

Investigating Students' Reading Motivation through Interviews

個人面接を通して見た多読への動機付け

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本研究は、多読授業における英語での読書の動機付けを、個人面接を行うことにより調査・分析したものである。高校2年生の多読授業受講者219名のうち、約3分の1(81名)の被験者に個人面接を実施したところ、別途行ったアンケート調査では得られなかった、被験者の多様な動機付けがみられた。その分析結果から、多読に積極的に取り組んだ生徒の多くは、英語の本を読破することに達成感を覚え、英語に自信を持つようになり、それがより大きな動機付けとなって、より読書に取り組んだことが判明した。また余り英語で読書をしなかった生徒には、様々な要因が認められた。

Introduction

In order to motivate students to learn English, teachers must encourage them to study and to continue studying. My greatest concern as an English teacher is how to motivate my students to study English. This concern is based on a number of problems that can hinder Japanese high school students from developing overall English competence such as limited contact with the target language community, university entrance examinations and difficult reading materials that most high schools have adopted (Takase, 2002, 2003).

In order to motivate students to actively study English and develop their reading skills by compensating for their insufficient input in English, and at the same time, with the hope that students would enjoy reading and studying English, I implemented an extensive reading program for second year high school students. When the students encountered this new reading strategy, which included choosing their own books, reading in large quantity without translating them into Japanese, most students showed a great appetite for reading English. However, as the program proceeded, a great disparity in the amount of English the students read could be observed. Emphasizing repeatedly the importance and effectiveness of extensive reading did not encourage all the participants of this study to read a large quantity of English. The amount of English that they read during the experiments varied from student to student (Takase, 1998; 2001; 2002; 2003). Some students read in a large quantity, whereas others showed little or hardly any interest

in reading English books, and some others suddenly gained or lost interest in the middle of the treatment. What factors motivated some students to read more than others and maintain their motivation throughout the year?

Motivation in Second or Foreign Language Learning

The concept of motivation in second or foreign language learning was first introduced by Gardner and Lambert in 1959. They found motivational factors as well as linguistic aptitude that were related to language learning. Gardner and Lambert (1972) identified two key orientations: integrative orientation and instrumental orientation as motivational factors in second language learning. Integrative orientation associates desire to learn for communication, interaction, and possible identification with the L2 group, whereas instrumental orientation associates desire for more practical purposes such as financial gain, employment, or good grades. Gardner and his associates focused on socio-educational aspects of L2 motivation, and their model dominated the field for the following 30 years (e.g., Gardner, 1985; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Gardner & Smythe, 1975).

However, this social-educational model and its dichotomous distinction of motivational factors were challenged by a number of researchers and practitioners (e.g., Clément & Kruidenier, 1985; Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dörnyei, 1990; 1994; Oxford & Shearin, 1994). Pointing out the differences between ESL and EFL situation, Dörnyei (1990) stressed the importance of the social context and the environment in which learning takes place. In a similar vein, Brown, Robson, and Rosenkjar (2001) place importance on examining a specific population of students in order to explore their motivation as well as other characteristics such as personality, anxiety, and learning strategies.

Considering that most Japanese EFL learners study English in a context in which they have very little substantial contact with members of the L2 community outside of the classroom, I assumed that Gardner and his associates' social-educational model would not be applicable to most English learners in Japan. Moreover, the goal of studying English for the majority of high school students is to pass a university entrance examination, an expectation placed on them by the society as a whole, including their parents and teachers. In this kind of situation, Dörnyei's framework (Dörnyei, 1990; 1994a; 1996) of L2 motivation, which emphasizes the importance of social context and the learning environment, might be more applicable to my students.

The Concept of Extensive Reading

Extensive reading is said to be one of the most effective strategies for motivating L2 learners to study and develop their reading skills and vocabulary. Many researchers have suggested the necessity of including intensive and extensive reading in foreign language curriculum (e.g., Carrell & Carson, 1997; Day & Bamford, 1998), and a large number of studies investigating the effectiveness of extensive reading have been conducted in ESL and EFL contexts (e.g., Cho & Krashen, 1994; Elley & Mangubhai, 1981; Hafiz & Tudor, 1989; Mason & Krashen, 1997; Robb & Susser, 1989; Suzuki, 1996). They have found a positive effect on attitudes toward English, as well as gains in reading proficiency. They have also shown how students became more eager readers after becoming involved in extensive reading.

