The Effectiveness of Sustained Silent Reading in Becoming Autonomous Learners

自立した学習へ導く授業内多読

Atsuko Takase

多読の効果が国内外で認められてきて、多読を授業に取り入れる教師が増えてきたが、導入の仕方によって多読の効果の表れ方が大きく変わるのは、あまり認識されていない。読書離れが進んでいる最近の若者に効果的な多読指導を行うには、どの年齢・レベルの学習者であれある程度の授業内多読が必要不可欠である。当研究では、授業内多読を行ったクラスと授業外での課題として多読を行ったクラスの読書量および事前・事後テストの伸びを比較した。結果は、読書量や事後テストの伸びに大きな差が認められた。授業内多読を行ったクラスの学生は、授業外での読書時間が、授業外でのみ読書を行った学生より長く、当然読書量も多かった。その結果、事後テストの伸びに大きな差が出た。

Introduction

Extensive reading (hereafter ER) has been recognized as one of the best strategies for improving second or foreign language learners' English proficiency; therefore, it has been gaining popularity as an important component of second and foreign language curricula worldwide. As indicated in numerous studies (e.g., Asraf & Ahmad, 2003; Day & Bamford, 1998; Kobayashi et al., 2010; Mason & Krashen, 1997a; 1997b; Nishizawa, 2009; Takase, 2003; 2005; 2008; 2009a; 2009b), one of the most important and fast-acting effects of ER is that it lowers the learners' affective filter and increases their positive attitudes and motivation toward the target language. Moreover, what is more important for language learners is that ER is effective in improving reading comprehension and reading speed, listening and writing proficiencies, and enhancing vocabulary acquisition, and consequently, increasing confidence (e.g., Beglar et al., 2011; Elly & Mangubhai, 1983; Furukawa, 2010; Furukawa et al., 2009; Hayashi, 1999; Irvine, 2011; Iwahori, 2008; Nishizawa et al., 2010; Mason & Krashen, 1997a; Masuhara et al., 1996; Robb & Susser, 1989; Taguchi et al., 2004; Takase, 2008; 2010b; Walker 1997). The fundamental principle of ER is articulated succinctly and clearly by Smith (1985) who stated that ER enables learners to "learn to read by reading." In other words, the key to success in learning to

read through an ER program is to read a vast amount in the target language, and read a lot of easy materials of their own choice. ER plays an important role in second or foreign language learning and helps learners become independent readers. Although the benefits of ER have been well-documented, a major obstacle is that there are always some unmotivated learners who are not willing to read extensively (Takase, 2004a; 2007b; 2008). Thus, the most critical element for effective ER is motivating learners to read a great amount of books in the target language extensively. To this end, several researchers and practitioners have offered tips for implementing a successful ER program (Krashen, 2004; Day & Bamford, 2002; Robb, 2002; Sakai & Kanda, 2005; Takase, 2008). Among them, Sustained Silent Reading (hereafter SSR) (Pilgreen, 2000) or Free Voluntary Reading (hereafter FVR) (Krashen, 2004) seems to be the most effective measures for motivating Japanese students to read English extensively.

Sustained Silent Reading (SSR)

According to Krashen (2004), reading proficiency can be improved by FVR, which refers to any in-school program where students are provided a short time for reading. FVR requires no book reports to be written, no questions to be answered at the end of reading, and no dictionary to be used to look up every unknown word while reading. SSR, which is one kind of FVR, is a system whereby students engage in silent in-class reading for a designated period of time “when students are allowed to read whatever they like” (Pilgreen, 2000, p.xvii). The effectiveness of SSR has been shown by many teachers and practitioners as motivating children to read and developing their reading proficiency in their native language (L1) (e.g., Henry, 1995: Pilgreen, 2000; Trelease, 2001). SSR is also effective for second and foreign language learners in motivating them to read an abundance of books with concentration (Furukawa et al., 2009; Takase, 2008), helping reluctant readers to continue reading (Mason & Krashen, 1997; Takase & Otsuki, 2011; 2012), and bridging the gap between the beginning and advanced level by consolidating the learners’ foundation in the language, and thereby allowing them to acquire higher levels of proficiency (Krashen). It produces “the most beautiful silences on earth” (Henry, 1995, p.ix) in the classroom.

