

Effects of Extensive Reading on EFL Learner Reading Attitudes

Paul Dickinson

Faculty of Foreign Studies, Meijo University

paul.dickinson01@gmail.com

Abstract

This three-year study explores the effects of extensive reading (ER) activities on aspects of the reading attitudes of EFL learners at a Japanese university. ER-based activities were integrated into one semester of a communicative English course. Pre- and post-ER questionnaires elicited learners' evaluations of the activities and data on reading attitudes. Analysis of the data indicated that ER had positive effects on the affective and cognitive aspects of participants' L2 reading attitudes. The findings suggest that implementing ER activities in EFL courses can improve learner motivation and L2 reading attitudes.

Keywords

Extensive reading, reading attitude, English as a foreign language

Introduction

This paper reports on a study of the effects of extensive reading (ER) activities on the reading attitudes of Japanese university EFL learners. The strong influence of reading attitudes on learners' motivation to read in an L2 was identified by Day and Bamford (1998). While several studies have examined the effects of ER on reading attitudes in designated reading classes (e.g. Takase, 2007; Stoeckel, Reagan & Hann 2012; Yamashita, 2013) this study addresses the research gap of contexts where ER has been integrated into communicative English courses. Spanning three years, this study explores the effects of ER-based activities on aspects of the reading attitudes of three cohorts of EFL learners at a Japanese university. It investigates the question: What effects do extensive reading activities have on EFL learners' L2 reading attitudes?

1 Methods

1.1 Participants

The participants in this study were 344 first-year students enrolled in a mandatory communicative English course. Almost all participants were L1

Japanese speakers. Proficiency levels varied from beginner to upper-intermediate.

1.2 The ER activities

This study examines the effects of ER activities implemented over one 15-week semester. In addition to reading as many graded readers as possible, students did various activities related to their reading, including speaking and listening tasks, written and oral book reports, and poster presentations on their favorite books.

1.3 Data collection and analysis

Pre- and post-ER questionnaires were used to collect learner evaluations of the activities and data on reading attitudes for each year of the study. Item types included closed and open questions, multiple choice, and Likert scales (1=*strongly disagree* to 5=*strongly agree*). The questionnaires were administered in the first and final classes of each ER program. Responses from participants who did not complete both pre- and post-questionnaires were eliminated from the data set. An independent samples *t*-test was used to analyse data related to reading attitudes.

2 Results

2.1 Evaluation of the ER activities

Almost all learners indicated that they enjoyed the ER activities and considered that their English improved as a result. The vast majority of students also stated that they would continue reading English books independently in the future.

Table 1: Learner evaluation of the ER activities

<i>Item</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
1. Did you enjoy the ER activities?	93%	7%
2. Do you feel that your English improved through the ER activities?	88%	12%
3. Do you think you will continue to read English books on your own in the future?	88%	12%

2.2 Effects on reading attitudes

Analysis of pre- and post-ER data indicated that the ER activities had positive effects on reading attitudes. In 2013, the post-ER data revealed that participants perceived reading in English to be more enjoyable, less boring, and less difficult, with the reduction in difficulty being statistically significant.

Table 2: 2013 pre- and post-ER reading attitudes

<i>Item</i>	<i>Pre-ER</i>	<i>Post-ER</i>
Reading in English is fun	3.70	3.85
Reading in English is difficult	4.25	4.02
Reading in English is boring	2.17	2.11

The results for 2014 and 2015 also indicated that the ER activities had positive effects on reading attitudes. This was especially true for the perceived enjoyment and difficulty of reading in English, as Tables 3 and 4 show.

Table 3: 2014 pre- and post-ER reading attitudes

<i>Item</i>	<i>Pre-ER</i>	<i>Post-ER</i>
Reading in English is fun	3.57	3.83
Reading in English is difficult	4.09	3.81
Reading in English is boring	2.25	2.23

Table 4: 2015 pre- and post-ER reading attitudes

<i>Item</i>	<i>Pre-ER</i>	<i>Post-ER</i>
Reading in English is fun	3.71	3.86
Reading in English is difficult	4.11	3.92
Reading in English is boring	2.0	2.19

The post-ER increase each year in students who stated that they enjoyed reading in English - a total increase from 62% to 86% - was another indication of the positive effects of the ER activities on reading attitudes. Further results will be shared in the presentation.

3 Discussion

This study examined the effects of ER activities on aspects of the reading attitudes of EFL learners at a Japanese university. As Yamashita (2013) found, it was seen that ER had a positive impact on the affective aspects of reading attitudes, especially those related to the perceived enjoyment and difficulty of reading in English. A positive effect on the cognitive aspects of reading attitude was also apparent, with 88% of participants stating that the ER activities improved their English abilities. It is encouraging that such results were achieved in a relatively short period of 15 weeks. The findings and their implications will be further discussed in the presentation.

4 Limitations of the study

The study has several limitations. First, although positive effects were identified, how long they continue is unknown and is something future studies should explore. Second, as the study was conducted over three years, variations in the learning conditions each year may have affected participants' responses. Third, the study examined only a few possible variables related to reading attitudes. Fourth, only the change in variables was examined, not any possible interactions between them. Finally, any findings should be considered the result of the context of the study. As ER is implemented in various ways, generalisability of results to different contexts may be limited.

5 Conclusion

Despite its limitations, the current study has provided results of the positive effects of ER on aspects of EFL learner reading attitudes. Further studies will contribute to the knowledge of the affective aspects of reading and may resolve some of the questions that remain.

References

- Day, R. R., & Bamford, J. (1998). *Extensive reading in the second language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stoeckel, T., Reagan, N., & Hann, F. (2012). Extensive reading quizzes and reading attitudes. *TESOL Quarterly*, 46, 187–198.
- Takase, A. (2007). Japanese high school students' motivation for extensive L2 reading. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 19(1), 1–18.
- Yamashita, J. (2013). Effects of extensive reading on reading attitudes in a foreign language. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 25(2), 248–263.