reading targets were set and teachers regularly checked learners' progress, which they recorded in a book especially designed for that purpose. Information contained in each reading record entry included the book title, word count, reading level and a brief comment and rating.

Materials

In order to examine changes in learner motivation and reading attitudes, we developed a questionnaire which included items from Yamashita's (2007) reading attitudes questionnaire and items selected from the Motivational Factors Questionnaire (MFQ) developed by Ryan (2009) on the Ideal L2 self, which refers to the representation of one's aspiration or wishes and is one of the main motivational factors. Evidence of the reliability of the reading attitudes items for learners of English at Japanese universities was provided in prior studies (e.g. Stoeckel et al., 2012; Yamashita, 2013). The reading attitudes questionnaire contained 26 items and employed a five-point Likert scale - a common approach to the measurement of attitudinal variables. It was designed to measure two aspects of reading attitude—*affect* (feeling) and *cognition* (thinking). Factor analysis yielded five factors: Comfort and Anxiety (Affect) and Intellectual Value, Practical Value, and Linguistic Value (Cognition). An additional variable – Ideal L2 Self – was added to these factors. An English version of the questionnaire items is included in the appendix.

Procedure

The identical questionnaire was administered online three times over one academic year. We conducted the initial survey in the first week of the first semester, prior to any ER activities. We administered the second survey at the end of the first semester, after 14 weeks of ER. The third and final survey was done after learners had completed two 15-

week reading courses using ER. The questionnaire was in Japanese and informed consent was obtained from participants each time. While 124 learners participated in the pre-ER survey and 92 responded to the second survey, only 40 learners completed all three questionnaires. For this reason, only the data from these 40 participants was included, with the data of those who did not complete all three questionnaires being discarded from the analysis.

Results

In order to detect changes in reading attitudes and L2 motivation over the academic year we performed a quantitative data analysis using SPSS. As this involved a comparison of three separate measurements a one-way ANOVA was used. The descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the six variables at three times

Variable	Time	<i>M</i>	95% CI	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>
ANXIETY	1	3.88	[3.71, 4.04]	0.53	0.08
	2	3.55	[3.35, 3.75]	0.62	0.10
	3	3.43	[3.23, 3.63]	0.62	0.10
COMFORT	1	3.01	[2.91, 3.11]	0.31	0.05
	2	3.01	[2.90, 3.12]	0.34	0.05
	3	3.09	[2.97, 3.21]	0.37	0.06
IDEAL L2 SELF	1	4.07	[3.85, 4.29]	0.69	0.11
	2	4.14	[3.90, 4.37]	0.74	0.12
	3	4.02	[3.78, 4.26]	0.75	0.12
INTELLECTUAL	1	4.07	[3.90, 4.23]	0.53	0.08
	2	3.83	[3.61, 4.05]	0.70	0.11
	3	4.09	[3.91, 4.26]	0.56	0.09
LINGUISTIC	1	4.25	[4.06, 4.44]	0.60	0.10
	2	4.07	[3.86, 4.29]	0.67	0.11
	3	4.23	[4.05, 4.40]	0.54	0.09
PRACTICAL	1	4.19	[3.99, 4.39]	0.63	0.10
	2	4.23	[4.00, 4.45]	0.71	0.11
	3	4.15	[3.94, 4.36]	0.67	0.11

Note. *N* = 40

Regarding the reading attitudes factors, Anxiety decreased throughout the study, as can be seen in Table 1. The one-way ANOVA demonstrated a statistically significant difference, $p = .003$, for this change (see Table 2). Although there were positive effects for Comfort and Intellectual Value, these were not statistically significant. There were also no significant differences demonstrated for Ideal L2 self or the Linguistic or Practical Value reading attitude variables.

Table 2. Results of the ANOVA for the six variables

Variable	Source	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
ANXIETY	Between Groups	2	4.22	2.11	5.98	.003
	Within Groups	117	41.27	0.35		
	Total	119	45.49			
COMFORT	Between Groups	2	0.16	0.08	0.68	.507
	Within Groups	117	13.68	0.11		
	Total	119	13.84			
IDEAL L2 SELF	Between Groups	2	0.29	0.14	0.27	.759
	Within Groups	117	61.91	0.52		
	Total	119	62.20			
INTELLECTUAL	Between Groups	2	1.60	0.80	2.23	.111
	Within Groups	117	42.06	0.36		
	Total	119	43.67			
LINGUISTIC	Between Groups	2	0.72	0.36	0.97	.379
	Within Groups	117	43.26	0.37		
	Total	119	43.99			
PRACTICAL	Between Groups	2	0.11	0.05	0.12	.883
	Within Groups	117	52.66	0.45		
	Total	119	52.78			

