

A Micro-Survey: Does Extensive Reading Improve Motivation and Lead to Continued L2 Reading Among Junior College Students?

Steven Burke

Three semesters have passed since being assigned to teach reading to a class of junior college students. I was apprehensive at first because not only was it my first experience teaching reading, but I had also heard and read from students, teachers and published sources (Waring, 2000) that typical reading courses for Japanese college students often failed. Typical reading courses often consisted of students being required to read a teacher-selected book, which was usually beyond the student's reading ability. Course failure meant that by and large, students did not make progress in their English reading skills (or any other L2 skill for that matter), and often lost enthusiasm for future reading in English. Losing motivation to read in English seemed the most serious problem, because without reading, as Krashen (1993) notes, students would be losing a valuable tool for English improvement. After researching various reading methods, an extensive reading method was settled on. According to sources, this process looked like it might have a good chance to encourage students to read books in English (RBE) now and into the future. Hence, this study will attempt to answer the following question: Does extensive reading improve motivation and lead to continued RBE among my junior college students?

Why Extensive Reading?

While looking at different reading methods, two approaches, extensive reading (ER) and intensive reading (IR) seemed most often discussed. The following are brief descriptions of the two approaches. To start, the chart below, from "Introducing Extensive Reading" by Roberta Welch (2001), offers a quick, explicit depiction of the differences between intensive and extensive reading:

Extensive	READING	Intensive
General understanding and enjoyment	PURPOSE	Language study
Easy (graded readers)	LEVEL	Often difficult (material for native speakers)
A lot	AMOUNT	Not much
Fast and fluently	SPEED	Slow

Steven Burke

Palmer (1968) used the term extensive reading (ER) to separate it from intensive reading, as IR usually refers to careful reading (or translation) of more difficult foreign language texts, while ER means to read a wide variety of print and lots of it. ER Readers are more concerned with the meaning of the text than the meaning of individual words or sentences. In contrast, IR's goals are a complete and detailed understanding of the text, individual words and individual words or sentences. Nation (1997) noted that the skills being practiced between the two approaches contrasted sharply. The IR approach practiced skills such as distinguishing the main idea of a text from the detail, finding pronoun referents, or guessing the meaning of unknown words. While the ER approach practiced skills associated with Automaticity or "bottom-up" (word recognition) processes. Nation asserts that these skills, upon which comprehension depends, is a consequence of practice and that no matter how sophisticated the teaching professional's understanding of and ability to teach the reading process, until students read in quantity, they will not become fluent readers.

Beyond becoming fluent readers, there is copious research to support that ER is a powerful tool for comprehensible input and achieving overall language development goals. (J. Coady & T. Huckin; Elley, W. B. 1991; Hafiz, F. M. & Tudor, I. 1989; Krashen, S. 1993). Additionally, a study by Huang and van Naerssen (1987) looked at factors effecting L2 proficiency, and found that reading outside class was an important predictor of oral communicative ability. Gradman and Hanania (1991) found that out-of-class reading was the most important direct contributor to TOEFL test performance. Green and Oxford (1995) in a study of the effect of learning strategies on language proficiency found that reading for pleasure was strongly related to proficiency. Clearly then, students should develop a positive attitude toward second language reading and a desire to continue L2 reading after their formal education ends to improve overall L2 proficiency.

In contrast, Beatrice Dupuy, Lucy Tse and Tom Cook (1996), reported that an outcome of traditional, intensive approaches to foreign language reading instruction was that students ended-up not actually reading very much. Students also were found to view reading as a "chore" and thus get little pleasure in the small amount of reading they did do.

After reviewing the research, ER became the method of choice that would hopefully stimulate my students to read books in English (RBE) now and into the future.

What Texts to Use

The "how-to-teach" decided, next to be addressed was what texts should be used for an ER class. According to Krashen (2004), students should be able to spend a lot of time reading books that are comprehensible and interesting to them. After surveying various graded reader libraries on the market, the Oxford Bookworm Series was chosen because it had an ample

selection of potentially student-relevant titles that could appeal to students. The publisher also provided some teacher-support materials, making this series a good choice for greenhorn reading teachers like myself.