To my knowledge, there have been very few studies on motivation toward L2 reading or the relationship between L1 and L2 reading. Mori (1999a; 2002) was the first to conduct an empirical study investigating Japanese college students' motivation to read in English when she looked at motivation toward the specific task of extensive reading. Mori found results similar to those reported in Takase's studies (2001; 2002; 2003) with high school students. Namely, *Intrinsic Motivation toward Reading English* (*Intrinsic Value of Reading* in Mori's study), and *Instrumental Motivation* (*Extrinsic Utility Value of Reading* in Mori's). The notable difference was *Exam-related Extrinsic Motivation*, which was not found in Mori's research, because her participants had already successfully passed a university entrance examination. In contrast, the participants in Takase's studies (1998; 2001; 2002; 2003) were expecting to take the entrance examination within a year and a half. This sheds some light on the role of university entrance examinations in forming high school students' motivation for reading English books.

The current study, a subcomponent of a larger study (Takase, 2003), was conducted to investigate the effect of students reading behaviors in their L1 and their response to the extensive reading program introduced into their high school English class. In addition, my intent was to look at parental and family influences on reading and how the students felt the extensive reading program affected their studies for entrance examinations. While some of these questions were addressed in pre- and post-questionnaires in the larger study, the interview data reported below were also held with 81 students out of 219 participants in extensive reading over a three-year period to examine the areas of interest outlined above.

Methods

Participants

The participants of the extensive reading program were 219 second-year students aged 16 to 17 at a private girls' Christian high school. They were from seven intact classes from three consecutive years. They had been placed in Course II, an advanced course, based on their high school entrance examination scores. Most of them had attended public junior high schools, and had had at least three years of formal English education in junior high school and one year at this senior high school before the extensive reading program started. In Course II classes, class size is generally smaller than Course I classes, the regular course, and students there have more opportunities to have contact with native speakers of English in the classroom than students in the regular classes or in public schools. They had nine English classes a week: three English II classes (intensive reading or *yakudoku* reading), two English Reading classes (extensive reading), two English composition classes (grammar, translation, and composition), and two oral communication classes. Extensive reading was implemented in the English Reading classes, where I taught. The participants' reading proficiency ranged from beginner to high intermediate levels based on the reading section of the Secondary Level English Proficiency (SLEP) test.

For this current study, approximately one-third of the above mentioned participants were selected from three different reading levels (in terms of number of words read) in each year of the study. Combining participants by the amount that they read across the three years, three groups were formed: Group 1 (30 students) which read the most, Group 2 (24 students) which was representative of students who read an average amount, and Group 3 (27 students) which read the least. Across the three years, students in Group 1 read an average of 110, 440 words, Group 2 read 67,760 words, and Group 3 read 36,760 words on average. The number of Japanese books participants of Group 1, 2, and 3 read during the experimental year was 14, 9, and 8, respectively.

Materials and Procedure

The duration of each extensive reading treatment was one academic year (approximately eleven months), including summer and winter vacations. The one-year English Reading class consisted of 60 45-minute lessons. At the beginning of this study, a total of approximately 500 books (200-1,800 headwords) were used for the extensive reading program, and about 200 books, some of which were new and others were multiple copies of popular books, were purchased and added to the school library every year, which came up to approximately 900 at the end of this

study. They included graded readers published by Cambridge, Heinemann, Longman, Oxford, and Penguin, and easy-reading books from some Japanese publishing companies. Approximately 100 books were kept in each classroom so that participants were able to have access to the books at any time, and the rest of the books were kept in the school library. Participants were able to choose books either in the classroom or in the library. The books in the school library were kept on open shelves and organized alphabetically by publishers' names and arranged according to levels.

The reading section of the SLEP test was administered as a pre-test at the beginning of the treatment in order to identify the participants' reading proficiency level and as the post-test in order to investigate their perceived gains in their reading proficiency.

