

Effectiveness of In-Class English Extensive Reading: A Case Study

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This paper reports the effectiveness of extensive reading (ER) in English classes in a university. Students were given approximately 15 minutes ER time at the beginning of each class. After a semester, they were asked to fill in a survey for this research. The survey result shows that the lack of time is the most common obstacle in ER program. Moreover, it is indicated that their motivation for ER has decreased within a year. The author suggests in-class ER can be a possible way to tackle those obstacles for two reasons through analyzing the survey results. One reason is that students can recognize the fun of reading in in-class ER. The other is that in-class ER can be the first step for students to start reading English books. Following the research findings, several aspects which seem to be essential for a successful ER program are also discussed.

本稿は、大学における英語の授業内多読の効果について報告するものである。各授業の冒頭15分間で用意された多読図書を読む活動を1学期間行い、学期最終日にアンケートを実施した。その結果、多読を妨げる最大の要因が時間不足であることが明らかになった。さらに、一年の間に多読に対する意欲が低下していることも分かった。本調査から授業内多読は二つの理由からこの状況を打開する方法となり得ることが示唆された。一点目としては、授業内多読を通して多読の楽しみを学生が認識することができるという点である。もう一点は、授業内多読は読む時間が最低限確保できるというだけでなく、授業外でも多読をするきっかけとなりうるという点である。調査結果をふまえ、授業内多読に必要な不可欠な要素についても考察を加える。

1. Introduction

1.1. What is extensive reading?

In recent years, extensive reading (ER) has become recognized as an effective method to learn English in Japan. Although there are many ER programs, they vary in style and implementation, especially at university. For instance, students devote their class time fully to ER or related activities, whereas other classes do not have ER time in class and students are asked to read books by themselves at home as one of their assignments. Toward a greater understanding of the goals of ER and how it may be used most effectively, this paper will introduce some of the basic principles of ER and discuss some conclusions drawn based on research undertaken on the implementation of an ER program at university.

1.2. Principles of ER

One of the most influential guidelines for ER teachers is the ten principles for teaching ER presented by Day and Bamford (2002).

1. *The reading material is easy.*
2. *A variety of reading material on a wide range of topics must be available.*
3. *Learners choose what they want to read.*
4. *Learners read as much as possible.*
5. *The purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information and general understanding.*
6. *Reading is its own reward.*
7. *Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower.*

8. *Reading is individual and silent.*

9. *Teachers orient and guide their students.*

10. *The teacher is a role model of a reader.*

Following these principles, Sustained Silent Reading (SSR), Start with Simple Stories (SSS) and Short Subsequent Tasks (SST) are often explained as crucial points for successful ER implementation (Takase, 2010). For learners, three basic rules are often explained (Furukawa & Kanda, 2010). The first rule is not to look up any words in a dictionary. If a student needs a dictionary, it means the book is too difficult. Second, readers should skip past difficult sentences, because they should be able to understand what is happening from the context, even if they cannot understand some sentences. The third rule is to stop reading if the book is not interesting.

It has been reported that learners who follow these principles show an improvement in vocabulary (Day, Omura & Hiramatsu, 1991), reading proficiency (Takase, 2012a), and on English test scores (Ito, Yoshioka & Nishizawa, 2010).

1.3. ER at Shizuoka University of Art and Culture

Based on the research reported above, 15 minutes were allocated for completing the ER program in selected English classes at Shizuoka University of Art and Culture (SUAC). SUAC is a public university established in 1999 in Hamamatsu. It is composed of four undergraduate departments; The Department of International Culture, The Department of Regional

Cultural Policy and Management, and The Department of Art Management in The Faculty of Cultural Policy and Management, and The Department of Design in The Faculty of Design. All students are required to take at least eight credits of language classes in either English or Chinese. English Communication (EC) classes are offered mainly for freshman and sophomore students. Students usually take two English classes per week; one for speaking and listening and one for reading and writing.

