

# A Methodological and Numerical Analysis on the Optimum Way for Kosen Students to Read English Books Extensively

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## Abstract

In order to motivate students at Tokuyama College of Technology to like and be interested in English, English teachers introduced extensive reading into their English classes four years ago. Extensive reading classes have not only boosted the students' motivation for English but also improved their English proficiency as a whole. However, the improvement varied from class to class and from student to student. Why did that happen? This paper clarifies the reasons for such differences and shows both methodological and numerical clues for the optimum way for the students to read English books extensively.

**Key Words :** motivation, extensive reading, methodological and numerical clues, optimum way

## 1. Introduction

As pointed out in Kunishige, Takahashi, and Harada (2011)<sup>1</sup>, students at Tokuyama College of Technology (hereafter TCT) used to experience a slump and are polarized in regard to studying English. In general, they used to be very poor at English as the average score of English proficiency tests and the ratio of attainment of the target scores showed<sup>1</sup>.

In order to tackle the undesirable situation, English teachers started giving extensive reading lessons in 2010.

Extensive reading is defined as a method of reading as many level-appropriate English books as possible. It is important that the skill level of the book allows the reader to comprehend the material smoothly and fluently, without translating anything into Japanese.

As pointed out in Liana's Extensive Reading Journal<sup>2</sup>, this method "lets you get used to reading more complex sentences with ease, reinforces the words you already know and helps you learn new words from context." Most books used for extensive reading, especially those intended for beginners, are short, simple picture books as shown below:



Fig. 1 An example of an extensive reading book

It is safely said that extensive reading classes are effective because they have not only increased the students' motivation for English but also improved their English proficiency as a whole, which will be shown below.

However, the change in their motivation differed from class to class. Also, it has been found out that the improvement in an English proficiency test was different individually.

In what follows, good results brought by the introduction of extensive reading will be shown first. Then, the reasons why the differences mentioned above arose will be examined so as to provide some clues for a suitable way of extensive reading from a student's perspective, that is, numerical viewpoint, as well as from a teacher's perspective, that is, a methodological viewpoint.

## 2. Good results brought by extensive reading lessons---based on questionnaire results

According to Takahashi, Kunishige, and Harada

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(2012)<sup>3</sup>, thanks to the effect of extensive reading lessons, the attitude of the third-year students in 2010 toward English improved as a whole compared to that in 2009 as the following figure shows:

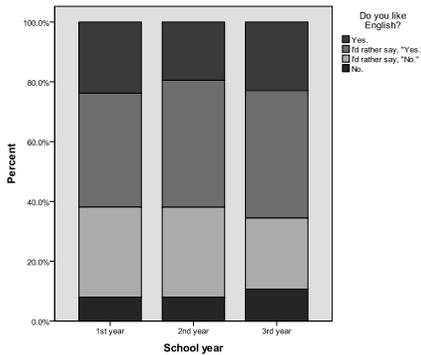


Fig. 2 The answers to the question “Do you like English?”

It shows that the percentage of the most desirable option, which dropped when they were second-year students, improved in the following school year, when they started to have extensive reading lessons.

Also, changes in the average score of ACE<sup>2</sup> shown in Table 1 below prove that extensive reading lessons clearly developed the students’ English proficiency. Bold-faced figures are the scores made by the students who had ER lessons:

Table 1 Shifts in the average score of ACE

enrollment year	1st grade	2nd grade	3rd grade
(standard score)	430	450	470
2006	408	421	434
2007	425	422	461
2008	410	442	<b>447</b>
2009	429	426	<b>478</b>
2010	<b>425</b>	<b>470</b>	<b>500</b>
2011	<b>436</b>	<b>461</b>	
2012	<b>448</b>		

These results reflect a positive impact of extensive reading on students.