According to Takase (2004a), interviews with her high school students revealed that, among several factors that prevented them from reading extensively, one of the most powerful demotivating factors was a lack of time for reading due to their busy schedules, including work for other subjects, after school sports or club activities, and more studies at cram schools. She succeeded in increasing her students’ reading volume immensely by providing them with time

for SSR (Takase 2004b, 2005). She later reported similar results with her university students (2007a). All the students in her class from a prestigious university in Osaka read English books enthusiastically when they were given ten minutes for SSR at the beginning of each class in the first semester, whereas approximately 30% of the students stopped reading in the second semester when they were required to read outside of class without being given time for SSR due to the tight class schedule.

As the word SSR is used in various ways, to be accurate, SSR in this study is also used in a slightly modified manners from that originally defined by Krashen (2004). The principle of SSR that "learners simply engage in reading during a certain period of class time without any accountability measures" is the same; however, the teacher reads together with her students only after reading students' reading logs and writing comments on them. Therefore, the word SSR is utilized here in a broader sense.

This study examined exactly how SSR differentiated learners who were provided with time for SSR from learners who were given ER as an assignment without any time for SSR. It also investigated if students became independent readers, when they were provided with time to read in class. Thus, the following research questions were posed.

1. What are the differences between students in the SSR group and the non-SSR group in their ER performance?
2. What difference does SSR make on the post-test scores between the two groups?
3. How different are the reading performances outside of class between participants of the SSR group and the non-SSR group?

Method

Participants

Initially, a total of 142 EFL non-English major students from two universities participated in an ER program for one academic year: Group 1 (G1 = 76) and Group 2 (G2 = 66). G1 consisted of students from two classes with various English proficiency levels from beginner to high intermediate, whereas G2 was a homogenous group from two highest and one middle classes, in which students were enrolled based on their TOEIC scores taken at the end of the previous academic year. Among them, twelve participants from G2 stopped reading during the 2nd semester. Therefore, in order to make the two groups equivalent in proficiency level and number, 22 out of 76 G1 students, who scored lowest in the pre-test were eliminated from the group for this study, leaving 54 students for each group: G1 (M = 30, F = 25) and G2 (M = 33,

F = 21).

Procedure

Participants from G1 met 26 times during the year, out of which six sessions were utilized for orientation in ER, the pre- and the post-tests, and final examinations, leaving 20 sessions for class work. G2 met 28 times during the year, and four sessions were utilized for the pre- and the post-tests and the TOEIC practice test, leaving 24 sessions for class work. For both groups one session lasted for 90 minutes, half of which was utilized for reading strategy practice. After that, G1 had SSR for approximately 45 minutes, whereas G2 was given reading and listening practices for the TOEIC.

In addition to 45 minutes for SSR, G1 students were also required to read as much as possible outside of class. In contrast, participants from G2 were not provided with reading time in class due to the tight schedule for preparation for the TOEIC IP, which is obligatory for all the students in the department. Therefore, they were only required to read outside of class as an assignment. Students from G1 were required to check out books from the library and bring them into class to read. On the other hand, approximately 100 books were brought to G2 classes for students to borrow at the end of each lesson.

Students were suggested to read approximately100 easy books which are lower than YL1.0 to begin with in order to unlearn the word-by-word rigid translation habit that they had acquired during the prior seven or more years of formal English classes.

YL stands for *Yomiyasusa* Level, and refers to readability measurement for Japanese learners, which was established by Akio Furukawa from SSS (Start with Simple Stories) Study Group in cooperation with Japan Extensive Reading Association (JERA) members. This scale fills the gap of readability differences among graded readers (GR) of various publishers who use their own readability scale and headwords; and thus have no compatibility with each other. YL is a way of levelling books that is a subjective assessment of readability for both graded and ungraded readers which is assessed for each book by considering factors like illustrations, the size of fonts, different text styles, genres, Japanese learners' background knowledge and familiarity with the content. All the books are graded into 100 levels from 0.0 to 10.0, 0.0 being the easiest picture books with no words except for its title, and 10.0 being the most difficult authentic (i.e., for native speakers) books that are not appropriate for ER. (See also Takase, 2009c for more detail on YL.)

