

On Developing EFL Learner's Readability Based on the Learner-Centered Curriculum

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1.0. Introduction

There is wide-spread agreement on the benefits of students reading extensively in a foreign language. In the first place, many of them want to be able to read texts in English for their careers, for study purposes or simply for pleasure. In this address, I discuss a variety of possibilities on integrating extensive reading into the learner-centered curriculum, and present the criterion of choosing language-teaching materials and effective teaching methods.

The national common basic curriculum is designed to be organized and implemented as differentiated curriculum. That is, level differentiation shall be offered for English. Four levels of English courses are offered from grades 7 through 10. Each level is divided into two sub-levels which are respectively operated on a semester basis. Furthermore, in-depth and supplementary differentiated curriculum shall be offered from grades 3 through 6 for English(Ministry of Education, 1997).

According to Richard(2002), the ideal way to integrate extensive reading into the EFL curriculum is through a separate, stand-alone extensive reading course in which students read and report on their reading to the teacher and other students. Realistically, however, in Korea the course is impossible. Alternatively, extensive reading can be included in the curriculum as part of an existing course.

There have been frequent discussions about what kind of reading texts are suitable for English language students. The greatest controversy has centered on whether the texts should be authentic or not. That is because people have worried about more traditional language-teaching materials which tended to look artificial and to use over-simplified language which any native speaker would find comical and untypical. In addition, the materials have to be kept a balance between real English on the one hand and the students capabilities and interests on the other.

Stories are a useful tool in linking the imagination with the student's real world. They provide a way of enabling students to make sense of their everyday life and forge links between home and school. Stories are also fun and can develop positive attitudes about the foreign language and language learning. Thus, it is considered that storybooks appropriate to the curriculum are selected from a wide range of story books based on

the national curriculum and the developmental stages.

2.0. The Seventh National Curriculum

The Seventh National Curriculum set a new benchmark in the democratization and localization of education in Korea. The curriculum has given more autonomy to schools at regional and local levels in order for flexible curriculum to meet individual needs. The curriculum is designed to introduce a system of a national common basic curriculum, to introduce the differentiated curriculum so as to optimize the volume and level of the content of learning, to diversify the contents of the curriculum and methods of instruction in consideration of each student's ability, aptitude, and career choice, and to reinforce the quality control of education by establishing the curriculum evaluation system. In other words, students will take common required courses based on national standards from grade 3 to 10. The concept of differentiated curriculum is being introduced. From grade 3 to 10, curriculum is differentiated on the basis of the student's academic capability. From grade 11 to 12, curriculum is differentiated on the basis of the student's interests and career goals. In this vein, the concept of an elective-course program is being introduced for grades 11 and 12. Students can choose courses they want to take according to their interests and career goals.

Korean students attend school 220 days a year, the minimum required academic year length for elementary, middle, and high schools. But, the length of an instructional hour varies as shown in the following table 1.

<Table 1> Instructional Hour in Schools

One Instructional Hour	Minutes
Elementary School	40
Middle School	45
High School	50

A school week is the same as in the business and government sectors: full days from Monday to Friday and half-days on Saturday. The academic year consists of two semesters. The first one begins on the 1st of March and ends on August 31st, and the second is from September 1st to the end of February.

Instructional hours per week and year vary depending on the school level(See Table 2). Koreans are exposed to English in public sector education for a maximum of 952 hours over 10 years. The table demonstrates the limited exposure to English that Koreans have during their school days. Considering that the minimum of instruction for English is not in English, genuine exposure to language is even far more limited.

<Table 2> Instructional Hours in Schools

Schools	E 3	E 4	E 5	E 6	M 1	M 2	M 3	H 1	H 2	H 3	sum
hours a week	1	1	2	2	3	3	4	4	4	4	
hours a year	34	34	68	68	102	102	136	136	136	136	952

The number in hours a week indicates instructional hours per week. The number of hours a year is the minimum required number of instructional hours and grade level for 34 school weeks(one academic year).

The effective year of the Seventh National Curriculum is indicated in the following table 3 by school level.

<Table 3> Implementation of the Seventh National Curriculum

Year	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
2000	Grades 1&2		
2001	Grades 3&4	Grades 7	
2002	Grades 5&6	Grades 8	Grades 10
2003		Grades 9	Grades 11
2004			Grades 12

The national common basic curricular consists of subject matters, optional activities and extracurricular activities(see Table 4).

<Table 4> The Minimum Numbers of Total Annual Instruction Hours

	Elementary School			
	3rd grade	4th grade	5th grade	6th grade
English	34(1)	34(1)	68(2)	68(2)
optional activities	68(2)	68(2)	68(2)	68(2)
extracurricular activities	34(1)	68(2)	68(2)	68(2)

As shown in the above table, just one 40 minute class hour a week in the 3rd and 4th graders is not effective for learners to achieve goals in the 7th national curriculum. Thus, optional activities in school need to be considered to improve readability as follows:

First, optional activity can be effective in designing the content of reading material as one class hour. But, it is not appropriate in doing a lot of learning activities within one class hour.