### 3. Big differences---based on a closer look at the good results

Fig. 3 below shows how the students’ answers to the question “Do you like English?” shifted over their past school years, depending on their department, i.e., their class:

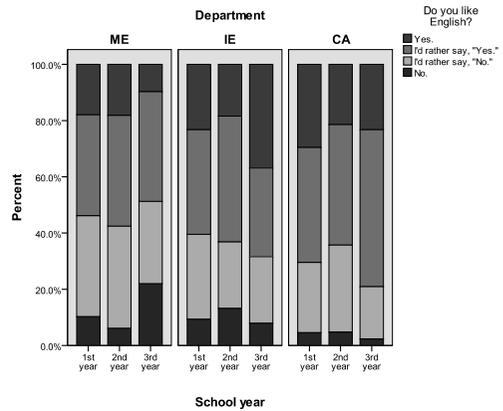


Fig. 3 Answers to the question “Do you like English?”

A positive change is observed in the Department of Computer Science and Electronic Engineering (hereafter IE) and in the Department of Civil Engineering and Architecture (hereafter CA). The IE class students showed the best attitude in the third year, when they had an extensive reading class. The percentage of the most positive option became the biggest in the third year, even though it dropped when they were in the second year. Also, the percentage of the most negative reaction decreased in the third year. Similar results can be seen in the CA class.

However, the Department of Mechanical and Electric Engineering (hereafter ME) exhibits a striking contrast to the other two departments. The most positive reaction decreased and the most negative reaction increased in the third year.

Now, let us examine the change in the students’ attitudes toward studying English:

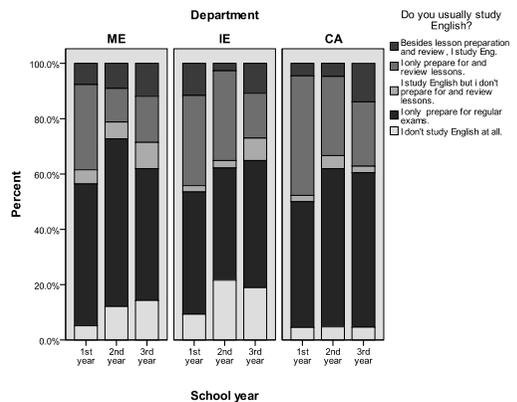


Fig. 4 Answers to the question “Do you usually study English?”

This figure shows the shift of the students’ answers

to the question “Do you usually study English?”, depending on their department.

As for the IE and the CA students, the percentage of the most favorable option increased in the third grade, compared with the previous school year. In addition, the percentage of the least favorable option decreased among the IE students and didn’t change among the CA students. These results suggest that extensive reading lessons improved their attitudes toward studying English.

As for the ME students, on the other hand, both the percentage of the most favorable option and that of the least favorable option increased in the third year.

In addition, in spite of the big leap in the average score of ACE as a whole, the individual scores varied from student to student as had been naturally expected. Some students got a very high score and others got a very low score.

We can conclude this section by saying that despite the positive results of extensive reading, a closer look at the data has made it clear that the change in the students’ motivation for English differed from class to class and that the improvement in an English proficiency test varied from student to student.

The following section will examine the reasons why the differences mentioned above arose and discuss a suitable way of extensive reading both from a teacher’s perspective and from a student’s perspective.

## 4. Examinations and Discussion

### 4. 1. From a teacher’s perspective---from a methodological viewpoint

As we observed in the previous section, the IE and the CA classes revealed a positive change in the students’ preference for English and their motivation for studying English, whereas the ME class showed a negative change.

We would argue that the sharp difference is ascribed to the fact that the ME class was taught differently by a different teacher. It is presumed that the ways extensive reading lessons were given had different impacts on the students’ attitudes toward studying English as well as their preference for English.

Based on the two successful extensive reading classes and the comparison with the other class, we will extract clues as to how teachers should give extensive reading lessons from a methodological point of view.

First of all, as in the case of the IE and the CA classes, teachers should observe their students’ English level well and recommend suitable books

one after another, especially in the early stages of extensive reading. With proper guidance, they can prevent their students from reading books that are too easy or too difficult for them. Otherwise, proud students are likely to read books that are too difficult. Then it takes them too much time to read a book and they end up translating English into Japanese, which cannot boost their English ability well.