Approximately one month after the onset of extensive reading a five-point Likert scale questionnaire was administered in order to investigate the students' motivation and attitudes toward reading in English and in Japanese as well as parental and family influences on the participants' reading habits. Considering that some change in motivation and attitudes in reading English might occur over time, the same questionnaire was administered at the end of the treatment (Takase, 2003).

Several classroom sessions were utilized to orient students to extensive reading by instructing them on how to choose books, read books extensively, write summaries, and fill out the book reading record list. Participants were instructed to choose a book with the following three criteria. First, the book must be interesting to them. If they found a book uninteresting, they could quit immediately and choose a different one. Second, the book must be easy enough to keep reading without using a dictionary or translating English into Japanese. They were advised to choose a book with less than one unknown word in every two lines, which would be about 5% unknown words on one page (Nation, 1990).

In the first term, participants were required to write a short summary in Japanese for each book they read. In the second and third terms, they were required to write in English. As their teacher, I read their summaries and provided feedback both on form and content. They were also required to submit the book reading record list, which included the number of pages and words read, the level of difficulty and interest, and their criteria for choosing books every month throughout the treatment. The book summaries and the book reading record list were counted as part of their course grades (10%).

Participant Interviews

Approximately 30- to 60-minute interviews were carried out with 81 participants outside of the classroom toward the end of and after the extensive reading course was over. The purpose of the participant interview was to learn more about the participants' opinions of the extensive reading program and to further investigate motivation and attitudes toward reading English extensively. About one-third of them were interviewed after they had taken university entrance examinations, which was about eight to nine months after their extensive reading course had finished.

Most of the participants felt uncomfortable having their interviews taped; therefore, I took extensive notes during the interviews. In some cases, I conducted follow-up interviews in person or on the phone to elicit additional information. Basically, the interviews were conducted individually. However, some students participated in twos or threes not only because of scheduling constraints but also to help them feel more comfortable talking to their teacher. Some quiet students were able to talk more freely when their friends were present.

The focus of the interviews was a) participants' reading experience, b) participants' response to the extensive reading program, and c) the effect of the extensive reading program. The major questions were as follows:

a) Participants' reading experience included:

1. Parents' and family attitudes toward and involvement in participants' reading, and participants' reading habits (e.g., Did your parents read books to you when you were a child? Does your family read Japanese books?)
2. The relationship between participants' reading behavior in the L1 and the L2 (e.g., Which do you enjoy more, reading English books or Japanese books?)

b) Participants' response to the extensive reading program included:

1. Attitudes toward and impressions of extensive reading (e.g., Did you enjoy reading English books?)
2. Reaction toward summary writing (e.g., How did you like writing summaries?)

c) The effect of the extensive reading program included:

1. Perceived effects on English studies and examination performance (e.g., Did reading English books help you with preparing for the entrance examination?)
2. Participants' suggestions and future prospect for extensive reading (Do you think you will continue reading English books in college or university?)

Results

Participants' Reading Experience

Parents' and Family Attitudes toward and Involvement in Participants' Reading, and Participants' Reading Habits

Many Japanese young people nowadays are criticized for having very poor reading habits in their L1. Surprisingly, the interviews revealed that most interviewees had experienced bedtime stories and shared book reading at home or at kindergartens in their childhood, and many of them even developed the habit of reading books in their L1 in elementary school. In addition, many interviewees reported that one or more family members read a lot of books. However, as Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) also found, with the exception of a few devoted readers, most of their positive reading habits ceased in their late elementary school to early junior high school years at about the ages of 10 to 13. Even though they were aware of the importance of reading, many interviewees complained about a shortage of time and said that was their major reason for not reading more books in their L1 and L2. The Following are some of the participants' responses to the questions concerning parents' attitudes toward and involvement in participants' L1 and participants' L1 reading habits.

"My family members read a lot, but I don't. It doesn't mean I hate books. I am just not used to reading."

"There are a lot of books in my house. My father reads a lot of books on business, but my mother doesn't read at all. I like to read, but I don't have time to read now."

"My family often talk about books. I like reading."