Second, it can be effective in doing activities many times a day after learning skills. In this case, it is easy and simple for students to read materials

Third, it can be effective in the difficulty of progressing reading activities as one class hour a week.

Fourth, it can be effective in designing instructional hours based on the schedule of the school such as school festival.

3.0. Storytelling Method for Developing EFL Learner's Readability

3.1. Criteria For Selecting Storybooks

Stories are a useful tool in linking fantasy and the imagination with the child's real world. They provide a way of enabling children to make sense of their everyday life and forge links between home and school. Stories are also motivating and fun and can help develop positive attitudes towards the foreign language and language learning. Thus, it is important to select simplified storybooks especially for children learning English.

There are many authentic storybooks written for English-speaking children which are suitable learning English. Teachers can choose storybooks from a wide range of story-books. However, it is necessary to select books that children are already familiar with in their mother tongue.

There are many kinds of storybooks such as traditional stories and fairy tales, picture stories with no text, rhyming stories, cumulative stories, humorous stories, everyday stories, fantasy stories, animal stories, and so on.

According to Ellis and Brewster(1991), the storybooks included under narrative features, content, and layout are classified as shown in Table 5.

<Table 5> Narrative Features, Content, and Layout of the Storybooks

Headings	Kinds of Stories	Storybooks
Narrative Features	Rhyming Words Repeating Structures Cumulative Content and Language Humorous	<i>My Cat Likes to Hide in Boxes</i> <i>Pat the Cat</i> <i>Don't Forget the Bacon</i> <i>The Elephant and the Bad Baby</i> <i>The Very Hungry Caterpillar</i> <i>I Can Do It!</i> <i>Where is Spot?</i> <i>My Cat Likes to Hide in Boxes</i> <i>The Turnip</i> <i>The Fat Cat</i> <i>Spot's Birthday Party</i> <i>Meg and Mog</i> <i>My Biff the Boxer</i>
Content	Everyday Life Animal Stories Trad/Folk/Fairy Fantasy	<i>Having a Picnic</i> <i>Mr Gumpy's Motor Car</i> <i>The Very Hungry Caterpillar</i> <i>Where's Spot?</i> <i>My Cat Likes to Hide in Boxes</i> <i>The Elephant and the Bad Baby</i> <i>I Can Do It!</i> <i>The Fat Cat</i> <i>Little red Riding Hood</i> <i>The Turnip</i> <i>Meg and Mog</i> <i>The Snowman</i>

Layout	Flap	<i>Where's Spot?</i> <i>Spot's Birthday Party</i>
	Cut-away Pages	<i>The Very Hungry caterpillar</i> <i>Pat the Cat</i>
	Minimal Text	<i>Having a Picnic</i> <i>I Can Do It!</i> <i>Spot's Birthday Party</i>
	No Text	<i>Where's Spot?</i> <i>The Snowman</i>

As shown in Table 1, the above stories can be classified in different ways according to the classification you have in mind.

Ellis and Brewster(1991) classifies the above categories into language levels in terms of levels of difficulty as shown in Table 6 .

<Table 6> Language Level

Easy	More Difficult	Most Difficult
<i>Where's Spot?</i>	<i>The Very Hungry Caterpillar</i>	<i>Mr Gummy's Mother Car</i>
<i>I Can Do It!</i>	<i>Meg and Mog</i>	<i>Mr Biff the Boxer</i>
<i>Having a Picnic</i>	<i>Spot' Birthday Party</i>	<i>The Turnip</i>
<i>Don't Forget the Bacon</i>	<i>The Elephant and the Bad Baby</i>	<i>The Fat cat</i>
	<i>My Cat Likes to Hide in Boxes</i>	<i>Little Red Riding Hood</i>
	<i>Pat the Cat</i>	<i>The Snowman</i>

As shown in Table 6, it gives an indication of language level and is based on the length and linguistic complexity of the text.

To teach English through storytelling method efficiently considering the above language features and language levels, the criterion of choosing textbooks needs to be proposed. Changar and Harrison(1992) proposes the criterion of choosing textbooks:

First, the language level should be appropriate to students. The vocabulary, structure, and functions suitable to students will provide pupils with a successful learning experience.

Second, the storybooks should contain any features such as rhyme, onomatopoeia, rhyme or intonation that pupils will enjoy imitating and so improve their pronunciation.

Third, the repetition can allow pupils to predict what is coming next in the story and to build up their confidence. Thus, to recycle language items and develop memory skills, teachers should consider the natural repetition to encourage participation in the text and to provide pattern practice, pronunciation practice.

Fourth, the storybooks should motivate pupils by drawing on their personal experience. Furthermore, it will develop their imagination and appeal to their sense of humor.

Fifth, the storybooks should arouse their curiosity and make them want to find out more about the target language and culture and language learning.

Sixth, the storybooks should enable pupils to respond positively to the storyline and develop positive attitudes towards the target language and culture and towards language learning.