Secondly, just like the IE and the CA classes, teachers should control a class to the extent that the students can at least concentrate on reading books. It is often said that extensive reading lessons should be given in a totally free and relaxed atmosphere. As was the case with the ME class above, however, extensive reading classes without any control can often lead to a situation where students fall asleep or do something other than reading, and thus to failure to achieve anything.

Thirdly, as the teacher in the IE and the CA classes did, teachers should assign their students a quota regarding the minimum numbers of words and books they have to read by the end of the course. As observed in the students in the ME class, it is quite difficult to maintain students’ motivation to read more and more books without such a quota.

### 4. 2. From a student’s perspective---from a numerical viewpoint

As we mentioned in section 3, even though there was a big leap in the average score of ACE as a whole, the individual scores varied from student to student.

In order to elucidate numerically how the students read books in extensive reading classes, we first calculated the average number of words in a book read by each student.

Then we examined the relationship of between the average number of words per book and the ACE scores. The objects of this examination are 65 second-year students who read between 14000 words and 17000 words in a year. The ACE score reaches the peak at a point where the average number of words per book is about 1000 as shown in the next figure:

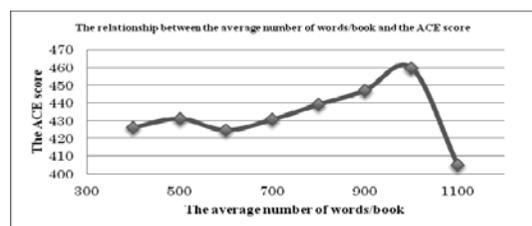


Fig. 5 The relationship between the average number of words/book and the ACE scores

We also analyzed the relationship between the average number of words per book and the number of students whose ACE scores increased by 30 points or more. The objects of the analysis are 118 students who took extensive reading classes for two years: school years 2011 and 2012. Among 118 students, there were as many as 100 students whose ACE scores in the school year 2012 increased by 30 points or more compared to those they got in the previous school year.

It has turned out that the majority of the 100 students read books with about 1000 words as illustrated in Fig. 6:

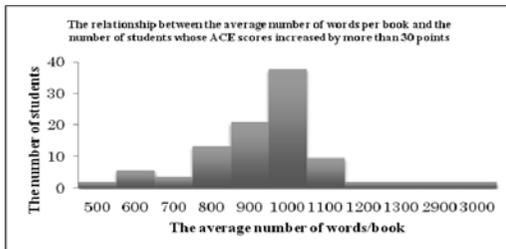


Fig. 6 The relationship between the average number of words per book and the number of students whose ACE scores increased by more than 30 points

We can draw a conclusion from the numerical analyses shown above that reading books with about 1000 words on average is the most effective in developing English proficiency of second-year students at Tokuyama Kosen.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper argued that extensive reading classes are effective not only in increasing the students' motivation for English but also in improving their English proficiency as a whole.

It also showed the fact that the change in their motivation differed from class to class and that the improvement in an English proficiency test was different individually.

Then we discussed the reasons why the differences arose and provided some clues for a suitable way of extensive reading from a student's perspective as well as from a teacher's perspective.

Based on the discussion, we argued that extensive reading classes should be controlled and disciplined to some extent by the teacher. Also, we numerically explicated that it is suitable for second-year students at Tokuyama Kosen to read books with about 1000 words on average so as to enhance their English proficiency.

## Notes

1. In September of 2010, for example, all the students who are in the fourth and higher grades took the TOEIC IP test. Their average score was 344 out of 990. This score is lower than that of students in colleges of technology (348), not to mention that of university students (441). Less than 30 % of the students achieved the target score, which TCT set in 2005. These facts show that our students are inferior in English proficiency.
2. ACE stands for Assessment of Communicative English. It is an English proficiency test whose questions vary from junior high school level to college entrance examination level.

## References

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