"I try to read books, but when I open the first page, I become so sleepy after a hard day at school and after school sport meetings."

"I read newspapers, because I need to know what is happening in the world in preparation for exams, but I don't feel like reading books."

Concerning parents' and family attitudes in the L2 reading, to my surprise, many participants made the remark that parents were not aware of their daughters' studying habits, in spite of their enthusiasm for their daughters' passing university entrance examinations. Some comments included the following:

"My parents don't know that I am reading English books, because I read them in my

room.”

“I never tell my parents what I do at school.”

On the other hand, several students from Group 1 gave some exceptional answers as follows:

“My mother asked me to let her read the book I was reading. I guess she also wanted to read English books.”

“My parents are willing to listen to me read aloud whatever book I’m reading. I always read aloud to them.”

“My father always encourages me to read English books because he says it is important to acquire a reading skill in English.”

These comments revealed that parents’ and family reading habits do not seem to have affected some participants’ reading habits. However, where parents played an active role in supporting their daughters in their reading, there seems to have been a positive effect on them. These data imply that the relationship between home and environmental factors and students’ reading habits are complex. Just having parents who read, or just having books around the house alone does not seem to lead children to reading. It depends on how the parents and their children interact with the material resources that are available.

Interviews also revealed that many participants stopped reading books in their L1 towards the end of their elementary school years and early junior high school years. The reasons they gave for stopping reading in their L1 varied from utilizing their spare time for friends and club activities to attending cram schools in the evening. However, only a few participants reported that their time for L2 reading was affected by these factors. This is probably because English is considered a high priority subject: that is, it is needed for an entrance examination; therefore, these factors very likely did not affect their L2 reading. Instead, they are more probable to have affected reading for enjoyment in their L1.

The Relationship between Reading in English and in the L1

The discrepancy between the L1 and L2 reading habits of some participants was explained by answers from devoted readers in Japanese and in English. Interviews revealed that participants’ motivation to read Japanese books did not accord with their motivation to read English books. The interviews included the most devoted so-called bookworms, who seemed to

be using all their spare time reading books in their L1. I often had to stop one particular student from reading a Japanese novel in my English class. Their comments included the following:

“I cannot resist reaching out for a Japanese book whenever I see one.”

“I can read any kind of book in Japanese, but in English I cannot. I have to choose easy books, which are usually not interesting.”

“I can easily predict the contents in Japanese books and read fast, but it takes a long time to read an English book.”

On the other hand, some participants from group 1 who read a great amount in English, but little or no in Japanese provided the following remarks.

“I felt a sense of accomplishment and self-confidence when I finished a book.”

“I am not interested in Japanese books at all, but I enjoy reading English books, because by reading English books I felt I was achieving something.”

“I like reading English books in this course, because I don't have to translate them into Japanese.”

Interviews with these participants who were so-called bookworms revealed that their L1 reading habits did not influence their English reading. When they were completely involved in reading books in their L1, they lost track of time and self-awareness, and they were experiencing a “flow” situation (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). Therefore, they could not abandon that enjoyment of reading and shift it to a different kind of reading that would require effort and would not bring as much enjoyment as they had experienced when reading in the L1. These bookworms were well aware of the “flow” experience. Thus, in order to eliminate every possible distraction from their L1 reading, they fulfilled the minimum requirements of the reading task. Some participants even ignored the requirement and kept reading books in their L1. However, it does not mean that they were poor readers of English. They simply would prefer to be spending their time on being voracious readers.

In contrast, the participants who were motivated to read English books all through the year seemed to have considered reading books in English and reading books in their L1 as distinctively different experiences. The interviews revealed that many participants from Group 1 were motivated by the novelty of the task and freedom from pressing demands other than writing short summaries. A sense of achievement and self-confidence sustained their motivation

throughout the year. They experienced a great joy and a sense of accomplishment after finishing the first book, which motivated them to continue reading the second and the third book. As their reading proceeded, they gradually developed a sense of self-confidence. By the end of the course, they showed a great interest in reading English. However, many of them showed no interest in L1 reading or developed a habit of reading in the L1. Thus, the L2 reading motivation of the participants of this study did not affect their L1 reading.

