

# The Effect of Free Voluntary Reading on College English Reading Class in Korea

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## Abstract

The present study examines the college English Reading Class (ERC) to cultivate Free Voluntary Reading (FVR), which enables learners to read for enjoyment and acquire reading competence spontaneously. Seventy participants were recruited and divided into two groups: traditional ERC only and traditional ERC with FVR. FVR was conducted on the basis of Sustained Silent Reading (SSR), Self-selected Reading (SR), a book presentation, and making reading notes for one semester. For proposing the effect of FVR on ERC, the study adopted pre- and post tests designed to measure learners' reading competence and affective variables in English learning. In the reading competence test, the questions were extracted from a TOEIC reading comprehension test, which consists of vocabulary finding, grammar use, and text comprehension. In addition, estimating reading speed was appended. In the surveys on affective variables in English learning, the scales of AMTB (Attitudes and Motivation Test Battery) and WTC (Willingness to Communicate) were utilized. In the results, the study suggests that implementing FVR into college ERC proves to be effective in developing reading competence in the aspects of reading comprehension and attitudes/motivation in English learning, but not in the aspects of reading speed and willingness to communicate in English.

## Keywords

Free Voluntary Reading (FVR)/Sustained Silent Reading (SSR)/Self-selected Reading (SR)/Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

## Introduction

Free Voluntary Reading (FVR) was introduced by Krashen (1993) in his book, *The Power of Reading*, and it is a type of reading that induces pleasure. According to Day and Bamford (2002), Extensive Reading (ER) has an intention to develop good reading habits, build up knowledge of vocabulary and structure, and encourage a liking for reading.

Krashen used the term FVR instead of ER but they both share the same definition and purposes in several ways (Brown, 2001; Yamashita, 2008). In this study, FVR is utilized instead of ER since the idea for cultivating FVR into college an English Reading Class (ERC) arose from the studies conducted by Krashen and his colleagues. There are various ways of implementing FVR or ER in the field of L2, and Krashen proposed Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) and Self-selected Reading (SR) to assist the in-school FVR program. Several case studies supported that students in the FVR program outperformed in the reading comprehension tests than ones in the traditional skill-based reading instruction (Bader, Veatch & Eldridge, 1987; Elley, 1991; Jenkins, 1957). In one of the previous FVR studies, Haeyoung Kim and Krashen (1998) reported that Korean high school students benefitted from FVR, developing their English vocabulary competence and establishing high correlations between FVR and vocabulary development. Jeong-ryeol Kim and Ji-young Hwang (2006) introduced the ER program for Korean elementary school students and reported its effectiveness on developing reading ability in the area of reading speed and vocabulary gains and affective domain in the area of students' interest and willingness to study English. Added to the equation are studies reflecting the need to revitalize the current ERC. According to Dae-Sook Han (1999), college students expressed a dissatisfaction with college ERCs, noting they acquired a limited competence of English even after a couple of semesters. Minjong Song (2007) and Minjong Song and Jeongwan Lim (2010) also reported that college students were asked to practice the customized rote learning from the transmission model of reading in the college ERCs, and it bred an appeal to revitalize the current ERC in most Korean

universities. Accordingly, regarding both FVR as a powerful tool to develop learners' reading competence and needs to revitalize the current ERC, this study extends the research on cultivating FVR for college English learners. It recruited participants from among Korean college EFL learners and provided the opportunity to have FVR in an ERC for one semester. The results were compared and analyzed to suggest a way to revitalize the current ERC through FVR. The research questions are as follows:

- 1) How does FVR increase English reading competence on the basis of reading comprehension and reading speed tests?
- 2) How does FVR increase affective variables on the basis of willingness to communicate in English and attitudes/motivation to English learning?
- 3) What is the most effective way to cultivate FVR into college ERCs?

