

A Micro Follow-up Survey: Did Extensive Reading Classes Lead to Continued Reading Books in English for Junior College Students?

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One problem which seems to be characteristic of many typical EFL reading classes is the tendency of students to stop reading books in English (RBE) once the class has finished. This is unfortunate since abundant research suggests that reading books in English could be a potent tool for achieving not only improved reading skills, but overall language abilities as well. (See J. Coady & T. Huckin; Elley, W. B. 1991; Hafiz, F. M. & Tudor, I. 1989; Krashen, S. 1993). The reason students may stop reading may have to do with being overwhelmed with reading material beyond their ability. As Fry (1991, p.8) observes, "Unless motivation is extremely high, the too-difficult (reading) material will cause a loss of comprehension...and an inclination to stop reading." In an attempt to keep students reading, and buoyed by Dickinson's (1995:174) comment that extensive reading (ER) leads to "learning success and enhanced motivation," our school began offering an extensive reading (ER) course three years ago, as an alternative to intensive reading (IR) for first year junior college students.

In the short term our ER courses did lead to increased motivation among our students toward both overall English study and RBE. According to surveys, (Burke, 2004), 100% of students felt their overall English skills had improved; felt motivated to continue studying English in general; and claimed they would continue to read books in English (RBE) in the future. The purpose of this paper is to follow-up on students' claims and answer the question: did our Extensive Reading Classes lead to continued reading books in English for these Junior College Students?

Early Surveys

In 2003, seventy-three ER students were interviewed at the beginning and end of their ER classes. The surveys were originally outlined in English, then translated into Japanese and administered directly on the first and last days of classes, requesting students not to write their names. Subjects were female junior college students, mostly English majors. The two 2003 surveys asked similar questions about student's attitude and motivation toward RBE, their progress in English and whether, as a result of their ER

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class(s), they planned to continue RBE in the future? The results of these surveys showed that all students (apparently on an ER “high”) intended to RBE in the future. A third follow-up survey was needed to confirm whether or not students would RBE once away from an academic setting.

Follow-up Survey

Two years later in 2006, a succinct follow-up survey was sent to all previously surveyed and now-graduated ER class students. The survey consisted of three questions: 1. whether or not they currently read books in English; 2. (if they answered) “yes” to question one, why they read books in English? 3. (If students answered “no” to question one, students were asked to choose a statement describing) why they did *not* RBE? Students had the option to choose only “yes” or “no.” The option for “Sometimes,” was not included because, according to Yamamoto (1981), “Japanese culture cherishes the spirit of harmony and complete rejections (i.e. “no” answers) are discouraged in Japanese culture.” Yamamoto’s observation reflects personal teaching experience: in nearly every class-improvement survey administered, Japanese students avoided choosing clear-cut negative answers. Consequently, results were always disingenuously middle-of-the-road even when control questions were clear-cut “yes” or no” answers.

The 2006 follow-up surveys were sent to students by regular mail with a stamped return envelope enclosed and a note allowing students to respond by email or phone if necessary. Forty nine students responded (N=49). Forty student responses were received by email and or phone and nine were received by regular mail.

Follow-up Survey Results

Question # 1

I now read books in English.

私は、これから英語の本を読みます

<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>
2	47

Comments: Question #1. Forty seven students said they did not RBE. Two students said they did RBE.

Question # 2

If you answered “yes” to question #1, do you agree or disagree with the statement

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below?

質問 1 で “はい” と答えた人は、以下の設問に、同意しますか、同意しませんか？

I now read books in English because I took an extensive reading course.

広域読書コースをとったので、私はこれから英語で本を読みます。

Agree	Disagree
強くそうだと思う (= 英語の勉強は大好き)	全然そうではない (= 英語の勉強はきらい)
2%	0%

Comments: Question #2. The two students who agreed attributed their continued RBE to having taken the ER class.

Question # 3

If you answered “No” to question #1, please choose or write the reasons you do NOT now read books in English.