ER is one of the mandatory assignments for all EC classes. Students borrow books from the library, read them and take quizzes on MReader, an online testing system to support ER. Those students who pass an online test of the book they read receive that book's word count. Students can only take one quiz per day. The minimum number of words required to received full credit for the ER program, 10% of their class grade, is 40,000 words per semester for freshman and 50,000 words per semester for sophomore students.

Students were given approximately 15 minutes ER time at the beginning of each class. Books from a list of Oxford Reading Tree Stage 1 to 4 were prepared for the students. When students finished reading a book, they made comments on the story. At the end of the semester, students indicated which books they had read from the list and received the word count without taking quizzes. In this type of in-class ER, there was no freedom for students to choose the books they read. Although this is against one of the principles stated above, reading the same book in a class is recommended in the guide presented by the Extensive Reading Foundation (2011) as a first step so that learners can understand the ER method.

1.4. Research questions

Over a 15-week semester, in-class ER was introduced and a research was conducted. There were two research questions.

Research question 1: What are the obstacles that hinder students from doing ER? In many cases, students

experience some difficulties learning a foreign language. Therefore, it should be helpful to know the difficulties that students face in ER in order to improve the ER program.

Research question 2: What are the effects of in-class ER? Takase (2012a) states that in-class ER is necessary for a successful ER program. Although there has been extensive research conducted on the effectiveness of in-class ER, this paper reports the outcomes of in-class ER as a case study. Additionally, some essential points of ER instruction are considered based on the conclusions drawn from this research. Since the circumstances and the methods of ER vary widely, it is hoped that this report will provide a reference for advancing ER expertise at university.

1.5. Methodology

In this research, both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed. The data collected by MReader such as the number of words read by students and the number of books or quizzes they took during the semester are referred to. A survey was also conducted at the end of the semester. Most of the questions were scale-type or multiple-choice questions. There were also spaces for free comments. The survey was conducted in Japanese so that the students were able to correctly understand the questions and fully express their thoughts.

The data collected in the classes for students from the Department of International Culture and Design is shown in table 1 below. In general, students from the Department of International Culture tend to have positive attitudes towards English and the language level is relatively high. On the other hand, students in the Department of Design often hold a negative image of learning English. By comparing those two groups, the effectiveness of in-class ER of various English levels can be revealed. The data collected on freshman and sophomore students was also compared to see if there was a shift in their attitudes towards ER.

Table 1

Department	International Culture		Design		Total
	Freshman	Sophomore	Freshman	Sophomore	
Number of students	55	22	26	16	119
Number of surveys collected	46	18	17	14	95

2. Results

2.1. Research question 1: What are the obstacles that hinder students from doing ER?

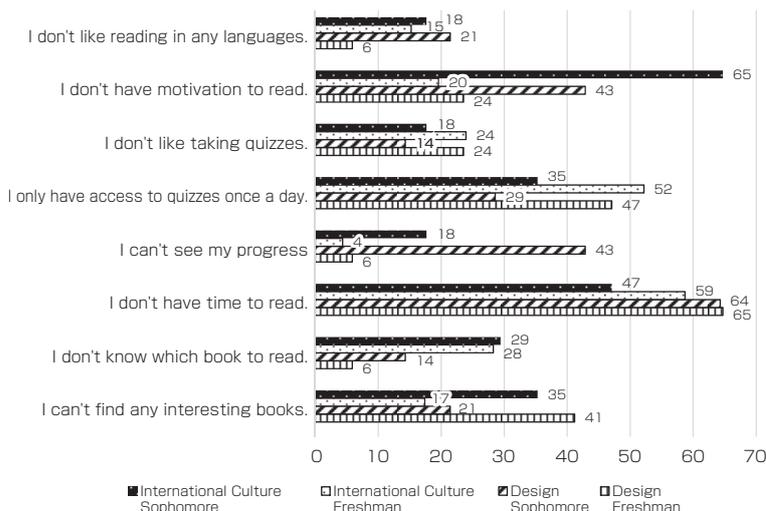
2.1.1. Lack of time

In the survey, students were asked to answer what obstacles hindered them from doing ER. The most popular answer was lack of time. ER research from another university also reported that students are often too busy to read by themselves at home (Takase, 2010). In particular, nearly 65% of students from the Department of Design indicated a lack of time as their biggest challenges in doing ER. There are two possible reasons for this. One reason is that they might be particularly busy with homework for other classes, as design students have a heavy workload. The other reason is they often chose books that were too difficult. As will be explained later, the students tended to read long and difficult books in order to avoid taking too many quizzes after reading. Since the English ability of the Design students was not as high as the International Culture students, Design students might struggle more

