Comparing the Effect of Extensive Reading with and without Discussion on Pre-service Teachers’ L2 Reading Attitudes
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ABSTRACT: A substantial amount of research has demonstrated the efficacy of extensive reading (ER) for improving aspects of L2 learners’ language proficiency and attitudes toward the L2. However, fewer inquiries have yet been made into the effectiveness of combining ER with other activities like discussion on learners’ L2 reading attitudes. To explore the potential advantages of ER with discussion over ER alone for improving learners’ L2 reading attitude, two groups of Korean pre-service EFL teachers engaged in ER or ER with discussion over a semester. At the end of the semester, they completed a questionnaire that included a standardized L2 reading attitudes instrument as well as open-ended qualitative questions about their perceptions of doing ER. Results from the standardized attitude survey revealed that the only difference in L2 reading attitudes between the ER and ER with discussion groups was that the ER only saw more practical value of ER than the ER with discussion group. There were no difference in other aspects of L2 reading attitude including comfort, anxiety and intellectual value between the two groups. Themes that arose from the open-ended survey questions included the perceived importance of teacher modelling, how ER enables some learners to experience authentic language and culture and, for some learners, engaging in ER changed their views of L2 reading. Quantitative results suggest that including discussion with ER does not improve L2 reading attitudes beyond doing ER alone. Qualitative findings indicate that doing ER can help some learners change their views on reading in English while allowing them to experience authentic language and culture.

Key words: extensive reading, discussion, L2 reading, L2 reading attitudes, EFL

I. Introduction

Over the past two decades, extensive reading (ER) has proven itself to be a valuable addition to second and foreign language teachers’ instructional repertoires. Early work explored the effect of ER on elementary school students’ L2 development. Researchers reported that ER did in fact support the growth in vocabulary and language proficiency (Elley & Mangubhai, 1983) as well as L2 literacy development (Hafiz & Tudor, 1989). Later studies began to establish connections between ER and those variables for other types of second and foreign language learners. Findings have been that ER is an effective intervention to support L2 vocabulary (Horst, 2005; Pigada & Schmitt, 2006), grammar development (Mason, 2007; Rodrigo, 2006), and L2 reading growth (Jeon & Day, 2016; Krashen, 2011).

In addition to reading proficiency, researchers are beginning to pay more attention to the impact of ER on other affective variables associated with second and foreign language learning. Research on EFL university students and adult learners in a wide variety of contexts
has demonstrated that ER positively influences language learners’ attitudes toward reading in the L2. University students in Hong Kong developed more positive attitudes toward pleasure reading than comparison group who practiced writing and presentation skills (Lao & Krashen, 2000). ER also improved the positive attitudes and decreased the L2 reading anxiety of non-English major Japanese university students in required EFL classes (Yamashita, 2013). Similarly, experience with ER positively affected Venezuelan university students’ perception of Extensive Reading (De Morgado, 2009).

ER also transformed formerly low-performing and reluctant EFL postsecondary-level readers into eager readers (Mason & Krashen, 1997). Other studies with remedial (Takase & Otsuki, 2012) and an unmotivated learner (Ro, 2013) reported comparable findings. These positive effects of ER on attitude have also been demonstrated to last for at least one year after the ER intervention (Chien & Yú, 2015). Thus, results from numerous studies suggest that ER has a powerful and long-lasting effect on L2 readers’ attitudes toward L2 reading.

As evidenced by the research reported above, previous investigators have given increasing attention to the possible influence of ER on learner L2 reading attitudes. More recently, this focus has begun to shift slightly as scholars wonder whether ER might be productively combined with other learning activities that may augment the effect of the ER intervention. For instance, a growing amount of research has been done on the pairing of ER with discussion in the form of literature circles. Authors have claimed to have combined ER with literature or reading circles in order to personalize learners’ reading experience and to connect text content to their lives (Bibby & McIlroy, 2013). Bibby (2012) claims that “[…] well-chosen literature facilitates discussion of issues that students can, and do, really engage in with genuine gusto” (p. 7). Extant empirical findings also point to the combination of ER and literature circles having an impact on learner affect. For instance, several studies have shown that adding literature circle discussion to ER improved learner attitudes and motivation. A qualitative investigation of upper-intermediate learners at a private school in Indonesia revealed that, based on observations of their literature circle discussions and open-ended questionnaire data learners “most students stated that they were more motivated to read in English after participating in the literature circle program…[and] the students’ attitude toward reading in English had improved significantly” (Nurjati, 2013, p. 32). Another study was conducted with intermediate and advanced high school students in Vietnam. Observations indicated that based on learners’ class attendance, discussion notes preparation and apparent enthusiasm, they were motivated by the literature circles (Shelton-Strong, 2011).

Findings from Japanese college students concurred that literature circles motivated students to read a lot on their own time, write numerous discussion notes and speak extensively in English during their discussions (Furr, 2004). Sheehan (2015) conducted research with Japanese college-level learners which led him to conclude that literature circles are an excellent way to engage higher-level learners and inspire a passion for reading and enjoying literature. An investigation of Japanese university students in a content (i.e., non-literature) class likewise reported that learners were enthusiastic to be involved in it and they found literature circles to be an enjoyable classroom activity (Williams, 2010).

Although some investigation has occurred into the effects of ER and other classroom activities on students’ L2 development and attitudes, a number of questions remain. In particular, the relationship between ER and less formal book discussion formats than literature circles and learners’ L2 reading attitude development has not been scrutinized yet. Literature circles tend to be considerably more structured than the type of post-reading discussion activity being investigated here so this rather unique post-ER discussion type seems to warrant its own study. Furthermore, while several researchers have recommended the use of this types of discussion as a follow up to ER (Bamford, Day, & Rodrigo, 2004; Cameron, 2015; Jacobs & Farrell, 2012), it does not appear that much research has been done on its influence on language development or learner affect.