Method

Students were asked to respond to two questionnaires (see appendix), one at the beginning of the semester course and one at the end. This was done over two semesters, with two groups of 20 students.

Subjects: Students were 40 female junior college students. All were English majors. In the future, the size of this survey could be increased by submitting questionnaires to other reading classes' here and at other institutions.

Materials: The survey consisted of 2 short questionnaires; a pre-course questionnaire of 5 questions and the post-course questionnaire of 6 questions.

Procedure: In preparing the questionnaires, a number of students were interviewed to assure clarity. The survey was originally outlined in English, and then translated into Japanese. The surveys were administered directly on the first and last days of classes of two semesters, requesting students not to write their names.

Analysis: Responses to the surveys were used for comparison and analysis of student's feelings toward ER before and after taking the class.

Results

Question #1

This pre-course question asked students if they agreed with the statement that they liked studying English. 45% strongly agreed; 35% moderately agreed; 9% slightly agreed; 7% were neutral; 4%slightly disagreed; 0% moderately disagreed; 0% strongly disagreed.

1. In general, I like studying English. 全般的に私は英語の勉強が好きである。

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)
45%	35%	9%	7%	40%	0%	0%

Steven Burke

The post-course survey showed some differences:

1. After taking this reading course I still like studying English.

このクラスを取り終えた後でも、私はまだ英語の勉強が好きです。

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)
47%	50%	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%

47% strongly agreed; 50% moderately agreed; 2% slightly agreed; 1% was neutral; 0%slightly disagreed; 0% moderately disagreed; 0% strongly disagreed. Question #1 summary: these results indicate that students who were not “enthusiastic readers” before the course had changed their feelings and had begun to like reading books in English (RBE) more after taking this course.

Question #2

Pre-course question #2 sought to find out what students’ goals were for this ER class. 45% chose A - improve their English reading. 37% chose B - enjoy reading books in English (RBE); and 18% chose C - improve their overall English skills. (reading, writing, listening, speaking) skills. Nobody chose D, E, F, or G.

2. I hope to achieve one of the following goals from this class. (Choose the ONE best answer):

この授業を通して達成したい自分の目標(ゴール)は次の一つである(あてはまるものを一つだけ選ぶこと)。

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
To improve my English reading skills. 英語の読解力を伸ばすこと	To enjoy reading books in English 英語の本を読む楽しさを味わうこと	To improve my overall English skills. (Reading, writing, listening, speaking) 英語力全般を伸ばすこと(読む・書く・話す・聞く)	To improve my English speaking skills. 英語のスピーキング力を伸ばすこと	To improve my sleeping skills 居眠りの力を伸ばすこと	I have no goals. 特に目標はない	I am taking this class because I have to. このクラスは必修なので取っただけだ
45%	37%	18%	0%	0%	0%	0%

The post-class question sought to find out if students had met their goals.

2. I feel I achieved the goals I had wanted to in this class.

このクラスが終了して、自分が求めていたゴールに達成したと思う。

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)
32%	30%	13%	10%	9%	6%	0%

Question #2 summary: the percentage of students who felt they had met their goals were as follows: 32% chose A – strongly agreed. 30% chose B – moderately agreed. 13% chose C – slightly agreed. 10% chose D – neutral. 9% chose E – slightly disagreed. 6% chose F – moderately disagreed. 0% chose G – strongly disagree. 75% of the students felt they met their goals in this class.

Question #3

Pre-class question #3 sought to find out if students currently read books in English for any other reason besides a school or outside requirement.

3. Now, I only read English books because they are required for my classes.

現在、このクラスで必要なので英語の本を読みます。

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)
42%	21%	16%	12%	5%	2%	0%

42% strongly agreed; 21% moderately agreed; 16% slightly agreed; 12% were neutral; 5% slightly disagreed; 2% moderately disagreed; 0% strongly disagreed. A clear majority (80%) were reading books in English due to outside pressure and not for pleasure.