## 1 Research Methods

### 1.1 Participants

The ERC in the present study formed the basis of a 16-week course, and the class met for 3 hours per week. For the Experimental Group (EG), the study integrates IR with FVR, assigning 1 hour for FVR with 2,000 books and 2 hours for IR with one unified textbook in order to provide a chance for learners to achieve a unified goal in the ERC. Simultaneously, the Comparison Group (CG) students spent 3 hours for IR, sharing the same process of IR in the EG, but they have more vocabulary and grammar practices to gain language knowledge. In other words, students in CG practiced the SQ3R techniques more in depth. Seventy college students who enrolled in the ERC participated in this study (n=36 in EG with FVR; n=34 in CG without FVR). Participants showed various ages, majors and English competences because the ERC is one of General English courses, open to all college students. On the basis of the placement test results (i.e. pretest), participants were grouped into 5 to 6 small groups, each with 5 to 6 students. This way of grouping students expects that each group maintains a heterogeneous setting, which helps students to conduct peer-works during the instruction.

## 1.2 Material

### 1.2.1 Book selection

In order to provide FVR in the ERC, the class was supplied with 2,000 books of various levels from intro to advanced and age groups from preschoolers to adult learners. The books are from the series Cambridge English Readers, Cambridge Readers, Penguin Young Readers, Penguin Readers, Kid's Readers, I Can Read, Picture Readers, etc. The book selection for FVR in this study comes from the suggestion by Nutall (1996) who claimed the selection of books for ER be established by the criteria of SAVE (Short, Appealing, Varied, and Easy).

### 1.2.2 Measuring reading competence

According to Krashen (1993), FVR participants outperformed in the areas of vocabulary development, grammar test performance, writing, and oral/aural language ability development. Regarding his concern, the test questions were adopted from the TOEIC reading test, consisting of grammar, vocabulary and text comprehension (i.e. TOEIC practice test parts 5, 6 and 7). To confirm test reliability, the internal consistency of the pre- and post TOEIC tests was conducted and produced a reliable result (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .824$ ). In addition, estimating reading speed of the given text was conducted. In the definitions of FVR and ER, it is a reading at length for pleasure along with informative purposes, and thus the process of ER expects for learners to read the texts smoothly without regression. According to Dae-Sook Han (1999), ER is done at a comfortable speed without consulting a dictionary, so it ought to consider reading speed in the process of ER or FVR. The importance of reading speed was also supported by several researchers (Jeong-ryeol Kim & Ji-young Hwang, 2006; Perfetti, 2007; Yamashita, 2008), so the present study includes estimating reading speed in the pre- and post reading competence tests.

### 1.2.3 Measuring affective variables

Pre- and post surveys were conducted to measure the changes of participants' affective variables in English learning. AMTB (Attitudes and Motivation Test Battery) (Gardner & Smythe, 1981) was used since it was testified as a reliable facilitator for language acquisition (Ellis, 2003) and the WTC (Willingness

to Communicate) scale (Li, 2005) was used since it is regarded as a strong predictor of communicative competence by several researchers in the field of SLA (Hashimoto, 2002; Li, 2005; Yashima, 2000). In this study, their internal consistency was reported reliably in WTC (Cronbach's  $\alpha=.639$ ) and in AMTB (Cronbach's  $\alpha=.733$ ) respectively.

#### 1.2.4 Data analysis

Collected data from the EG were analyzed by *t*-test (SPSS ver. 15.0) to investigate the development of reading comprehension and reading speed, and compare the change of the WTC scale and AMTB after FVR. In addition, a comparison of reading comprehension tests, reading speed tests, WTC scale and AMTB in the EG and CG was conducted by ANCOVA (SPSS ver. 15.0) to confirm the effectiveness of cultivating FVR. Also, Regression Analysis was appended to suggest the effect of FVR on the development of reading competence.

### 1.3 Procedures

At the beginning of the FVR class, students were asked to select whichever book they wanted to read from the bookshelves, and they participated in SR. Regarding the recommendation by Hill (1992) and Krashen (1993), the EG students spent 30 minutes on SSR per week<sup>1</sup> and read at least one book per week. After SSR, students were asked to complete the reading note, and participated in a book presentation, which meant introducing their favorite book of the day in front of the class. During the session, students had an option to give the presentation in English or Korean. In addition, the EG students took the IR class for 2 hours per week to achieve the goal of general ERC, which is shared by other ERCs since the class is one of courses required for graduation from the university. The unified goal of ERC is guided for class participants since the school expects them to build the fundamental competence to read written English materials. So the school asks each ERC to use a unified textbook and take the same format of tests in the mid- and final term.