もしあなたが、質問 1 で “いいえ” と答えたならば、英語で本は読まない理由を選ぶか、もしくは自分なりの答えを書いて下さい。

I do not read books in English because I have no time. 私は、英語の本は時間が無いので読みません。	I do not read books in English because I don't enjoy it. 私は、英語の本を読むのが楽しくないので読みません。	I do not read books in English because (write your own reason): 私は英語の本は読みません。 (各自の理由を書く)
41 (82%)	5 (11%)	3 (7%)

Comments: Question #3. Forty one students said the reason they did not RBE was *lack of time*. Five students said they *did not like RBE* and three students wrote answers (see below): (answers were edited for clarity)

Student #1: *“I don't read books in English because I want to concentrate on learning Chinese”*

Student #2: *“I don't read books in English because I have no reason to use English.”*

Student #3: *“I don't read books in English because it's too difficult.”*

Conclusion

This paper showed results of a follow-up survey asking seventy-three female junior college students who took our extensive reading courses, whether or not they continued reading books in English (RBE) 2-3 years after their extensive reading (ER) courses finished. The answers from the 47 responders were “No.” Judging from this limited survey,

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the ER classes we offered obviously did not motivate students to *take* time to *continue* to RBE. So, we are back to the core question of how to motivate students.

Motivation is, according to Ellis (1994:517), one of the most well researched areas of individual difference. Most research seems focused on the difference between integrative and instrumental motivation (Gardner, 1985); *integrative* coming from a desire to integrate with the target language (TL) community and *instrumental* from material rewards associated with TL learning success. In present day Japan, it seems most students do not really *need* material benefits and have lost interest or forgotten about the internationalization craze of yesteryears. Unfortunately, as Burden (2002) observes, there seems to be a foreign language *malaise* among EFL students, which is reflected by falling enrollment in EFL elective classes nationwide. Even among the students who do enroll, many now display, as McVeigh (2001, p.29) notes, an “apathetic attitude manifested by loss of academic interest in English classes.” In a nut-shell, what can EFL instructors do when students think they won’t need English for economic or social/communication reasons?

Given the current general gloom among Japanese college EFL students and teachers, maybe future studies should renew efforts to make EFL classes truly student-centered or relevant. However, we thought we were already doing that in our ER classes; students were encouraged to read only books they were interested in, with little or no assessment. And while students reported short-term enthusiasm for the course and for English, the enthusiasm did not carry forward. This dying enthusiasm for English in Japan may be something that “can’t be helped” and that instructors should just get used to: English study in Japan is going the way of foreign language study in America – popular among just a few students, but otherwise suffering a slow demise.

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Appendix

2003 focal question

Because of taking this ER course I will continue to read books in English in the future.

このクラスを取ったため、私はこれから英語の本を読み続けるだろう。

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Strongly Agree 強くそうだと思う (=英語の勉強は大好き)	Moderately Agree まあまあそうだと思う	Slightly Agree 少しそうだと思う	Neutral どちらともいえ ない	Slightly Disagree ほとんどそうではない	Moderately Disagree あまりそうではない	Strongly Disagree 全然そうではない (=英語の勉強は きらい)
0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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2006 follow-up questions

Question # 1

I now read books in English.

私は、これから英語の本を読みます。

<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>
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Question # 2

If you answered “yes” to #1, do you agree, disagree, or are unsure with the statement below?

質問 1 で “はい” と答えた人は、以下の設問に、同意しますか、同意しませんか、または、どちらともいえませんか？

I now read books in English because of having taken an extensive reading course.

広域読書コースをとったので、私はこれから英語で本を読みます。

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Strongly Agree 強くそうだと思う (=英語の勉強は 大好き)	Moderately Agree まあまあそうだと 思う	Slightly Agree 少しそうだと思う	Neutral どちらともいえ ない	Slightly Disagree ほとんどそうでは ない	Moderately Disagree あまりそうでは ない	Strongly Disagree 全然そうではない (=英語の勉強は きらい)
0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%