

Motivating Students to Read Extensively: Focus on Pleasure

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Abstract

This study investigates what a teacher of extensive reading can do to motivate learners to actually read extensively. The findings of extensive reading researchers in Japan will show factors that motivate students to read and factors that demotivate. Dörnyei's process model of motivation will be explained and applied to an extensive reading curriculum. Focusing on students' pleasure in reading will be suggested as an element in seeing students read large amounts of foreign language text.

Key words: extensive reading, motivation, motivation over time

I. Introduction

Extensive reading is known to be beneficial for second language acquisition. Due to the emphasis on intensive reading in English classrooms in Japan, extensive reading is an important addition to foreign language curricula because it encourages learners to read large amounts of understandable text that can improve their reading fluency and deepen their knowledge of the language (Waring, 2006). However, extensive reading can only be beneficial if learners actually read very large amounts of the foreign language. Unfortunately there are well planned extensive reading programs in which learners only read a minimum of books and the potential of extensive reading is not actualized. This paper will focus on what a teacher can do to encourage learners to read large amounts that are required to make extensive reading effective.

Many curricula that include ER follow the '10 Principles of ER' (Bamford and Day, 1998) where learners chose the books they will read, and read at their own pace. Under these conditions, learners are not forced by a teacher's schedule or program to read a certain amount. Therefore, in order for learners to read large amounts they must choose to do so; they must have motivation to read, and continue reading. Thus, an important aspect of planning a course with ER involves planning how to motivate

learners to read extensively.

Motivating learners to read graded readers at the beginning of the term has not been difficult. Showing students a large amount of graded readers alone stimulates most students to want to pick one up. The thin size, colorful covers and pictures inside them are attractive. I have found that for many learners the novelty of choosing the book they will read brings a positive reaction. Attractive readers and autonomy generate students' motivation to begin reading (Karlin & Romanko, 2007). However, ER programs in high schools are increasing¹, so the newness of ER cannot be depended upon for stimulating motivation in a university setting.

Initial motivation to read fades rather quickly. Learners must put forth effort and sometimes the books they choose are not enjoyable to read. As the school year progresses, the busyness of their lives accelerates, other classes, social activities and part-time job all make demands for their time. Students will find ways to get by with the least amount of effort, resulting in an ER program with students who are not reading extensively. Motivation is temporal.

II. Research on Motivating Students to Read Extensively

Research by practitioners of extensive reading in Japan has identified influences on learner motivation to read in a foreign language. Motivating factors and de-motivating factors will be summarized below.

A. Motivating Factors

Takase has been using extensive reading with Japanese high school and university students for a decade. Concerning motivating students to read, she writes, "The most critical element for ER to be effective is motivating learners to read a great amount of English" (Takase, 2008, p.121). Takase (2001), studying high school students reading outside the classroom, found that the greatest predictor of motivation to read English was enjoyment of reading, and satisfaction after facing the challenge to read an English book. She labeled this factor as *Positive Intrinsic Factor*. The next predictor of motivation to read English was a desire to do well on exams (*Exam-related Extrinsic Factor*). Later research in 2007, with a similar population, Takase again found that motivation to read in English is multidimensional, including intrinsic motivation for L1

¹ Most high schools that aim to prepare students for university entrance exams have included extensive reading in their curricula. From personal communication with Michiko Kanamaru at Oxford University Press, Sept. 2010.

reading, intrinsic motivation for L2 reading, family attitudes toward reading and exam-related extrinsic motivation.

Takase has researched university students involved in various types of extensive reading programs (2008). The amount of words the students read and surveys concerning their experience of ER, revealed two elements which were effective in motivating students to read large amounts of English books. These elements are providing in-class reading time and large amounts of very low level books at the beginning of the program. The students in classes with these two elements read significantly more words than the students in classes that required out-of-class reading and choose more difficult books.

Yamashita (2004) proposed that learners' attitudes toward reading were a possible cause for performance in extensive reading. Reporting on a study of university students' affective and cognitive reactions to reading, Yamashita found a significant correlation between a feeling of comfort when reading and the number of words read. The comfort reaction is described as feelings of happiness, pleasure or being comfortable. Positive self-perception or confidence of oneself as a reader also correlated with high performance. Surprisingly, feelings of anxiety did not result in a lower reading performance. Another surprising finding was that ascribing value to reading did not correlate with higher performance or a higher number of words read. Yamashita summarizes these findings by writing, "In sum, we can say that the motivation factor for extensive reading is not a negative feeling, nor is it rational thinking about a value. Instead, it is a positive feeling towards reading" (2004, 9).

Brierley and Ruzicka researched changes in university student attitudes toward reading during a comprehensive English course with an extensive reading component. A focus of their results stresses the importance of students choosing 'good' books as opposed to 'bad' books (2006, 11-13). Their recommendations include giving students the opportunity to order books of their choice and allowing ample time in class to choose the next book they will check out.

To summarize, factors that motivate students to read can be delineated as those that teachers can influence (pleasure in reading, confidence in reading, ease in finding 'good' books) and those factors which teachers cannot influence (parental attitudes toward reading and exam pressure on high school students).

B. Demotivating Factors

The relationship between extensive reading and factors that de-motivate students to read has been examined by Takase and Kanda. Kanda (2009) gathered university

student opinions of extensive reading from reading logs, comments and interviews. In particular she sought to find factors that make extensive reading difficult “in spite of the instructor’s intention of making ER easier and fun for them” (2009, 1202). Kanda’s qualitative analysis found five sources of difficulty. Length of books was the most common difficulty noted by students. The length of a book that was ‘too long’ was relative to the reading level of the student. The second most common difficulty was unknown vocabulary, especially unusual names of people or places. A lack of illustrations was a negative factor. The fourth source of difficulty refers to dislike of certain genres, for example fantasies or biographies. The last difficulty mentioned was due to a lack of background knowledge that made understanding the story difficult. Difficulties that students experience will lessen their joy in reading and result in less willingness to spend time reading.

