The importance of an L2 reader's attitude in the field of Extensive Reading

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Abstract

Recently Extensive Reading has been receiving more and more attention. Developing the proper reading attitude is considered to be a crucial component of becoming an avid reader. Researchers have determined that reading attitude can be divided into three domains: cognitive, affective, and conative. One question that still needs to be verified is whether a positive reading attitude promotes more reading or whether more reading creates a more positive reading attitude. To determine which aspect of the theory is more viable, questionnaires were given to fifty-five university freshmen in Japan before and after fifteen weeks of an extensive reading program. The number of words they read during the semester was recorded by MReader. In accord with previous research (Yamashita, 2013), the amount of reading affects a more positive reading attitude. The present study was conducted on a small-scale and more detailed research is needed before any definitive theory can be proven.

Keywords: Extensive Reading, reading attitude, MReader, Moodle,

Introduction

Recently Extensive Reading, one facet of L2 reading pedagogy, has been receiving more attention. Acquiring the proper reading attitude is considered to be crucial for becoming an avid reader. Theoretically, readers with a good reading attitude will read more extensively, but is it easily verifiable? Facilitating the attainment of a better reading attitude may be crucial for a successful extensive reading program. However, reading attitude is multidimensional and so it is not easy to define the term. The consensus among researchers is that there are three domains in reading attitude: the cognitive domain, the affective domain, and the conative domain. In the present study, we will use a definition of the three domains of the human mind proposed by Lee and Schallert (2014): "despite some slight differences in approach, the general consensus has converged on three constituents of reading attitude: cognitive (evaluative beliefs), affective (feelings and emotions), and conative (behavioral intentions) factors." Among these three domains, the conative domain of reading attitude has received less attention from researchers, and only a few papers have been published. The reason for this imbalance is not clear, but a possible reason might have to do with the researchers' belief that the cognitive and affective domains of the human mind are more important than the conative domain. They

might reason that, if the conative domain depends upon the affective domain, then the conative domain is secondary and thus less important than the other two. However, McLean and Paulshock (2018) proved that students read more if they have a clear target. Their results seem to imply that a directed effort towards a specific behavior - that is the conative domain of the human mind - is crucial for extensive reading. Preferably, the cognitive and affective domains of the human mind should take control of reading. In an ideal world, students might read more if they think that reading is important or if they enjoy reading books, but in a classroom environment, what makes the biggest difference is whether or not the students read the books. The present study will examine how the conative domain of the human mind affects the amount of reading. The present study will also reflect the influence of extensive reading upon reading attitude. Yamashita (2013) has already dealt with the second issue, and her study demonstrated the positive effect of extensive reading on the learner's reading attitude. The present study is an extension of that research.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were as follows:

1. Did the amount of reading increase if students initially had a positive reading attitude?

2. Did students have positive reading attitude after they experienced extensive reading?

Method

The current study involved analyzing students' answers to the items on a pre-semester questionnaire and a post-semester questionnaire and correlating those answers with the total number of words they read during a semester-long extensive reading program. The purpose was to investigate the relationship between their reading attitudes before and after the semester and the total number of words that they read. The data was analyzed to see if there was any correlation between the student's reading attitudes before and after the semester and the amount of reading they did during the semester.

Research subjects

The subjects were fifty-five freshmen engineering majors at a four-year university in northern Japan. They were all eighteen or nineteen years old, and their native language was Japanese.

Procedures

The items on the questionnaire and the subject's total word counts were collected and analyzed for the investigation of correlations. The same questions were on both surveys so the students answered each one twice, once before and again after the semester (fifteen weeks). The first questionnaire was given during the first week and the second one was given during the fifteenth week. The total number of words read by the subjects were collected at the end of the semester. The word count was collected by using MReader, an online website that automatically calculates the number of words read by the subjects. Even though the subjects read graded readers for 15 minutes during each class, the majority of the reading and MReader quiz taking occurred outside of class hours.

The answers to the questionnaires were collected by using a Moodle site on the university intranet. The actual questions

(see the **Appendix**) were borrowed from a study conducted by Lee and Shallert (2014). Their focus was on reading attitudes, so the items were suitable for investigating the relationship between the subjects' reading attitudes and their total reading word count.

Results

The first research question was whether or not the total amount of reading increased if subjects had a positive reading attitude. Contrary to our expectations there were negative correlations between the pre-semester questionnaire items and the amount of reading. (**Table 1**) The result indicates that those who did not visit English websites and read English on the Internet (Question 3) and those who did not want to read many English books in the future (Question 7) read more graded readers.

Table 1
The Correlation among the Pre-Semester
Questionnaire Items and the Amount of Reading

	The Amount of Reading (r)
Question 1	0.22
Question 2	-0.02
Question 3	-0.65**
Question 4	0.14
Question 5	-0.15
Question 6	0.02
Question 7	-0.54**

$**P<.01$ $*P<.05$

Table 2 shows correlations among the pre-semester questionnaire items. There were significant correlations between Q2 and Q4, Q2 and Q7, Q4and Q5, Q4 and Q7,

and Q6 and Q7. The results indicate that the subjects were willing to read books, they were going to find time for reading in English (Question 4), and that they wanted to read more English books in the future (Question 7).