The post-class survey sought to find out if student’s feelings toward RBE had changed as a result of taking the course.

3. Now that this class is finished, I want to read English books in my free time because reading in English is enjoyable.

このリーディングのクラスを取る前に比べて、今は、時間があれば英語の本を読むのは楽しいのもっと読みたいと思う。

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)
22%	31%	26%	9%	6%	5%	0%

22% strongly agreed; 31% moderately agreed; 26% slightly agreed; 9% were neutral; 6% slightly disagreed; 5% moderately disagreed; 0% strongly disagreed.

Question #3 summary: 79% of students marked in the “agree” categories indicating that, post course, they were interested in RBE for pleasure and not because of any academic requirement.

Steven Burke

Question #4

Pre-class question #4 asked students if they thought RBE improved their *reading* in English ability.

4. I think reading English books improves my reading English ability.

英語の本を読む事は、自分の英語の読解力の上達に役立つと思う。

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)
30%	27%	19%	18%	4%	2%	0%

30% strongly agreed; 27% moderately agreed; 19% slightly agreed; 18% were neutral; 4% slightly disagreed; 2% moderately disagreed; 0% strongly disagreed.

The post-class question asked if students might continue RBE because they felt it improves their *reading* ability. (While not asked directly, the implication is that students will continue RBE because of experiencing reading improvement as a result of taking this course).

4. In the future, I will continue to read English books because I think it improves my English reading ability.

英語の読解力が向上すると思うので、これからも英語の本を読み続けるつもりだ。

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)
59%	36%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%

59% strongly agreed; 36% moderately agreed; 5% slightly agreed; 0% were neutral; 0% slightly disagreed; 0% moderately disagreed; 0% strongly disagreed.

Question #4 summary: the results show that a majority of students' felt RBE helped their *reading* English skills and would therefore continue RBE in the future. One interpretation of these results, while generally encouraging, could indicate that RBE might be done solely to improve their English reading, and not for pleasure – the opposite of what this course was hoping to achieve.

Question #5

This pre-course question sought to find out if students thought RBE improves their *overall* English ability.

5. I think reading English books improves my overall English ability.

英語の本を読む事は、自分の全体的な英語の上達に役立つと思う。

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)
9%	15%	23%	45%	7%	0%	0%

9% strongly agreed; 15% moderately agreed; 23% slightly agreed; 45% were neutral; 7% slightly disagreed; 0% moderately disagreed; 0% strongly disagreed.

Post-class question #5 was similar to the pre-course question however with an added part to the question asking about students' future plans for reading.

5. In the future, I will continue to read English books because I think it improves my overall English ability.

英語の全般的な力が向上すると思うので、これからも英語の本を読み続けるつもりだ。

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)
47%	33%	17%	3%	0%	0%	0%

47% strongly agreed; 33% moderately agreed; 17% slightly agreed; 3% were neutral; 0% slightly disagreed; 0% moderately disagreed; 0% strongly disagreed.

Question #5 summary: results showed overwhelmingly, that students felt that RBE had helped them improve their *overall* English ability.

Question # 6

This question was asked at course-end to try to gauge students' class satisfaction.

6. I enjoyed this class. このクラスは楽しかった。

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)
63%	16%	13%	7%	1%	0%	0%

Steven Burke

63% strongly agreed; 16% moderately agreed; 13% slightly agreed; 4% were neutral; 1% slightly disagreed; 0% moderately disagreed; 0% strongly disagreed.

Question #6 summary: These results indicate that most students enjoyed the course. This is good news because, common sense tells us that students do better in a class if they like it. What needs to be discussed more deeply however, is whether students liked the course because of its content or its “looseness.” (Looseness refers to students’ large amount of freedom with which they were encouraged to use reading, at their own pace, with little instructor interference).

