

Extensive Reading: A Foundation for Active Learning

David J. Grant*

要 旨

外国語の授業内において、M-Readerを用いた多読トレーニングを実践することで、教育目標を十分に達成しつつ、学生が主体的に学ぶ環境を作ることが出来る。また、多読トレーニングを実践することで、学習者は理解できる範囲のインプット (comprehensible input) を十分に受け、学ぶことへの自律性を確立していくのである。そして、この活動において、学生は何を読むかを自ら選択するため、学びは主体的なものとなり、確実に目標を達成することになる。学習者は多読トレーニングを行うことによって、主体的に学ぶことに対する積極的な態度を養いながら、読む、聞く、書く、話すの4技能を高め、さらに批判的思考力を身に付けることが出来る。本稿は、このような多読トレーニングをはじめとした **comprehensible input** についての理論を概観し、さらに高知工業高等専門学校における英語の授業内で実践した多読トレーニングについての実践報告をするものである。また、今後の多読トレーニングに基づいたさらなる研究への基盤を与えるものである。

Abstract

Extensive reading (ER) using MReader provides a solid foundation for a student-centered, active learning environment while meeting or exceeding educational objectives. ER provides essential comprehensible input while fostering learner autonomy. It gives facilitators the freedom to allow student choice over content without risking missed objectives. It improves reading, listening, writing, speaking and critical thinking skills while improving attitude and fostering a better learner understanding of what active learning actually is. This paper provides a brief introduction to the theory and practice of ER through MReader in large four skills courses at National Institute of Technology, Kochi College and provides a basis for further study.

Keywords : active learning, comprehensible input, critical thinking, EFL, extensive reading, learner autonomy, listening, motivation, speaking, student-centered learning, writing

1. Introduction

Establishing effective student-centered active learning practices at schools similar to National Institute of Technology presents a number of challenges for the facilitator. Classes are large, having from 40-50 students. Students are generally not accustomed to student-centered learning. Learners are largely extrinsically motivated by exams and grades. Promoting intrinsic motivation through immediate feedback is a considerable

*National Institute of Technology, Kochi College grant@ge.kochi-ct.ac.jp

challenge. Students are easily distracted from the tasks at hand and require individual support from the teacher. Comprehensible input is limited to scarce class time and insufficient reading and listening materials. All of these problems have been addressed by applying ER (extensive reading) using MReader as the foundation for fully engaged, student-centered courses.

Helping students become fully engaged in learning and encouraging them to become independent learners is a benefit of extensive reading when combined with the ability to provide immediate feedback using reading portfolios and leader lists via MReader. MReader enables individual feedback sessions and peer assessment even for large groups of students. When combined with other activities, ER using MReader provides a constant stream of comprehensible input, a source of meaningful conversation topics, a basis for critical thinking tasks, and helps students become intrinsically motivated, autonomous learners.

Facilitating large active learning classes of students unfamiliar with student-centered learning presents a number of challenges. This includes keeping students constantly engaged during class and providing immediate feedback enabling them to become intrinsically motivated. A wide variety of classroom, group and individual activities can be going on in the class at one time, providing variety while freeing the facilitator to work with one group or one student at a time. All students are constantly engaged in various tasks while completing reading goals and interacting with the facilitator using the target language. Conversation practice becomes natural, enabling learners to talk about things important to them, rather than parroting rote, scripted conversations. Meeting or exceeding curriculum objectives is essential for any successful program. In order to achieve this in a measurable way, proven educational theory needs to be put into practice. The comprehensible input theory has been thoroughly researched and proven to be the primary means of language acquisition. Extensive reading using graded readers with MReader is an effective, systematized, measurable means of applying the comprehensible input theory and insuring students' language acquisition. Using ER as a basis for courses allows facilitators considerable freedom to engage students directly in conversation and critical thinking tasks.

2. Background

Beginning in 2006, graded readers were gradually purchased using incremental funds from annual research budgets and several other grants in order to build an extensive reading library of 2478 books, sufficient for the 561 students currently using the system. This includes all current students in years 1, 2, 3, 6 and 7.

In 2009, students in years 6 and 7 took the Edinburgh Project on Extensive Reading Placement Test as a pretest and posttest. Students in both of these years have no other English instruction, therefore gains made can be inferred to have come primarily from coursework done in Advanced English courses, the foundation of which was ER. Unsurprisingly, student test improvement mirrored progress using Moodle Reader, the predecessor to MReader.