Participants' Response to the Extensive Reading Program

Attitudes toward and Impressions of Extensive Reading

The majority of the participants who were interviewed expressed favorable attitudes toward the new methodology of reading English. Asked about their impressions of the extensive reading course, some of them expressed their enjoyment of reading books as follows:

“I was surprised that I was able to understand English without translating it into Japanese.”

“I was very much impressed when I understood the story without using a dictionary.”

“I never knew that reading a book could be considered as an English study.”

“It was wonderful that we could choose books of our own, instead of being given materials by teachers.”

“I felt very proud of myself when I was reading an English book.”

Although the majority of the participants liked the extensive reading course, several students were not motivated to read English books at all, and showed negative attitudes toward extensive reading. They were mainly from group 3, who read the least amount of English. At first, no student seemed to resist the idea of extensive reading. However, interviews revealed that some students gradually resisted taking part in extensive reading for several reasons. Some participants complained about the shortage of easy books, because easy books were very popular and never stayed in the classroom or on the library shelves. Others expressed unfavorable attitudes toward reading without a dictionary, without translation, and at a high speed. The following are some of their complaints:

“All the English books were difficult, so I didn't understand them well.”

“I don't like to read easy books. I prefer long difficult books.”

“I prefer to read English newspapers more than novels.”

"I don't want to read any book fast. I wanted to have plenty of time to read English and read the books slowly."

"I don't have enough time to read books, because I have a lot of other studying to do."

It seems that books that were of interest to the participants or that were appropriate to their levels were crucial to some reluctant readers.

Reaction toward Summary Writing

Among the several tasks participants were required to do during the program, summary writing seems to have had an important influence on their motivation to read. In response to the question of whether they liked writing summaries, the answers contained pros and cons, and some participants gave contradictory answers.

"Summary writing in Japanese helped me to understand the story clearly."

"Writing summaries in Japanese was no fun, because I had to translate what I read in English into Japanese in order to write Japanese summaries."

"English summary writing helped me to write an English composition."

"Summary writing was a waste of time, because when I wrote English summaries, I just took some of the sentences from the book."

"Writing English summaries was very hard. I could have read more if summary writing had not been obligatory."

"I hated to write summaries, but if we hadn't been required to write a summary, I would not have read as much as this."

From these comments it can be assumed that summary writing affected the participants' motivation to read both positively and negatively. Summary writing in their L1 helped some participants to understand the contents better, while for others, it deprived them of the joy of reading in English. Similarly, summary writing in their L2 encouraged some participants to read more; however, for other participants, it was a burden and discouraged them from reading.

In conclusion, from participants' responses to extensive reading program it was found that participants were largely motivated to read English books extensively, particularly due to the novelty of reading methods (e.g., reading without a dictionary or translation; free choice of materials), but there were some participants who found some aspects of the program to be counter-productive (e.g., summary writing; high speed reading).

The Effect of the Extensive Reading Program

Perceived Effects on English Studies and Examination Performance

Most of the participants responded that extensive reading helped them to make progress in their English studies, facilitated their reading comprehension and helped them answer university entrance examination questions. The answers to this question were mostly collected from students who had already passed entrance examinations. Some of their comments were:

“Before this course, I could not continue reading an English sentence if it contained even one single word I didn’t know, but now I can read them without stopping to look them up in the dictionary. It was very helpful on the exams.”

“I think I learned many new words by reading many books. So it was helpful on the tests.”

“I was very much afraid of the long reading comprehension sections on entrance examinations, but now I am no longer afraid of them, because compared to a whole book, they are only one or two pages long.”

There were several negative remarks included among the positive answers, such as:

“As I have now become used to reading English without translating it into Japanese, I cannot translate English sentences into Japanese well any more.”

“I have become lazy and do not consult the dictionary.”

“Most of the books were novels, and there were only a few nonfiction books that I found interesting and that I needed to read to prepare for entrance examinations.”

“Most of the books were written in easy English, so they were of no use for entrance examinations.”