After becoming used to reading easy books fluently, they were instructed to gradually read books in higher levels. The requirement of the course was to keep a reading log after finishing

each book, including dates, word counts of each book, the time spent for reading the book, reading speed (WPM = word per minute), interest level, and short comments on the book.

At the onset of the course, the Edinburgh Project on Extensive Reading (EPER hereafter) placement test A (cloze test) was administered as the pre-test, and the same test was conducted at the end of the course as the post-test, which was approximately nine months later. Raw scores (k = 141) were calculated into a standard score with 100 as the full mark, and they were sorted into eight levels with A being the highest and H being the lowest.

Materials

Three kinds of reading materials were used as follows:

1. Leveled Readers — Picture books for children who speak English as their first language (L1) to learn to read English and other subjects such as history, geography, math, science, social studies, etc. Many series contain both fiction and non-fiction stories.

   Some major series participants read were Oxford Reading Tree (ORT) (Oxford, UK) Longman Literacy Land Story Street (LLLSS) (Pearson Education, UK), All Aboard Reading (AAR) (Penguin Group, USA), I Can Read Books (ICR) (Harper Collins, USA), Curious George (CG), Fast Forward (FF) (Thomson Learning, Australia), Puffin Easy-to-Read (PER) (Penguin Group, USA), Rookie Readers Biology, Geography, Health, Holidays, Science (RRB, RRG, RRH, RRHo, RRS) (Scholastic, USA), Scholastic Readers (SCR) (Scholastic, USA), Step Into Reading (SIR) (Random House, USA), Usborne Young Reading (UYR) (Usborne, UK), Mr. & Miss Series (M M), etc.
2. Language Learner Literature or Graded Readers (GR) – Books written in easier English for people studying English as a second or foreign language.

   Major series participants read were Foundations Reading Library (FRL Level 1-7), Macmillan Readers (MMR Level 1-4), Cambridge English Readers (CER Level 0-3), Oxford Bookworms (OBW Level 0-4), Penguin Readers (PGR Level 0-5), and Scholastic ELT Readers (SCE Level 0-3). Among them, FRL series were the most read by many participants, who were not confident enough to start reading GR series, as a bridge between LR and GR.
3. Children's Books (CB) – Books for L1 children in the 2nd - 5th grades to enjoy reading and acquire reading habits.

   The series which were most read by some enthusiastic students were Oxford Wolf Hill (OWH), Magic Tree House (MTH), Amber Brown Series (AB), and A to Z Mysteries (ATZ). Although these books contain a smaller number of words than books in the higher levels of

GR, many students found them a little difficult because some English expressions were unfamiliar to them. In addition, their lack of background knowledge made them feel that these books were even more difficult. Yet, some students found them more interesting than GR and continued reading books in this group.

Results and Discussion

Data Analysis

First, the descriptive statistics of participants' reading data and EPER scores was calculated. Second, in order to investigate the initial compatibility of the two groups, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. Next, changes in the pre- and the post-EPER test scores were investigated using a repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Study Question 1: What are the differences between students in the SSR group and non-SSR group in their ER performance?

Descriptive statistics

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for the pre- and the post-EPER test scores of the two groups.

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics for the two groups of participants*

Group		*N*	*M*	*SD*	*SEM*	*Min*	*Max*
G1	Sum of words	54	351519.0	216509.68	29463.24	103868	1266949
	Sum of Books	54	127.1	47.94	6.52	28	295
	Pre-EPER	54	23.6	5.10	.69	7	37
	Post-EPER	54	30.5	7.48	1.02	15	46
G2	Sum of words	54	86934.2	73870.62	10052.52	4936	436417
	Sum of Books	54	48.9	42.44	5.78	4	203
	Pre-EPER	54	22.0	5.72	.78	10	37
	Post-EPER	54	25.8	6.84	.93	10	43

Notes: Scores are calculated into standard scores.

As seen in Table 1, a significant difference is shown in participants' reading amount between G1 and G2. The mean numbers of words each group read in the year were 351,519.0 for G1 and 86,934.2 for G2, and the mean number of books G1 and G2 read were 127.1 and 48.9, respectively.