Over the following years, more books were purchased and students were added as books became available, culminating in 2015, making at least three years of extensive reading available to all new Social Design students.

3. Theory

3.1 Extensive reading and the comprehensible input theory

The body of language learning literature beginning with Handchin's 1919 article, *Individual differences and supervised study* (Handshin 1919) continuing through Krashen's establishment of the comprehensible input theory in 1977 (Krashen 1981) through McLean's recent work regarding increasing reading rates (McLean 2017), has consistently supported and conclusively proven ER to be an effective means of language acquisition and of improving learner autonomy. Although there has been discussion of other methods of acquisition (Krashen 1998), all evidence points to other methods being, at best, supplementary to comprehensible input (Mason 1997). Over the last 20 years, as extensive reading has gained greater acceptance in ESL/EFL programs, copious amounts of evidence point towards its efficacy. It is therefore essential for any language program to provide adequate amounts of comprehensible input. Extensive reading through the use of graded readers has proven to be a practical, efficient and measurable means to deliver comprehensible input to EFL students.

Notwithstanding the abundant and increasing amount of conclusive quantitative evidence supporting extensive reading as an essential component of foreign language acquisition, some skepticism remains about improving skills other than reading. Numerous studies have shown extensive reading has clearly shown improvement in L2 reading ability, reading speed, attitude, vocabulary, listening, speaking, writing and spelling (Day 1998). In addition to the references supporting these claims provided by Day and Bamford in *Extensive Reading in the Second Language Classroom* considerable evidence has been reported since 1998, for example: TOEFL improvement (Mason 2006), writing performance (Sakurai 2017), and reading rates (McLean 2017).

3.2 Improving motivation and developing learner autonomy

As Dörnyei states in *Motivational Strategies in the Language Classroom*, creating learner autonomy is important in order to maintain and protect learner motivation (Dörnyei 2001). Allowing student choice over as many aspects of their learning as possible is key to developing learner autonomy. Students at Kochi Kosen have had very limited choice over any aspect of their education. Predictably, this has led to a very pronounced lack of learner autonomy. Not only does ER give learners choice over what books they read, it frees the teacher to allow learners further choice over other materials, projects and group work, while insuring learners meet or exceed educational objectives. Allowing learners choice over materials and projects, and setting and meeting objective goals, gives students responsibility for their own learning.

4. Practice

4.1 MReader: a reading portfolio (Fig. 1)

MReader is a web based application that has over 4,500 quizzes for almost all graded readers and many youth literature titles available from numerous publishers. Learners create a portfolio of the books they have read by taking a quiz on that book. The system is designed to discourage cheating while allowing students to record their progress by taking short quizzes. After reading a book and passing the quiz, the book cover appears and the number of words is recorded. This allows for students' motivation and autonomy to grow by providing immediate feedback.

Since extensive reading has been proven to be effective developing various L2 skills, it can be used as the foundation for student-centered active learning. Learners gain autonomy while being exposed to constant comprehensible input by receiving immediate feedback, reaching clear goals and understanding how they compare to other students in their class, school and around the world. Because students are constantly striving to achieve their reading goals, idle time while working on other tasks is minimized. The facilitator is freed to work with individual groups and students, while the rest of the class is kept engaged in learning. Keeping large classes constantly engaged while doing group tasks is often a problem. Since students are required to meet



Figure 1. Typical MReader Student Portfolio

individual goals using MReader, they are kept engaged while other students are working on other tasks. It is simple for the facilitator to keep track of student progress and provide support and encouragement, keeping all students engaged in learning as much as possible. ER using MReader provides the basic knowledge and structure upon which numerous writing, listening, speaking and critical thinking tasks and projects can be built.

4.2 Understanding and helping individual learners

When teaching large numbers of students with diverse abilities and motivations, it is important to understand each learner in order to help them develop skills and motivation. Using MReader enables the teacher to have a clear picture of each student's progress, interests and motivations. This enables the teacher to have meaningful dialog with each student about their progress, interests and lives.

Some students are so deeply entrenched in extrinsic motivation, they are not interested in truly improving their skills, they are only interested in passing the course. After several months of using MReader, patterns emerge clearly exposing students who are not engaged with their reading. Most often, these are the same students not engaged in any of their studies. Providing direct, genial support for these students enables many of them to become engaged, autonomous learners capable of fully participating in active learning tasks.

