Critical Reflection on Extensive Reading through Collaborative Active Learning at College Level

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Abstract: This study is based on the awareness that a useful reading program needs to be developed for university EFL students who have limited exposure to English. For the program, we combine an extensive reading program with a collaborative active learning approach. The study aims to describe our implementation of the extensive program with Korean university EFL students and analyze its effects on language improvement. Based upon that, it attempts to suggest a model for extensive reading. For the research design, it employs qualitative method such as learning logs and interviews with students and teachers; and quantitative method including pre- and post-reading tests. The study provides several significant results. First, it shows that the extensive reading program through collaborative active learning contributed to improving participants’ English competence in reading and writing. Second, it suggests that the roles of students and teachers be re-established for the program to be utilized successfully with Korean EFL learners. Finally, a model of an extensive reading program using collaborative active learning was suggested.

Keywords: extensive reading, collaboration, active learning, EFL program

I. Introduction

It is a general belief that learners need to be exposed to their second language (L2) as much as possible to develop the target language proficiency. However, the input EFL students receive is mostly from their classroom; the students do not often engage in L2 resources beyond a course requirement. In Korean university contexts, this state can be even worse. Apart from the limited exposure to the target language, university students tend to be passive and reluctant in regard to the EFL course offered by their university (Kwon, 2005). Educators are concerned about students’ disinterest and, therefore, are endeavoring to find ways to encourage students to actively engage in the course. Yet, what seems to be less prior to those educators is to provide the students with a rich foreign language source,
which is absolutely needed for L2 acquisition.

Extensive reading (ER) can be suggested as a solution not only to enhance students' interest in EFL classes but to afford sufficient input to college students. ER involves reading “large quantities of materials within their linguistic competence” (Grabe & Stoller, 1997, p.102) for general understanding and obtaining pleasure from reading (Pigada & Schmitt, 2006; Taguchi & Gorsuch, 2002); further, Krashen (1995) defines ER as the program in which learners “do self-selected reading with only minimal accountability” (p.192). In other words, in extensive reading, learners can choose the ones they enjoy; as a result, reading can be interesting to a great extent. Positive effects of ER on motivation have been found by several studies (Bell & Campbell, 1996; Kembo, 1993). ER has also been considered as a useful way to promote second language (L2) learning, especially in input-poor environments since its materials provide substantial linguistic input for developing learners’ linguistic competences (Bell, 1998; Horst, 2005). Numerous studies have reported that ER has positive effects on a variety of students’ language skills as well (Greenberg, Rodrigo, Berry, Brick & Joseph, 2006; Hitosugi & Day, 2004; Ponniah, 2011; Soltani, 2011).

The theoretical basis underlies Krashen’s input hypothesis (1985, 1994). According to the input hypothesis, “human acquires language in only way - by understanding message, or by receiving comprehensible input” (Krashen, 1985, p.2); and the only role of output in SLA is that of generating comprehensible input. This implies that the only necessary and sufficient condition for second language acquisition (SLA) is comprehensible input and the output is a mere product of input. However, such views of input and output have been questioned since Swain first proposed her output hypothesis (1985). She argued that comprehensible input is not enough for successful L2 learning. She based her hypothesis on findings from the studies she and others (Lapkin and Swain, 1979; Genesee, 1983) conducted in immersion contexts in Canada. According to the findings of these studies, although the immersion students were provided with a rich source of comprehensible input over many years, their speaking and writing did not reach desired levels, despite the fact that they were almost equivalent to native speakers of the target language in terms of comprehension ability. A significant amount of research has been conducted to examine the role of output in L2 learning and has supported a positive role for output (Swain, 1993,