These comments indicate that reading English books was effective in helping some students on their entrance examinations in that they felt more confident in their reading, but for others it did not seem so helpful. This can be attributed to the differences in genre, as well as the differences in the levels of difficulty between the books they read and the styles of questions on the exam. In addition, the different reading styles between extensive reading and reading comprehension passages on the exams seem to have confused some students.

Participants’ Suggestions and Future Prospects for Extensive Reading

Asked for their opinion about and suggestions for making a more successful extensive

reading program, the participants provided various comments related to the reading materials, summary writing, and the assigned number of books to read. In addition, more than half of the participants answered that they would continue reading. The rest of them were not sure if they would. Very few of the participants declared they would not. More importantly, all of the participants stated that they would not have read English books if they had not had the extensive reading class. Their comments included the following:

“If there had been a greater number of easy books, I would have read more, but the easy books were always out.”

“I wanted to read *manga* (comics) or picture books.”

“When assigned to read a certain number of books, I was compelled to cover the number of books, and I could not enjoy reading.”

These comments revealed the necessity of a wider variety of books in terms of genre and readability levels. Another notable comment was that the prescribed amount of reading increased some participants' reading amount; however, at the same time, decreased their joy of reading.

Conclusion

In sum, the interviews with the participants were valuable for both the participants and for the researcher. Because the participants had not had previous opportunities to express their opinions and evaluate the courses they had taken or the tasks they had engaged in, they were hesitant at first to talk openly to their teacher about their perceptions of the course and the task. However, by answering different questions, first of all, they realized what they had gained from reading English books or failed to gain from not reading enough: greater reading fluency, reading enjoyment, and a positive affect in learning English. Second, in order to answer my questions, many participants reviewed the course, examined their reading and summary writing styles, and discovered several factors that encouraged them to or hindered them from reading books. Finally, they discovered that they had developed a certain degree of learner autonomy through selecting reading materials themselves, choosing the time and place to read, and evaluating the books they had read.

The interviews also uncovered some aspects of motivational factors and implications that had not been found in the former questionnaires (Takase, 2001; 2003). First, in terms of parents' attitudes toward and involvement in reading, parents' reading habits or simply having books around is not enough to motivate students to read. In order to motivate them to read both in

their L1 and L2, parents' active involvement in their children's reading is suggested.

Concerning the relationship between participants' L1 and L2 reading, devoted L1 readers and L2 readers do not seem to share the same motivation toward reading. Most devoted L1 readers in this study basically had a strong desire to read books in L2 as well as L1; however, their English reading proficiency level did not allow them to choose books that they found interesting and enjoyable. Therefore, they chose books written in their L1. It can be assumed that devoted L1 readers are likely to develop better L2 reading habits, once their L2 reading competence improves enough to give them the same joy, or "flow" situation in their L2, as they have already experienced in their L1. However, it might not work conversely, because devoted L2 readers were not necessarily motivated intrinsically. Rather, their main motivational factor to read English books was *a Sense of Achievement* or *Self-confidence* in reading English, which many of the participants had lost during their English studies in the past. Thus, L2 reading habit is not likely to be transferred to L1 reading. The relationship between the L1 and L2 reading is so complex that further research is suggested by interviewing more students at various levels of L1 and L2 readers.

From participants' response to the extensive reading program, it was revealed that the extensive reading program did work for most of the participants; however, there were some students who were not motivated to read for reasons such as the difficulty of the books, their lack of interest in the books, or their need to write summaries. Their experiences are helpful in that they suggest ways to improve future programs. Taking these points into consideration, teachers need to take care in implementing their program that they provide a wide variety of books in terms of readability levels and genre of materials. In particular, providing an abundance of extremely easy reading materials of interest (e.g., less than 200 word level books or picture books) are needed for the less motivated students. In addition, it is necessary to carefully consider certain elements of the program such as summary writing or the prescribed amount of reading. The amount of L2 reading affects a sense of self-confidence and a sense of self-accomplishment, and vice versa. Thus, in order to motivate learners to read English in large quantities, it is necessary to help develop a sense of self-confidence and a sense of accomplishment by providing abundant reading materials of interest at appropriate levels, which will lead them to more reading.

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