In traditional extensive reading based courses, such as those outlined in *Extensive Reading in the Second Language Classroom* (Day 1998) and *The E.P.E.R. Guide to Organising Programmes of Extensive Reading* (E.P.E.R. 1992), teacher interaction and feedback is essential. Both of these references are directed primarily to an audience of teachers with 25 or so, intrinsically motivated students. However teachers at National Institute of Technology colleges are often responsible for over 300 largely extrinsically motivated students. MReader facilitates meaningful individualized interaction and assessment of such large groups of students.

4.3 Assessment

MReader provides useful information about student progress on its own, however Kochi Kosen requires quarterly exams demonstrating mastery of specific educational objectives. In the beginning, developing exams for this situation is a daunting task. However as the exam writer becomes familiar with CEFR, (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, the current Japan Ministry of Education standard) exam question schema are easily defined, resulting in accurate testing. Although intensive testing goes against accepted active learning practice, it does have benefits. Students have a transparent concept of what standards based progress they need to achieve. Cheating is discouraged because students understand that if they do not meet course objectives, they will not receive credit. Drawbacks to testing include student exam stress and underperformance on exams due to unfamiliarity of standards based examinations and exam anxiety.

5. Conclusion

Using extensive reading via MReader provides a foundation for improving L2 proficiency while encouraging learner autonomy and an optimized atmosphere for student-centered active learning. Using MReader, learners become accustomed to student-centered learning through immediate feedback, clear goals, peer support and facilitator interaction. They become fully engaged in their studies and become more intrinsically motivated. A wide variety of group tasks and student projects are made more productive by enabling the instructor to directly address group and individual needs. Conversation practice becomes

meaningful, being directly connected to learners' lives and interests in contrast to rote learning from scripted conversations.

Considering the skepticism and administrative reluctance still prevalent even after over 100 years of evidence supporting ER and the comprehensible input theory, further study to more thoroughly document ER efficacy and motivational benefits is required. This paper outlines some of the background required to thoughtfully pursue these studies.

References

- Bell, T. (1998). Extensive Reading: Why? and How? *The Internet TESL Journal*, *IV*(12).
- Cheetham, C., Harper, A., Elliott, M., & Ito, M. (2016). Assessing Student Attitudes Toward Graded Readers, MReader and the MReader Challenge. *The Reading Matrix*, *16*(2).
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow : the psychology of optimal experience* (1st ed.). New York: Harper & Row.
- Day, R. R., & Bamford, J. (1998). *Extensive reading in the second language classroom*. Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Dörnyei, Z. n. (2001). *Motivational Strategies in the Language Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Handchin, C. H. (1919). Individual differences and supervised study. *The Modern Language Journal*, *3*(4), 158-173.
- Krashen, S. (1998). Comprehensible Output. *System*, *26*(1), 175-182.
- Krashen, S. D. (1981). *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*: Pergamon Press Inc.
- Lee, J., Schallert, D. L., & Kim, E. (2015). Effects of extensive Reading and translation activities on grammar knowledge and attitudes for EFL students. *System*, *52*(1), 38-50.
- Mason, B. (2006). Free Voluntary Reading and Autonomy in Second Language Acquisition: Improving TOEFL Scores from Reading Alone. *International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, *2*(1), 2-5.
- Mason, B., & Krashen, S. (1997). Extensive Reading in English as a Foreign Language. *System*, *25*(1), 91-102.
- McLean, S., & Rouault, G. (2017). The effectiveness and efficiency of extensive reading at developing reading rates. *System*, *70*(1), 92-106.
- E. P. E. R. Edinburgh Project on Extensive Reading (1992). *The E.P.E.R. Guide to Organising Programmes of Extensive Reading*. Edinburgh: Institute for Applied Language Studies, University of Edinburgh.
- Ro, E. (2016). Exploring teachers' practices and students' perceptions of the extensive reading approach in EAP reading classes. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *22*(1), 32-41.
- Robb, T. (2015). Quizzes--A sin against the sixth commandment? In defense of MReader. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, *27*(1), 146-151.
- Sakurai, N. (2017). The Relationship between the Amount of Extensive Reading and the Writing Performance. *The Reading Matrix*, *17*(2), 142-164.
- Suk, N. (2015). *Impact of Extensive Reading in a Korean EFL University Setting: A Mixed Methods Study*. (Doctor of Philosophy in Applied Linguistics), Northern Arizona University, Ann Arbor, MI. (3708188)
- Yamashita, J. (2008). Extensive reading and the development of different aspects of L2 proficiency. *System*, *36*(1), 661-672.