Benefits and Future Directions

This paper reported on a one-year study of the effects of ER on the L2 reading attitudes and motivation of Japanese university EFL learners. It was found that post-ER there was a positive effect on one variable, with a significant reduction in feelings of anxiety towards reading in English over the period of the study. This may have been due to the fact that learners were reading books that were easy for them to understand and the reading was not assessed using tests or other high-pressure forms of assessment. However, further qualitative data is needed to further explain the reasons for this reduction in anxiety. This result concurs with the findings of Yamashita (2013), which also found that learners felt less anxious about reading in English after doing ER. That

this effect was sustained over a longer time period than Yamashita's (2013) study is further evidence that ER may have positive effects on anxiety about reading in a foreign language and that ER may change negative attitudes developed from previous L2 reading experiences. As ER involves reading easy materials in "*noncompetitive, nonjudgmental*" (Day & Bamford, 1998, p. 26) learning conditions, learners experiencing ER for the first time may perceive reading in a foreign language as less difficult and stressful than before. Another finding that concurs with Yamashita (2013) was that there was no effect on learners' perceptions of the practical value of reading. This is despite learners being aware that ER was worth 30% of their overall reading course grade. However, although Yamashita (2013) found that ER had a positive effect on comfort and intellectual value, the current study showed only slight, insignificant increases on these factors.

It must be noted that this study has several limitations. First, although ER was a major part of the learners' English learning, it was not the only type of reading or learning activity that they did during the period of the study. It is possible that other learning activities and experiences may have affected participants' L2 reading attitudes and motivation. Second, as the reading course was taught by several teachers, although there was some degree of standardisation in the ER program, there would have been some variations in the learning conditions within each class. This would also have affected the participants' learning experience and influenced their responses. Third, the findings are specific to the particular participants and context described in the study and are therefore limited in their generalizability. Similar research in a different context may produce different results. Finally, this study reported only quantitative findings. Qualitative data, which is being collected from participant interviews, should shed further light on the reasons for the results. For example, such data may further explain the reasons why anxiety towards L2 reading significantly decreased during the study.

Despite such limitations, this study indicates that ER might have positive effects on learners' L2 reading attitudes and motivation, especially related to anxiety. It is possible that enabling learners to choose books that they can understand without too much

difficulty, and assessing them in relatively stress-free ways may lead to them feeling less anxious about reading and developing more positive reading attitudes and language learning motivation. This will hopefully result in learners wanting to read more in the L2, creating the conditions for a virtuous circle of reading. However, as the language learning benefits of ER require a sustained effort over a considerable amount of time to be realised, more research in other learning contexts is needed to further explore the affective aspects of reading over longer time periods. Research that can further illuminate the types of learning conditions that help motivate learners to continue reading and learning over a long period of time should prove extremely beneficial.

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Appendix: Questionnaire items (translated from Japanese)

1. I can become more sophisticated if I read English.
2. I can get various kinds of information if I read English.
3. The things I want to do in the future require me to speak English.
4. Reading English is useful for my future career.
5. I feel anxious if I don't know all the words.
6. I can acquire vocabulary if I read English.
7. Whenever I think of my future career, I imagine myself being able to use English
8. I can acquire broad knowledge if I read English.
9. I feel relaxed if I read English.
10. I sometimes feel anxious that I may not understand even if I read.
11. I can develop reading ability if I read English.
12. Reading English is useful to get credit for class.
13. I often imagine myself as someone who is able to speak English.
14. I do not feel pressure when reading English.
15. Reading English is dull.
16. I get to know about new ways of thinking if I read English.
17. I can improve my sensitivity to the English language if I read English.
18. I feel tired if I read English.
19. If my dreams come true, I will use English effectively in the future.
20. I feel refreshed and rested if I read English.
21. I can imagine speaking English with international friends.
22. I can acquire expressive power by reading English.
23. When I think about my future, it is important that I use English.

24. I can enrich my English by touching unfamiliar phrases and expressions when reading English.
25. Reading English is enjoyable.
26. Reading English is useful to get a job.
27. Reading English is troublesome.
28. Reading English is useful to get a good grade in class.
29. Reading in English develops intellectual curiosity.
30. I feel anxious when I'm not sure whether I understood the book content.
31. I don't mind even if I cannot understand the book content entirely.
32. I get to know about different values if I read English.

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