Table 2 shows the participants' reading data for each semester.

Table 2. *Group means of reading amount per semester*

	N	1s*M*	*SD*	*Min*	*Max*	2s*M*	*SD*	*Min*	*Max*
G1 books	54	87.5	31.02	17	163	39.6	25.96	11	146
G2 books	54	31.3	25.94	3	100	17.6	20.52	1	124
G1 words	54	117699	86517.60	23364	427566	233821	158563.06	31163	886330
G2 words	54	35058	29626.02	3160	153530	51877	55166.93	1391	282887
G1 W/B	54	1548.8	1368.92	236	6306	6036.3	2729.36	822	12876
G2 W/B	54	1424.2	1274.69	338	7814	2821.4	2228.75	292	9953

Notes: 1s = 1st semester, 2s = 2nd semester, W/B = words per book.

As shown in Table 2, the number of books read in the 1st semester was 87.5 for G1 and 31.3 for G2, which means the participants in G1 read approximately three times as many books as those in G2. In the 2nd semester the mean number of books became smaller for both groups: 39.6 for G1 and 17.6 for G2, which is approximately half the number of books read by G1.The mean word counts they covered in each semester were 117,699 for G1 and 35,058 for G2 during the 1st semester and 233,821 for G1 and 51,877 for G2 during the 2nd semester. This means that G1 read approximately 3.4 times as many words as G2 in the 1st semester and 4.5 times as many words as G2 in the 2nd semester. The mean number of words per book which participants from G1 and G2 read in each semester was 1,547.8 and 1,424.2 in the 1st semester and 6,036.3 and 2,821.4 in the 2nd semester, respectively. This indicates that after reading a greater amount of words compared to those in G2 in the 1st semester, G1 students proceeded to read books that were much longer, which are generally considered higher level books, in the second semester in contrast with G2. In other words, reading an abundance of easy books at the beginning of ER enables the participants to gradually and smoothly improve their reading and move to higher level books for reading.

Tables 3 and 4 show what level of books participants of each group read in more detail using YL as a readability scale.

Table 3. *Average number of books read in different levels during the 1st semester*

Level(YL)	G1*N*	*M*	*SD*	*Min*	*Max*	G2*N*	*M*	*SD*	*Min*	*Max*
0 (0<YL<1)	54	61.7	32.28	0	141	54	19.0	22.87	0	81
1 (1=<YL<2)	54	16.5	10.88	2	53	54	8.9	6.80	1	37
2 (2=<YL<3)	54	7.6	10.04	0	42	54	2.7	4.96	0	24
3 (3=<YL<4)	54	1.6	2.73	0	12	54	.5	1.33	0	6
4 (4=<YL<5)	54	.1	.34	0	1	54	.0	.00	0	0
5 (5=<YL<6)	54	.0	.14	0	1	54	.2	.14	0	1
6 (6=<YL)	54	.0	.00	0	0	54	.0	.00	0	0

Table 4. *Average number of books read in different levels during the 2nd semester*

Level(YL)	G1*N*	*M*	*SD*	*Min*	*Max*	G2*N*	*M*	*SD*	*Min*	*Max*
0 (0<YL<1)	54	6.9	12.75	0	56	54	10.1	13.05	0	117
1 (1=<YL<2)	54	8.2	11.12	0	59	54	4.4	10.63	0	25
2 (2=<YL<3)	54	16.9	9.77	0	37	54	1.8	9.60	0	11
3 (3=<YL<4)	54	7.0	9.88	0	51	54	1.3	9.80	0	25
4 (4=<YL<4)	54	.4	1.27	0	7	54	.0	1.16	0	0
5 (5=<YL<5)	54	.1	.67	0	4	54	.0	.62	0	0
6 (6=<YL)	54	.1	.30	0	2	54	.0	.27	0	0

*Materials of each YL level includes mainly following levels of graded readers:
YL0: PYR1 & 2, FRL1 – 4, MMR1, OBW0, PGR0;
YL1: PYR3, FRL5 – 7, MMR2, CER0 & 1, PGR1;
YL2: PYR4, MMR3, CER2, OBW1 & 2, PGR2;
YL3: CER3, MMR4 & 5, OBW3 & 4, PGR3;
YL4: CER4, MMR6, OBW5, PGR4;
YL5: CER5, OBW6, PGR5;
YL6: CER6, PGR6