Table 2
The Correlations among the Pre-Semester
Questionnaire Items

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7
Question 1	1.00						
Question 2	0.59**	1.00					
Question 3	0.11	0.35 *	1.00				
Question 4	0.48 **	0.75 **	0.31*	1.00			
Question 5	0.45 **	0.59**	0.17	0.68 **	1.00		
Question 6	0.51 **	0.67 **	0.31 *	0.57 **	0.62 **	1.00	
Question 7	0.44 **	0.76 **	0.33*	0.73 **	0.65 **	0.72 **	1.00

$**P<.01$ $*P<.05$

The second research question was whether or not the amount of reading changed the subject's reading attitude. There was a statistically significant correlation between Question 4 and the amount of reading when both the post-semester questionnaires and the reading word counts were analyzed. (**Table 3**) There was no statistically significant correlation except for Question 4. The result indicates that the subjects had a better reading attitude as a result of fifteen weeks of extensive reading. Even though it was a weak correlation, the result provides evidence that extensive reading influenced the subjects' reading attitude.

Table 3
The Correlation among the Post-Semester
Questionnaire Items and the Amount of Reading

	The Amount of Reading (r)
Question 1	0.22
Question 2	0.24
Question 3	0.20
Question 4	0.30*
Question 5	0.22
Question 6	0.16
Question 7	0.00

**P<.01 *P<.05

Table 4 shows the correlation between the post-semester questionnaire items. There were strong correlations between Q1 and Q2; Q1 and Q4; Q1and Q5; Q2 and Q4, and Q2 and Q5. These items all related to reading attitude; Q2 asked the respondents about their attitude toward reading, and the other items asked about their reading conation. The results indicate a reciprocal mental link between the affective and

Table 4
The Correlations among the Post-Semester
Questionnaire Items

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7
Question 1	1.00						
Question 2	0.79**	1.00					
Question 3	0.33*	0.43**	1.00				
Question 4	0.73**	0.80**	0.30*	1.00			
Question 5	0.73**	0.73**	0.22	0.69**	1.00		
Question 6	0.54**	0.70 **	0.51**	0.61**	0.65**	1.00	
Question 7	0.64**	0.74**	0.46**	0.64**	0.66*	0.71	1.00

**P<.01 *P<.05

conative domains. In other words, the subjects were moved to action when they liked reading, and they also liked reading when they were moved to action.

Takahashi and Itoh (2018) previously studied ER and its effectiveness. We found that there was a threshold around one-hundred and fifty thousand words where a student's English proficiency makes an emergent jump. **Table 5** shows that the subjects were still below the borderline for changing their proficiency.

Table 5
The Statistics of the Number of Words Read by
the Subjects in a Semester

	n	Mean	SD
The Number of Words	55	105147	77579

Conclusion

In the present study, the dual influences of a positive reading attitude promoting more reading and more reading creating a more positive reading attitude have been examined. Previous research has proven that the total reading word count can significantly influence a positive reading attitude in L2. (Yamashita, 2013; Lee & Schallert, 2014) The results of the present study confirm the theories proposed by past research. The data gathered for the present study has also provided evidence that extensive reading can change learner's reading attitude.

Contrary to our expectations, the subjects' reading word count increased, even when they did not start with a positive reading attitude at the beginning of the semester. This result will require further investigation.

The duration of the present study was a

mere fifteen weeks and the average word count was about one-hundred thousand words. Fifteen weeks is not enough time for the majority of inexperienced L2 readers to become fully aware of the benefits and the joy derived from reading books. Our previous study determined that one-hundred and fifty thousand words are an emergence threshold for readers to jump to the next level of reading complexity. The students averaged around one-hundred thousand words during the fifteen-week semester, so it might require another fifteen weeks for the majority to cross the one-hundred and fifty thousand word threshold and reach the next reading level. The results of the present study are encouraging, but further research should be conducted to validate the findings.

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Appendix

The items of the questionnaire

Q 1 英語の本を借りたり、本を読んだりするために図書館に行きますか。Do you go to a library to borrow or read English books?

Q 2 空いている時間に英語の本を読むことは好きですか。Do you like reading English books in your spare time?

Q 3 時々英語で書かれたウェブサイトに行って書かれていることを読みますか。Do you sometimes visit English websites and read them on the Internet?

Q 4 英語で読書をする時間を探そうと試みますか。Do you try to find time for reading in English?

Q 5 休暇の期間には少なくとも一冊は英語の本を読みたいと思いますか。Do you want to read at least one English book

during your vacation?

Q 6　もし誰かがある英語の本をすごく好きだとあなたに言ったら、あなたもその本を読みますか。If someone tells you that he or she likes an English book very much, are you going to read it too?

Q 7　将来、沢山の英語の本を読みたいと思いますか。Do you want to read many English books in the future?

*The following are the original sentences in Lee and Schallert（2014）.

1．I go to a library to borrow or read English books. 2．I like to read English books in my spare time. 3．I sometimes visit English websites and read them on the Internet. 4．I try to find time for reading in English. 5．During my vacation, I want to read at least one English book. 6．If someone tells me that he or she likes an English book very much, I am going to read it too. 7．I want to read many English books in the future.