## 2 Results and Discussion

### 2.1 How does FVR increase English

<sup>1</sup> Krashen recommended SSR for 5-10 minutes per day for in-school FVR, but the class for this study lacked the time to run the class every day, so it provided SSR for 30 minutes per week.

### Reading competence and reading speed?

To examine the effect on FVR on English reading competence, English reading comprehension and reading speed tests were conducted. The average reading comprehension test score significantly increased after the 16 weeks of FVR in the ERC ( $p=.000$ ), but the reading speed did not statistically decrease ( $p=.469$ ). Participants' reading comprehension score was 8.1 out of 20.0 in the pretest, and then it ascended to 11.0, indicating a significant improvement. The reading comprehension test examined learners' vocabulary gains, grammar knowledge, and text comprehension of the given articles (approximately 100 to 200 words), and the test results reported an advancement in reading competence in all questions. In addition, estimating reading speed of the given text (approximately 150 words) was conducted and the pretest result indicated 50.80 seconds, which decreased to 47.12 seconds in the posttest. In other words, students spent less time to read the same length of text, but not significantly.

For the comparison of pre- and post reading comprehension and reading speed tests between the EG and CG, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted. In the results on reading comprehension, it reported no significant difference between groups ( $p=.995$ ), and the group effect size was found to be small (partial eta squared ( $\eta^2$ ) =.000) to explain the significant difference. In short, both groups of students increased their reading comprehension test scores after the semester. This implies that EG students who weren't given much help with reading strategies and vocabulary learning acquired an equivalent reading competence in terms of vocabulary development, comprehension ability, and grammar through FVR.

The results on reading speed tests, indicated no significant difference between the groups ( $p=.856$ ). The group effect size was also small to compare the difference (partial eta squared ( $\eta^2$ ) =.001). Students in both EG and CG reduced their reading speed through the semester, but the reduction of reading speed was not affected by FVR implementation.

### 2.2 How does FVR facilitate affective variables in English reading?

Affective variables in English learning were measured in the pre- and post surveys and reported its significant increase in AMTB ( $p=.003$ ). FVR participants boosted the mean score of AMTB significantly and reported that cultivating FVR into ERC delivered a positive effect on attitudes and motivation development in English learning, which

expects the successful L2 acquisition in the long term (Ellis, 2003). In the comparison of WTC, it increased after 16 weeks of FVR participation (Pre-Mean=3.0; Post-Mean=3.3), but it was not a significant difference ( $p=.129$ ).

Students in both the EG and CG showed no significant difference on the development of WTC ( $p=.198$ ), taking ERC for one semester, and the group effect size was shown to be small, indicating low value of partial eta squared ( $\eta^2$ ) =.025. However, the significant difference between the EG and CG was reported on the comparison of AMTB. The results of ANCOVA reported a significant value ( $p=.000$ ), and the group effect size on AMTB was found to be big to explain the difference (partial eta squared ( $\eta^2$ ) =.193). EG students outperformed, gaining positive motivation and attitudes in language learning through FVR. So the result concludes that learners' affective variables on the basis of attitudes and motivation in English learning were increased in this study but not on the basis of WTC in English.

### 2.3 What is the most effective way to cultivate FVR into college ERC?

#### 2.3.1 An implementation of SSR, SR, a book presentation and making reading notes

On the basis of the consideration that the combination of IR and FVR is a successful approach to revitalize the current ERC at the college level, since it provides the opportunity to enjoy reading and maintain a unified curriculum, this study introduces activities for implementing FVR, which are SR, SSR, a book presentation and making reading notes. In the FVR class, participants select the book based on their preference (i.e. namely SR) and participate in SSR for 30 minutes. After that, students participate in a book presentation, where they present their favorite book of the day in front of the class and make reading notes to summarize the book they read. In the present study, learners read 13 books for 16 weeks, which corresponds with the requests by Hill (1992) and Krashen (1993) that the ideal amount of ER for the beginners is a book per week. Additionally, in the reading notes, participants reported the main idea of the book shortly in Korean and consulted 2 to 3 new words a book on average. Also, the reasons to read the book were aggregated by SAVE (Short, Appealing, Varied, and Easy), the

