

The Influence of Extensive Reading on Beginning EFL Students' Motivation

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Abstract: The present study reanalyzed the data set from Kuramashi et al. (2015) and examined how much extensive reading would affect beginners' intrinsic motivation and their proficiency level of English. As a result of a multiple regression analysis, extensive reading was not statistically influential either to the intrinsic motivation or proficiency variables.

Keywords: extensive reading intrinsic motivation multiple regression analysis

1. Introduction

For decades, a number of studies have been administered on extensive reading and motivation in the research field of second language acquisition (SLA). Both extensive reading and motivation have been investigated not only in SLA but also in the setting of foreign language acquisition (FLA) in many countries including Japan. Lately, the relationship between extensive reading and motivation has been actively discussed and is of interest to practitioners as well as researchers. The present study focuses on how influential extensive reading and motivation are on each other.

Since Krashen (1985) advocated the Hypothesis of Comprehensible Input, extensive reading has been one of the major themes to which researchers and practitioners paid attention. Krashen (1994) persisted that extensive reading brought about language acquisition under certain conditions, especially with an appropriate exposure to the target language, interesting materials, and a relaxed environment. Day & Bamford (1998) also insisted that extensive reading had a positive impact on language learners' reading skills, vocabulary, motivation, vocabulary, and others. The research conducted by Murrell et al. (2015) showed that there was a statistically significant correlation between the amount of words that students had read and the highest TOEIC scores they had gained.

There have also been a large number of investigations of motivation with respect to learning both second and foreign languages. Gardner (1985) categorized learners' motivation toward learning a second or foreign language into two different orientations: instrumental orientation and integrative orientation. However, especially in the setting of learning a foreign language, language learners do not have access to communities where the target language is used. This means that such language learners hardly have opportunities to be motivated in the integrative orientation toward learning the target language.

On the other hand, Deci & Ryan (1985) proposed their version of a self-determination theory, sorting motivation into two types: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. These two types of motivation are not distinctive but successive; therefore, the higher the degree of self-determination that a learner has, the more intrinsically motivated the learner most likely becomes (Deci & Ryan 2002). If a learner of English with low or extrinsic motivation finds English interesting or discovers some meaning when learning English, he or she can become an intrinsically motivated learner.

As Day & Bamford (1998) argue, extensive reading is surely influential on many aspects as to language learning including motivation. In the research by Takase (2004), it was revealed that many of the participants who actively read books in the extensive reading program felt a sense of achievement and self-confidence, which motivated them to read more. Ninomiya & Kawakami (2012) also suggested that extensive reading activities in class potentially have an effective impact on the intrinsic motivation of learners of Japanese.

In 2014 the Agency for Cultural Affairs published a report about a public-opinion survey on the national language of Japan. One of the purposes of this survey was to investigate the current situation of the Japanese people's awareness and understanding of the Japanese language. The subjects were Japanese citizens older than sixteen years old. In the survey of 2014 there were 3,473 participants and 2,038 valid responses; as a result, the ratio of the valid responses was 58.4%. One of the questions was about the number of books per month the participants read, and 47.5% answered "zero" to it and the ratio of "don't read" responses was lower than it was in 2012 by 10 points. The survey also inquired whether or not the participants read more than before. The ratio of the responses indicating "read less" was 65.1%, which was the highest of all.

Considering such results, it can be said that reading is not always easy and enjoyable. Reading can give mental stress or be a burden if it is compulsorily assigned. Extensive

reading could reasonably be seen to cause even more stress. It goes without saying that English learners at the beginning level may even feel more stress due to their reluctance to read and low intrinsic motivation toward learning a foreign language.

On the basis of the reviews discussed above, the research questions in this study are as follows.

- 1) How influential is extensive reading in beginners' proficiency of English?
- 2) How much does extensive reading influence beginners' motivation toward learning English?

2. Methodology

Kuramashi et al. (2015) administered a paper-based questionnaire to 84 Baiko Gakuin University undergraduate students, freshmen and sophomores, majoring in English at the beginning of the Fall semester 2014. The purpose of this study was to explore what factors of motivation English majors have for language learning and how those factors influence English proficiency. The data from this study was utilized in the present study.

2.1 Samples

Considering the purpose of the present study, only learners of English at the beginning stage based on the proficiency scale indicated by ETS (2012) are to be examined. According to its definitions of proficiency levels, the examinees with the TOEIC scores of lower than 220 are ranked as "E," the lowest of the five. Those examinees are accordingly capable of understanding only part of even slow and easy conversations. The examinees with the scores of 220 to 470 are ranked as "D," the second lowest, and are able to communicate through English minimally in a daily conversation. In the present study these two levels were specifically selected as beginners of English learning; therefore, the samples with the scores of higher than 470 were eliminated, which left 68 of the samples to be utilized for the analysis.