Table 3 shows that participants in G1 read 61.7 books from level 0 (YL0) and 16.5 from level 1(YL1), which means they read 78.2 very easy books in total. On the other hand, participants in G2 read only 19.0 books from YL0 and 8.9 from YL1, totaling 27.9, which is approximately one third of the books read by participants in G1. Then, in the 2nd semester, the numbers of books from YL0 and YL1 that participants in G1 and G2 read were 15.1 and 14.5, respectively, which shows little difference. However, as for YL2 and YL3, participants in G1 read 23.9 books on average. In contrast, participants in G2 read only 3.1 books. These results from Tables 2, 3, and 4 suggest that G1 group members, who read an abundance of easy books at the beginning of ER during the 1st semester, were likely to be able to read higher level books much more easily than G2 members in the second semester. On the other hand, participants in G2, who read only a small number of easy books at the beginning of the ER program, continued reading books from the similar levels in the second semester. During the time for SSR, participants in G1 were constantly encouraged to read fully comprehensible books. Although being encouraged

to read fully comprehensible books as well, participants in G2 were likely to choose higher level books from the beginning of the ER program due to the lack of regular observation in class by the instructor.

4. Research Question 2: What difference does SSR make on the post-test scores between the two groups?

Table 5 shows the results or the pre- and the post-EPER tests.

Table 5. *Pre- and post-EPER test results (standard score)*

		Pre-test					Post-test				
Group	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*SEM*	*Min*	*Max*	*M*	*SD*	*SEM*	*Min*	*Max*
G1	54	23.6	5.10	.69	17	37	30.5	7.48	1.02	15	46
G2	54	22.0	5.72	.78	10	37	25.8	6.84	.93	10	43

Notes: Raw scores are calculated into standard scores.

One-Way ANOVA on the Pre-EPER Test Scores

A one-way ANOVA was conducted in order to examine whether there were significant between-group differences for the pre-EPER scores. The independent variable was groups and the dependent variable was the pre-EPER scores. The results of the analysis indicated a non-significant main effect for group (F = 2.22, df = 1, p = .139), which means that the two groups were not significantly different, therefore, comparable.

Repeated-Measures ANOVA on the Pre- and the Post-EPERT Tests

The effects of extensive reading on English proficiency were examined using a repeated-measures ANOVA.

Table 5. *Repeated-measures ANOVA on the pre- and the post-EPER tests*

Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*
Between subjects					
Group	525.78	1	525.78	7.68	.007*
Error	7258.49	106	68.48		
Total	7784.27	107	594.26		
Within subjects					
EPER Test	1541.34	1	1541.34	126.07	.000**
EPER x Group	132.23	1	132.23	10.82	.001*
Error	12295.94	106	12.23		
Total	13969.51				
TOTAL	114495.29	1			

*p < .01

As seen in Table 5, the results of the analysis indicated a significant main effect for group (F = 7.68, df = 1, p < .01), a significant main effect for EPER test (F = 126.07, df = 1, p = .000), and a significant interaction effect between EPER test x group (F = 10.82, df = 1, p < .001). The results revealed that there were significant between-group differences, significant changes between the pre-EPER test and the post-EPER test, and the EPER test factor and group factor interacted. This can be seen in the non-parallel lines in Figure 1.

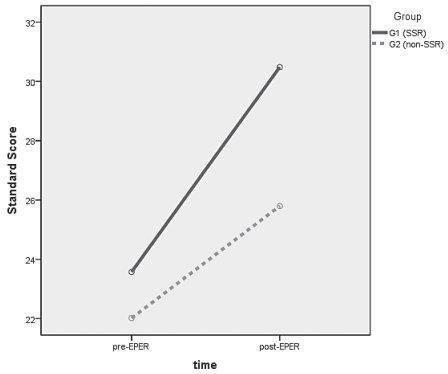

Figure 1. *Changes in the pre- and the post-EPER test scores*

Figure 1 shows the pre- and the post-EPER test scores in two groups (G1, G2). Non-parallel lines indicate that the two factors were interacting. This analysis suggests that there were no significant differences at the stage of the pre-EPER test between the two groups; however, the two groups showed differential degrees of improvement on the post-EPER test. The participants' performance varied not only by group factor but also in interaction with the test factor.