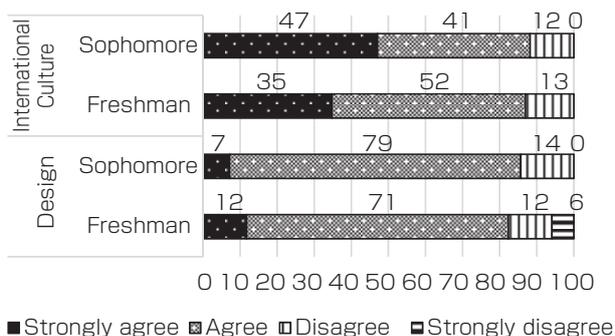
reading books that took a longer time to finish. One of the Design students implied this by stating, "it takes time to understand because of my poor English ability".

2.1.2. Lack of motivation

While a lack of time was the most common answer given in the freshman classes and the Design sophomore class, sophomore students in the Department of International Culture indicated a lack of motivation as the most popular answer. It was also the second most common reason among sophomore students in the Department of Design. In contrast, limited access to the reading quizzes was the second most common reason given by freshman students from both International Culture and the Design Department. These results point to an important implication. Freshmen students are motivated to read books, but their motivation seems to decrease within a year, despite the fact that high motivation and positive attitudes towards English are recognized as the having the most significant impact on the outcome of ER (Takase, 2012b; Joichi, 2015).



[Figure 1] What are the obstacles that hinder you from reading?

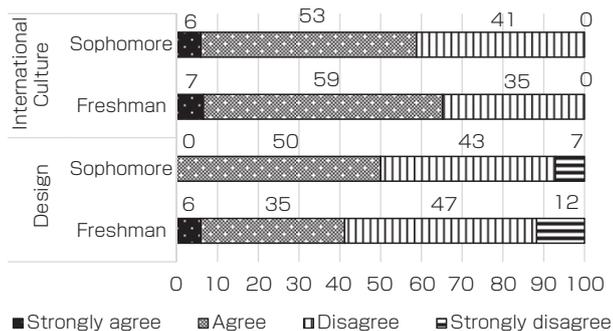


[Figure 2] I enjoyed in-class ER. (%)

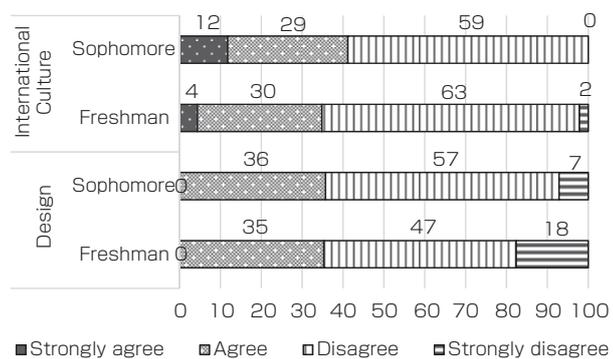
2.2. Research question 2: What are the effects of in-class ER?