2.2 Variables

Kuramashi et al. (2015) used a questionnaire that consisted of 65 items, some of which were not discussed in their research. Most of the items were multiple-choice questions

using the five-point-scale answering system, except the first two items which inquired about examinees' grade (freshman or sophomore) and gender (male or female) .

Table 1 *Frequencies of grade and gender*

		gender		total
		male	female	
grade	freshmen	19	32	51
	sophomores	3	14	17
total		22	46	68

The third question was about the number of words they had read for the extensive reading program in the previous semester. In the present study these three items become variables labeled "Grade," "Gender," and "Word Count" respectively.

The next two items asked the hours spent with homework, previews, and reviews of English lessons and hours spent on non-school related English study. The present study utilizes these two items as variables, and labels them "Hour 1" and "Hour 2" respectively.

Kuramashi et al. (2015) had 50 items regarding motivation, which were originally created by Schmidt et al (1996) and later modified by Hiromori (2002) for Japanese students to understand. The alternative responses to those items were "strongly disagree," "disagree," "neither agree nor disagree," "agree," and "strongly agree."

For the present study five of the 50 items that had contributed to "Intrinsic Motivation" in Hiromori (2002) were selected to set up a variable named "Motivation." Since the sample size was too small to conduct factor analysis, the mean of the five items was calculated. The reliability (Cronbach alpha) of this variable was 0.74.

In addition to the items discussed above, there were two more variables, and the one regarding the TOEIC scores the students had gained (which is used to measure the proficiency levels of students' English learning) was labeled as "TOEIC." The other is one of the ten items that Kuramashi et al. (2015) used regarding how students had been feeling about the systems and programs at Baiko Gakuin University and what sorts of lessons they would like to take in the future. This question, number 57 on the questionnaire, inquired about whether or not the extensive reading system conducted in the Baiko Gakuin University English courses was helpful, and this item was chosen as a variable, labeled "Item 57."

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the variables in the present study.

Table 2 *Descriptive statistics of variables (n=68)*

Variables	minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Year	1	2	1.25	.44
Gender	1	2	1.68	.47
Word Count	1	5	2.72	.71
Hour 1	1	5	2.56	1.19
Hour 2	1	5	2.16	1.17
Item 57	1	5	3.66	1.02
TOEIC	195	465	326.54	73.64
Motivation	1	5	3.35	.77

Note. SD = Standard Deviation.

3. Result and Analysis

The data obtained from the questionnaire was analyzed with the SPSS software. Table 3 indicates correlation coefficients of all the variables.

As observed in Table 3, the Hour 1 and 2 variables had a positive high correlation of 0.525 with the p-value of 0.01. In the present study the hour 2 variable was eliminated to avoid the multicollinearity in the multiple regression analysis. Instead, the items with correlation coefficients of lower than 0.400 ($p < .01$) were left for the analysis.

Table 3 *Correlation Coefficients of Variables (n=68)*

variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Grade	—							
2. Gender	.181	—						
3. Word Count	-.012	.127	—					
4. Hour 1	-.072	-.045	.259*	—				
5. Hour 2	-.022	-.175	.218	.525**	—			
6. Item57	-.008	-.138	.260*	.134	.236	—		
7. TOEIC	.320**	.367**	.327**	.078	.067	.133	—	
8. Motivation	.049	-.114	.066	.151	.300*	.329**	.288*	—

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Next, a multiple regression was implemented having TOEIC as the dependent variable and the other six as independent variables. The following is the table that shows the determining factors of TOEIC.

Table 4 *Determining Factors of TOEIC (n=68)*

variables	β	p-value
Grade	.250*	.019
Gender	.323**	.004
Word Count	.267*	.018
Item 57	.015	.896
Hours 1	-.005	.966
Motivation	.291**	.010

Note. β = standard partial regression coefficient.

R=.610, R2=.372. * p <.05, ** p <.01.

As seen in Table 4, among the six independent variables, Gender was the most influential factor to the independent variable ($\beta = 0.291, p < 0.01$), and Motivation follows after that ($\beta = 0.323, p < 0.01$). Word Count, which represented extensive reading, was ranked as the third ($\beta = 0.267, p < 0.05$). Grade also showed statistically significant correlation with the dependent variable ($\beta = 0.250, p < 0.05$). Item 57, created to show to what extent learners would find extensive reading helpful, did not statistically significantly correspond with the dependent variable.