Seventh, the storybooks should give some information about life in the target culture. It also contains some obscure cultural references that may be difficult to understand.

In the above criteria, the level such as vocabulary and the pronunciation like rhyme are classified as linguistic category, the encouraging participation such as repetition and prediction is classified as psychological and cultural category, and arousing curiosity and creating positive attitudes are classified as cultural category.

3.2. Usage of Storybooks

It is difficult to imagine how a story can be exploited, or how the time required to plan story-based lesson. As we have already seen, one of the main reasons for using storybooks to develop comprehension skills.

The amount of time in the classroom depends on the choice of the textbook. If teachers have to work through a syllabus imposed from outside, they may not have a great deal of time to spare. Therefore, they may spend only a couple of lessons on each story. They may also read the whole story once or twice each lesson. In addition, they can tell the story to the pupils over and over again. In this case, teachers try to help pupils positively enjoy hearing stories repeatedly.

The mother tongue in the storytelling method can be used in the classroom activities. That is to say, for stories with beginner pupils you may have to use the mother tongue from time to time. If your class shares a common language, this is quite natural. However, you should consider carefully when and why you would use the mother tongue. Obviously, the more you use English and more familiar with the language, the less you will need to use the mother tongue.

Some occasions need to be considered when you might decide to use the mother tongue. First, teachers can explain the scene in their mother tongue by drawing upon the children's experience related to the story or their knowledge about the subject and language. For example, many pupils are likely to be familiar with the traditional stories

or fairy-tales. As an introduction to *Little Red Riding Hood*, pupils could use their mother tongue to tell you what they remember about the tale.

Second, teachers can predict in their mother tongue what comes next in a story. For example, in *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* when you have read 'on Friday he ate through five oranges but he was still hungry', ask what day comes next and what pupils think the caterpillar eats.

Third, teachers can elicit vocabulary or phrases in their mother tongue. For example, in *The Elephant* and *The Bad Baby* you could ask pupils to say which food shops they think the elephant takes the bad baby to. If they do not know these words in English, they will need to make suggestions in their mother tongue.

Fourth, teachers can explain key words, a grammatical rule or cultural information in their mother tongue. For example, translating a keyword in their mother tongue may be a useful short cut if there are no illustrations to convey the meaning or if it is an abstract word.

Fifth, teachers can remind pupils of what has happened so far in their mother tongue.

Sixth, teachers can explain how to do an activity in their mother tongue. For example, teachers can say in their mother tongue how to play pair work or a game.

In telling stories, storytellers' hands should be free for movement, for expression, and for drawing the children into the story. In addition, a special bonding and trust should be developed between the storytellers and the children.

3.3. Procedures of Story-based Lessons

It is useful to write out a detailed lesson-plan to help you define and clarify the aims of the lesson. The aims of each lesson should be defined, and suggested procedures should be given. The lesson plan can help you think about the classroom language to use both in the target language and in the mother tongue. It can also help you see what materials (flash cards, real objects, etc.) to prepare or collect. Furthermore, the lesson plan also gives you a written record of what you have done with your pupils.

There are many different ways of writing a lesson plan and conducting a lesson. The following set of procedures is only one of many ways to conduct a lesson.

First, the warming-up procedure is especially important in a lesson plan. For example, an informal chat aims at building up and maintaining rapport with your pupils. Teachers can ask what the pupils did over the weekend, comment on work in the classroom, and so on.

Second, teachers can review or remind pupils of what they did in the previous lesson. This encourages pupils to reflect on what they did and provides teachers with valuable information about what the pupils found memorable.

Third, teachers explain what they are going to do in the lesson. Teachers do not need to go into technical details here. Simply inform the pupils of the overall aim and of how they are going to work.

Fourth, teachers present new language using a variety of techniques.

Fifth, teachers make the pupils practice a lot of activities. Teachers provide the pupils with opportunities to practice the new language on carefully directed activities.

Sixth, teachers enable the pupils to have the chance to use the new language relatively spontaneously. This may be in a game, an interview, and role plays.

Seventh, teachers review at the end of lesson. This provides pupils with another opportunity to reflect on the lesson.

Eighth, teachers prepares for the next lesson by explaining homework, and tell pupils about any preparation they may need to do for the next lesson.

4.0 Conclusion

The learner centered education puts the focus of education on the learner. That is, the learner controls the choices of goals and the teacher provides resources and materials. Thus, it is very important to choose reading materials in developing EFL learner's readability.

But, it is difficult for learners to construct a unique mental representation of the reading materials to be learned in the practice of learner-centered education. Its biggest problems are the limited exposure to English, the limited English vocabulary of students and teachers, and the increase of teacher's burden. According to needs analysis in the Korea Institute of Curriculum and Evaluation(2002), it is necessary to increase the class hour a week in order to improve EFL learner's communicative ability, because just one 40 minute class hour a week in the 3rd and 4th graders is not effective for learners to achieve goals in the 7th national curriculum. Thus it needs to be argued that the class hour a week should be increased in designing the next curriculum.

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