2.2.1. Experience of fun reading

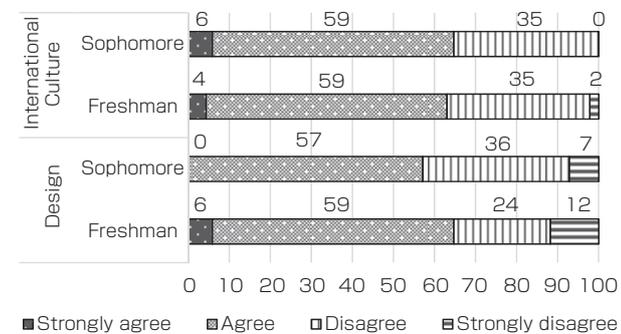
The second research question concerned the effectiveness of in-class ER. The survey shows that one of the most significant outcomes was that many students began to see the joy of ER. More than 80% of all the students agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoyed in-class ER. One sophomore student in the International Culture Department commented she had less reluctance towards doing ER than the previous year. Another student in the same class said "I could



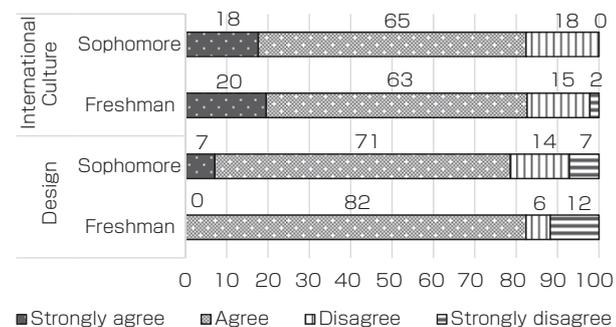
[Figure 3] I could overcome the negative image of English. (%)



[Figure 4] I've got the confidence in English. (%)



[Figure 5] I gained English ability. (%)



[Figure 6] In-class ER could raise my motivation. (%)

make the best effort ever". A freshman student in the Design Department commented, "I used to dislike reading English, but not now". These results show that even with only 15 minutes of each class, many students started to recognize the joy of reading in English. Also, around 80% of students replied that the in-class ER raised their motivation to study or to do more ER. Additionally, the majority of students felt an improvement in their English, even though it was probably not enough to give them confidence or overcome their negative image towards English. Several freshman students in the International Culture Department commented that they were able to raise their reading speed. A sophomore Design student said, "I think I can read more smoothly now". These survey results suggest that in-class ER can be a remedy to lack of motivation.

2.2.2. First step to start reading

Another advantage of in-class ER is that it can be a valuable chance for students to start reading ER books. The following are some comments from the students.

- I need energy to read English books, however, I could read easily in class. – Sophomore, Design
- I didn't read books unless I had ER time in classes. – Sophomore, Design
- It was a good opportunity to start reading English books. – Sophomore, Design
- I couldn't find time to read by myself. – Sophomore, International
- I've gotten into the habit of reading English books. – Freshman, International
- I think it was good because I could have more time to read English. – Freshman, International
- I got used to reading English sentences. – Freshman, International

Takase (2017) claims that it is necessary to lead students to get used to English reading by providing time in class. For students in the International Culture Department who tend to have positive attitudes towards English, the in-class ER helped establish for them a habit of reading English books. These comments also showed that the 15-minutes ER time was the first step for some students to start reading. Since they started reading from easy books in classes, even students who were reluctant to read English found themselves able to participate in the ER program positively.

3. Discussion

To summarize the findings, many of the students were able to understand the joy of reading through in-class ER. In addition, in-class ER enabled them to get into the habit of reading English books. However, despite the positive comments about ER, there was no difference in the total number of words read by students

between those who had ER time in their classes and those who did not (see Table 2). This suggests that most students read English books just for the points. Students do not read more than required unless they enjoy ER. Taking time for ER in class was not enough to get students to read autonomously out of class. Based on these findings, The following discusses some of the essential aspects of ER instruction.

3.1. Instruction on appropriate book choice

Having all students read the same easy books in class is helpful so that they can understand the importance of starting from a low level for the purpose of easy comprehension. On the other hand, it is also helpful to use class time for students to read books of their own choice and watch if they are reading smoothly. Based on teacher observation, students should be given advice on what books to choose. In particular, ER teachers at university need to emphasize the importance of starting from easy books. Although the importance of choosing easy books was explained at the beginning of classes, the average number of words per book students read was around 7,000 or more (see Table 2). Also, many students randomly chose various levels of books. This seems to be the main cause for why students were not able to notice their progress. It has been reported that those who started reading from an easy level and

then raised the level gradually can improve their English ability more than those who read various levels randomly, even though they read almost the same amount of words (Kimura, 2016). Furukawa (2017) recommends reading 100 to 1000-word books until reaching 20,000 words and 500 to 2000-word books until reading 50,000 words in total. Teachers need to show students the roadmap of reading from easy to more difficult books so that they can learn to select appropriate books by themselves.