Another multiple regression was conducted with Motivation as the dependent variable and the other six as independent variables. Table 5 indicates the determining factors of Motivation, the dependent variable.

Table 5 *Determining Factors of Motivation (n=68)*

Variables	β	p-value
Grade	-.025	.212
Gender	-.183	.203
Word Count	-.129	.138
Hour 1	.275	.076
Item 57	.109	.091
TOEIC	.361*	.001

Note. β = standard partial regression coefficient.

R=.471, R2=.222. * p <.01.

As viewed in Table 5, TOEIC indicated a statistically significant correlation with the dependent variable ($\beta = 0.361, p < 0.01$). However, none of the other variables showed statistical significance with Motivation.

4. Discussion

4.1 TOEIC as the dependent variable

As seen in the first multiple regression analysis (see Table 4), Motivation, which represented intrinsic motivation toward language learning, was statistically one of the most important determining factors to TOEIC, which was the dependent variable. It can be said that intrinsic motivation surely has a powerful impact on language proficiency even in the setting of foreign language acquisition such as the previous studies discussed earlier. This was a surprising result since the samples of the present study were recognized as beginner with TOEIC scores of lower than 470, and they were less likely to have intrinsic motivation toward learning English. Of course, it would not be surprising that many of the participants were intrinsically motivated since they are all English majors. In addition, many of them had joined study abroad programs a couple of months before this survey. That is, their experience of studying abroad might have encouraged them to be intrinsically motivated to learn English and eventually resulted in their higher TOEIC scores.

In addition, Gender was statistically the most powerful corresponding factor to TOEIC among all the independent variables. The ratio of males to females in this study was 22 to 46. The mean of TOEIC scores of the female students' was 345.11 and comparatively higher than that of male students, which was 287.33. As a result of a t-test, these means were not statistically different ($p=0.276$). Note that as seen in Table 3 there was no significant correlation between Gender and Motivation.

To answer the first research question in this study, Word Count and Item 57, which represented extensive reading, need to be discussed. Both variables were less influential compared with TOEIC and Gender. Word Count was slightly more significant ($\beta =0.267$, $p<0.05$) than Item 57, which was not statistically corresponding to TOEIC. It can be said that the extensive reading program at Baiko Gakuin University was somehow influential on the students' proficiency but not quite dominant. The students might not have been fully accustomed to the program yet to be intrinsically motivated to read more and learn English more.

4.2 Motivation as the dependent variable

As the results of the second multiple regression analysis seen in Table 5 show, TOEIC

was the only statistically corresponding factor to Motivation, which was the dependent variable in this analysis. Although Item 57 (the indicator of how helpful the students found extensive reading) was ranked third, it did not indicate a statistically significant correspondence with Motivation. It need scarcely be said that Word Count, the other variable related to extensive reading, was not statistically influential to Motivation. It seemed that in this study extensive reading was not powerful enough to make beginners motivated, unlike in some investigations, such as Ninomiya (2013), which revealed that extensive reading activities can effectively function to improve beginners' motivation. Therefore, a possible answer to the second research question of this study is that extensive reading may not directly improve beginners' motivation.

As a matter of fact, at Baiko Gakuin University, students gain much higher scores on the TOEIC test after participating in the study-abroad programs. In Murrell et al. (2015) the variable that represented the duration of the students' studying abroad had a statistically significant correlation with the TOEIC gain variable ($r=0.691$, $p<0.01$), which represented the difference between the highest and lowest scores on the TOEIC. It would be a bit hard to say TOEIC directly influenced the students' motivation. Rather than that, TOEIC score might have indirectly influenced the students' motivation through their study-abroad experience or other things that had an impact on their motivation.

It should be added that the highest gains in TOEIC scores after studying abroad are most likely listening scores, and their reading scores merely increase. One challenge that teachers face is that of trying to spark the interest of beginning language learners and learners with low or extrinsic motivation. Still, they can be stimulated by having a great experience of studying abroad, taking exciting and effective English classes at school, making friends from other countries or something else effective for learning English. Consequently, they may become intrinsically motivated even through extensive reading so that they eventually will be even more motivated learners.

5. Limitations and implications

A limitation of this study is the lack of samples to conduct a factor analysis and create a stronger variable out of it. In this study the motivation variable was set up by calculating the mean of the five items which contributed to Intrinsic Motivation utilized Hiromori (2002). There can be some doubt as to whether this variable fully functioned,

especially in the multiple regression analyses. For future research, the research plan needs to be reconsidered.

The findings of this study were quite suggestive since many students at Baiko Gakuin University are beginners of learning English, and often need help from others. Therefore, they will possibly be better readers with help from others, and will hopefully be more motivated learners of English.

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