Conclusion

This study tried to find out if (this) extensive reading course improved motivation and will lead to continued reading books in English (RBE). Based on analysis of the questionnaire’s results, the following conclusions seem reasonable:

1. Students who were not enthusiastic English book readers before the course, increased their enthusiasm for RBE after taking the course.
2. The number of students who said they would RBE because it was enjoyable and not because of any school or outside requirement, increased.
3. There was an increase in the number of students who felt they would continue to RBE because it helped them improve their English *reading* ability.
4. There was an increase in the feeling among students that RBE helped them improve their *overall* English ability.
5. Most students felt they had met their pre-course goals.
6. A majority of students enjoyed the course. (What needs follow-up discussion however, is why, exactly, students liked the course. As indicated above in question # 6 was it genuine interest in RBE or was it because of the “looseness” of the course. ¹⁾

The results of this survey suggest that extensive reading improves motivation and leads to continued RBE among this select group of junior college students. Because the students in this survey are from only one private junior college, the external validity of the study is limited. Further research in this area would benefit from a wider subject selection conducted over a larger geographical area.

¹ In the second semester of this course, student’s RBE performance dropped significantly with fewer and less difficult texts being read. Until further research proves otherwise, I am attributing this drop-off in performance to too much “freedom” in the class, and will adjust accordingly for future ER classes.

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Steven Burke

Appendix

Questionnaire #1 given to students BEFORE the course.

1. In general, I like studying English. 全般的に私は英語の勉強が好きである。

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)
45%	35%	9%	70%	40%	0%	0%

2. I hope to achieve one of the following goals from this class. (Choose the ONE best answer):

この授業を通して達成したい自分の目標(ゴール)は次の一つである(あてはまるもの一つだけ選ぶこと)。

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
To improve my English reading skills. 英語の読解力を伸ばすこと	To enjoy reading books in English 英語の本を読む楽しさを味わうこと	To improve my overall English skills. (Reading, writing, listening, speaking) 英語力全般を伸ばすこと(読む・書く・話す・聞く)	To improve my English speaking skills. 英語のスピーキング力を伸ばすこと	To improve my sleeping skills 居眠りの力を伸ばすこと	I have no goals. 特に目標はない	I am taking this class because I have to. このクラスは必修なので取っただけだ
A-45%	B-37%	C-18%	D-0%	E-0%	F-0%	G-0%

3. Now, I only read English books because they are required for my classes.

現在、このクラスで必要なので英語の本を読みます。

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)
42%	21%	16%	12%	5%	2%	0%

4. I think reading English books improves my reading English ability.

英語の本を読む事は、自分の英語の読解力の上達に役立つと思う。

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)
10%	17%	28%	39%	4%	2%	0%

5. I think reading English books improves my overall English ability.

英語の本を読む事は、自分の全体的な英語の上達に役立つと思う。

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)
9%	15%	23%	45%	7%	0%	0%

Questionnaire #2 given to students AFTER the course

1. After taking this reading course I still like studying English. このクラスを取り終えた後でも、私はまだ英語の勉強が好きです。

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)
47%	50%	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%

2. I feel I achieved the goals I had wanted to in this class. このクラスが終了して、自分が求めていたゴールに達成したと思う。

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)
A-32%	B-30%	C-13%	D-10%	E-9%	F-6%	G-0%

3. Now that this class is finished, I want to read English books in my free time because reading in English is enjoyable.

このリーディングのクラスを取る前に比べて、今は、時間があれば英語の本を読むのは楽しいのもっと読みたいと思う。

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)
22%	31%	26%	9%	6%	5%	0%

4. In the future, I will continue to read English books because I think it improves my English reading ability.

英語の読解力が向上すると思うので、これからも英語の本を読み続けるつもりだ。

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)
38%	29%	19%	14%	0%	0%	0%

5. In the future, I will continue to read English books because I think it improves my overall English ability.

英語の全般的な力が向上すると思うので、これからも英語の本を読み続けるつもりだ。

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)
47%	33%	17%	3%	0%	0%	0%

6. I enjoyed this class. このクラスは楽しかった。

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)
63%	16%	13%	8%	0%	0%	0%