3.2. Discussion time in class

Another activity that should be included in in-class ER is discussion time with other students about the books they read. It has been reported that information sharing with classmates about books can encourage students to read out of class (Fujioka, 2015). This seems to be effective not only for raising motivation but also in helping students find interesting books. Uozumi and Takase (2015) reported that those who read books that they were interested in tended to improve in their English abilities more than those who didn't. Information sharing with classmates who have similar interests can be the most convenient way to for students to find enjoyable books.

Table 2

Department	International Culture		Design	
	Freshman	Sophomore	Freshman	Sophomore
Average word count	49970 (49696)	42264 (42489)	49970 (34963)	42264 (27749)
Average number of passed quizzes	7 (8)	3 (3)	5 (5)	3 (3)
Average words per book	7227 (7279)	13015 (11233)	7469 (7322)	14311 (6831)

Upper: all classes (Lower): classes with in-class ER

3.3. Access to a variety of books

In order to give advice to students on which books to read, students need access to many books of various topics and levels. Takase (2012a) claims that students should be able to enjoy reading if the books match their levels and interests. Some students indicated in the survey that they could not find any interesting books to read. In particular, more than 40% of freshman students in Design answered that they did not read much because

they could not find any interesting books. Therefore, it is suggested that students should be supplied with books of various genres, including art or design, that match their interests.

3.4. Introducing Yomiyasusa Level (YL)

YL is used in most ER classes in Japan as a measurement of book difficulty. Currently, students cannot easily identify how hard a book is to read because

there is no standard measurement of book difficulty across different reader series. Accordingly, students tend to pay little attention to the level of books that they are to read, which makes it difficult for them to see progress in their reading level. Among various standards of book levels, YL is recognized as the most suitable standard for Japanese students (Fujii, 2017). In another university, it was reported that students' reading comprehension got better after introducing YL (Fujioka, 2015). If students can see the level of each book, it should be helpful when choosing a book and may encourage them to read because they can see their level improve.

3.5. Systems to promote reading easy books

As has been explained repeatedly, promoting the reading of easy books is one of the main challenges for university ER programs. One reason why students tend to read long books is because the online testing system only allows them to take one quiz per a day. Because of that, it is difficult for them to read the required number of words by reading easy books. Allowing them to take more than one test per day may be necessary in order to provide them with more chances to read easy books without having to worry about limited access to quizzes. One solution to this problem is by doing in-class ER. Another possible solution is to assess student learning based on the number of books as well as the number of words read in a semester.

4. Conclusion

In this research, the obstacles to ER and the effects of in-class ER were investigated. Because students are often busy and can take quizzes only once per day, they tend to read long books in order to finish reading the required amount of words. As a result, students cannot enjoy nor improve in English effectively and may lose their motivation to read. In-class ER, where students can read easy books, offers a solution to this problem in two ways. One way is that students can experience the joy of reading. The other is that in-class ER can be the first step to start reading and students get at least 10-15 minutes a week of ER reading time, even if they are busy.

On the other hand, the total number of words read did not increase by in-class reading. In order to create active readers, further efforts need to be made, such as teacher instruction about book choices, information sharing among students, supplying students with various genres and levels of books, a standardized measurement for book difficulty levels, and an ER program that promotes reading easy books. These conditions also seem to be vital for a successful ER, in addition to in-class ER.

Even though the students in this research experienced in-class ER only in the first semester, they showed positive changes in their learning attitudes. The research results reported in this paper will be reflected in future in-class ER at this university. It is also hoped that the conclusions drawn from them will help other teachers improve their ER programs.

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