ANOVA

Because the results of the repeated-measures ANOVA were significant, a one-way ANOVA was performed inside the repeated-measures ANOVA in order to investigate whether there were significant between-group differences for the post-test scores. Groups were the independent variable and the post-EPER test scores were the dependent variable. The results of the analysis indicated a significant main effect for group (F = 11.54, df = 1, p < .001).

The results of the analyses revealed that both SSR and non-SSR groups gained significantly on the post-EPER test scores, however, there was a significant difference in the gain scores between the two groups; SSR group (G1) had significantly greater gains than those of non-SSR group (G2).

Research question 3: How different their reading performance outside of class?

Table 6 shows the comparison of participants' reading amount and time spent in reading inside and outside of class between G1 and G2 for each semester.

Table 6. *Differences in reading time between SSR group and non-SSR group*

Time	1st Semester		2nd Semester	
Group (N)	G1 (54)	G2 (54)	G1 (54)	G2 (54)
Sum of Words	117,699	35,058	233,821	51,877
Time for SSR (minutes)	900	—	900	—
Actual reading time (80%)	720	—	720	—
Average reading speed	100	—	120	—
Words read in class	72,000	0	86,400	0
Words read out of class	45,699	35,058	147,421	51,877
Average reading speed	100	100	120	120
Time spent out of class: minutes(h)	457 (7.6)	351(5.8)	1,229(20.5)	432 (7.2)

As seen in Table 6, the mean scores of word counts of G1 and G2 were 117,699 and 35,058 in the first semester and 233,821 and 51,877 in the second semester, respectively. Although the SSR group was given reading time for 45 minutes, it included time for choosing and exchanging books, and keeping reading logs; therefore, their actual reading time is assumed to have been approximately 80 % of the whole time for SSR. As participants' average reading speed was approximately 100 words per minute (wpm) in the first semester and 120 wpm in the second semester, the sum of words G1 participants read in-class were calculated as approximately 72,000 (900 x 0.8 x 100) for the first semester and 86,400 (900 x 0.8 x 120) for the second semester. Subtracting 72,000 words and 86,400 words from the total number of words in each semester leave 45,699 words for the first semester and 147,421 words for the second semester as words read outside of class. In order to find out the time spent for reading during each semester, these numbers were divided by 100 for the first semester and 120 for the second semester. As illustrated in Table 6, the results show that the approximate numbers of time spent for reading outside of class by participants in G1 and G2 were 457 minutes (7.6 hours) and 351minutes (5.8 hours) for the first semester and 1,229 minutes (20.5 hours) and 432 minutes (7.2hours) for the second semester, respectively. These results indicate that participants in G1 spent approximately 1.3 times longer than participants in G2 in the first semester, and 2.8 times longer in the second semester, which shows an even wider gap between the SSR group and the non-SSR group. This explains that students who had time to read in class also spent time in reading outside of class independently, which was longer than time spent by their

counterparts in G2 who had no in-class reading and read only outside of class.

Conclusion

The results of this study show that the reading amount of the SSR group was greater than that of their counterpart who had no time to read in class, and the gap between them became even larger in the second semester. One notable difference was the level of books the participants of the two groups read. The SSR group read many easy books during the first semester and gradually read higher level books in the second semester, whereas many participants from non-SSR group either skipped or read only a small number of easy books and started reading books from the second or third levels and stayed at the same level all through the year. This difference of reading style affected the post-EPER scores, which participants in G1 gained significantly, however, their counterparts in G2 showed insignificant gains. More importantly, participants in G1 not only read inside of class, but also read independently outside of class.

In conclusion, it can be said that the more students read, the more their reading proficiency improves as long as they read an abundance of easy books within their reading level at the beginning of the ER program. In addition, with monitoring and encouragement of the instructor, SSR enables learners to start reading easy books well within their reading level. Thus, SSR students become motivated to read even outside of class, gradually developing a good reading habit and becoming autonomous learners.

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