Takase (2003) experimented with eliminating factors that de-motivate high school students. Interviews with students revealed that long difficult books and summary writing after reading were two negative factors in the extensive reading experience of reluctant students. The following year Takase added more low level books to the graded reader collection and replaced the summary writing task with a shorter reporting task. The result was a two-fold increase in the amount of words read by the students.

III. Maintaining Motivation Over Time

Dörnyei has addressed the temporal aspect of motivation, observing that there is a natural tendency among students to lose sight of goals, and to get tired or distracted during the learning process. Dörnyei has developed the process model of L2 motivation which can account for the “ups and downs of motivation, that is, the ongoing changes of motivation over time” (2001, 2003, 17, 18). In this approach, the students’ learning experience is divided into three time phases that each involve different needs the student has to take action in some learning activity. Briefly, the three phases are as follows,

1. Pre-actional Stage

Motivation needs to be generated. Learner desires, hopes and opportunities are stimulated. The result is the selection of a goal along with commitment to attain it. This stage is aided by learning strategies, a supportive environment and envisioning success.

2. Actional Stage

Motivation needs to be maintained. Learners evaluate their progress and make

adjustments. This stage is aided by pleasure and satisfaction, a supportive environment and rewards for achievement.

3. Post-actional Stage

Achievement is evaluated and future goals considered. This stage is aided by feedback and rewards.

My current extensive reading class incorporates the process-oriented approach to motivating students to read extensively. In the first three weeks of class (pre-actional stage) I aim to stimulate their motivation by having them read only low level books. During this stage I hope they will begin to overcome fear of reading English books and begin to break the habit of translating into Japanese while they read. I give them time to choose books and read in class. I ask them to read eight Level 1 books without any reporting to give them confidence in being able to do ER. I give them examples of role models (previous students comments on ER, an interview of Sam Itoh on reading a lot of simple books (Takeno, 2007) and 100 万語 webpage (www.seg.co.jp/sss) participants' comments).

In the following ten classes (actional stage) I aim to maintain motivation in several ways. I seek to make reading pleasurable by playing background music during reading time, ease in checking out books, and include variety in reporting using graphic organizers. Feedback from the teacher and peers is also important for a supportive environment therefore, I write comments on a page of the Mini Book Report. I also plan time for students to receive information about good books from classmates (see Appendix 1).

The final class (post-actional stage) gives students time to evaluate their extensive reading experience and consider ways to continue reading.

IV. Focus on Pleasure

Motivation is a directional word; it infers movement towards a goal. What is the goal or objective of an extensive reading program? There are many possible objectives, such as vocabulary acquisition, improved reading rate, or a change in attitude toward the foreign language.

Can an increase in reading rate be an objective? In one class my objective was for students to see gains in reading rate and as a result be motivated to continue reading. The students did drills to stretch their reading rate and they measured their reading rate in almost every class. However, their reading rates were inconsistent and they read 16% less words than another class with a similar application. (Class A, in which

reading rate was emphasized, read an average of 94,000 words, whereas Class B read an average of 111,000 words.)

The amount of time given to extensive reading plays an important role in the choice of program objectives. Longer ER programs of one academic year or more can aim for linguistic goals. However, short, one-term ER programs, have limitations as to what linguistic goals can be attained. Taguchi, Gorsuch and Sasamoto (2006) in their research on reading fluency have found that reading rate is very inconsistent in the short term (less than 25 classes) and only shows consistent growth in the long term. Karlin and Romanko (2007) also found that in a one-term class with extensive reading there were gains in affect, weak increases in fluency and no increase in vocabulary. Increasing reading rate or reading fluency seems to be a poor objective for a one-term ER class.

Can an increase in pleasure be an objective of an ER program? I think so. I have decided that for a one-term ER class the objective for learners to read extensively so they can experience pleasure in reading in English. Pleasure is often related to a lack of fear of reading. Takase (2008) has written that if students read 50,000-60,000 words they will overcome feelings of fear or weakness in reading English books and begin to feel comfortable reading. Student surveys in my classes have affirmed Takase' finding of overcoming fear. Over 90 percent of my students read 50,000 or more words, and over 90 percent say that they overcame fear of reading.

Brierley and Ruzicka propose that experiencing pleasure in an extensive reading program may be an essential ingredient. They challenge teachers to "take enjoyment seriously" (2006, 17). In conclusion, motivating learners to read large amounts seems to involve making the reading experience as pleasurable as possible with consideration to motivation throughout the length of the term.

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Appendix 1

2010 Curriculum has content to maintain motivation throughout the term.

1. former students' comments on ER experience, intensive/extensive explanation, show books, Read 8 FAST (level 1 books, no reporting)
2. Sam Itoh article
3. small group book introductions
4. 2009 students' comments on being able to raise level of reading
5. introduce 『快読 100 万語』 and the reading a million words comments
6. talk about setting a personal goal, collect a page of Mini Book Report
7. teacher feedback on Mini Book Report
8. take students to library and introduce them to the graded readers with audio CDs

9. introduce using graphic organizers for book reports
10. small group talk about a graphic organizer book report
11. explain genres and advise students to try a different genre
12. introduce a second set of graphic organizers for book reports
13. small group talk about a graphic organizer book report
- 14.
15. evaluation of ER experience, suggestions for continuing