rule of book selection for ER (Nuttall, 1996). One student reported the reason for choosing book *Dumbo*, saying that the book looks like an easy read, and for choosing *The Little Boat That Almost Sank* because it says "more than 55 million sold" on the cover. Based on the review of reading notes and voices from the students in the FVR classroom, this study suggests that students in FVR enjoy the ERC more through means of SSR, SR, a book presentation and making reading notes.

Table 1: Summary of reading notes

No. of books (n=36)	Main idea (summary)	New Vocabulary findings	Reasons to choose
1-5 (3)/6-10(8)* 11-13 (9)/14-16(9) 16-20(10)/20 more (1) M=13 (1 book per week)**	Mostly written in Korean 1-2 sentences per book	2-3 words per book	A familiar title Short to read Best seller, etc. Follow the rule of Nuttall: SAVE

\*Note: the parenthesized number indicates the number of students

\*\*Excluding the mid-and final term test period (2 weeks) and the first week (1 week)

#### 2.3.2 An effect of FVR on the development of reading competence

The study appended the correlations analysis between the results of reading comprehension tests and the amount of books that students read during FVR to investigate the effect on FVR on the development of reading competence. The results reported the high correlations between variables, so that it allows assuming if students read books a lot for FVR, they would develop reading competence gradually. The data from the regression analysis supported that the accumulation of books to be read during FVR expects learners to accelerate the score of reading competence test ( $R^2=147.875$ ,  $p<.000$ ).

## 3 Conclusion

The amalgamation of FVR and IR in the ERC originates from the idea that a goal of IR-based instruction is to teach how meaning is produced and what it means (Nuttall, 1996). Expecting the benefits to teach "how" and "what" in English reading corresponds to the controversial issue between the importance of accuracy and fluency in the L2 learning process. So the ERC expects a fluent reader by FVR as well as an accurate reader by IR as being

in opposition. In terms of two concerns: expecting to benefit from FVR and IR, and allowing learners to follow the mainstream curriculum at the college level, the study adopted the modified FVR class and interposed IR for 2 hours and ER for 1 hour per week. The blended class management with IR and ER benefitted the development of reading comprehension skill and attitudes/motivation in English learning. This result also corresponded with the purpose of this study, which was to revitalize the current ERC for college students. According to Brown (2001), if learners' internal motivation is intensified, learners' process of learning will be modified, so this study invited the FVR in the ERC, which is meant to strengthen college learners' internal motivation in English reading because FVR encourages reading for pleasure. In the middle of FVR, when participating in SSR, students can fall into a concentration on reading, the phase of *flow* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), a widely used term in psychology. In the phase of *flow*, there's no other thought or conscious acting except the main activity. So in this process, the *flow* of English reading through SSR, students attain the knowledge of English as well as overall meaning of contents without the conscious exertion of learning. That makes learners enforce their internal motivation. In addition, the opportunity to experience FVR provides the college learners a chance to read at least one English book during their college life, which expects the long term effects on language acquisition in terms of the close relationship between the target language and culture (Kramersch, 1993). Like the phase of *flow*, the implicit experience in English culture in the book can be a facilitator of language acquisition since it gives us the indirect experience of staying in the target language community and the authentic language learning process on the basis of context. In sum, this study proposes the way to revitalize the current ERC by means of a blended classroom design of IR and ER, which serves to develop reading competence and positive attitudes and motivation in English learning.

Moreover, the present study shows a limitation in analyzing the results of reading comprehension tests, which only appear in the overall test score, since this study concentrates on the implementation of FVR in college ERCs on the basis of general reading competence in the areas of academic and affective domains. It neglects to analyze the vocabulary

development, grammar gains, and reading comprehension parts respectively. Therefore, if further study amends this part, the specified gains from FVR participation can be suggested.

## 4 References and appendices

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