The Effects of an Extensive Reading Program for Japanese Junior High School Students

Hiroshi OTA*, Norio HAYASHI**, Shigeyuki HIDAI***, Yasuhiro HAGIWARA****

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to identify an effect of an extensive reading program held in two three-week sessions in June and in September for Japanese junior high school students by comparing the students who participated in the program with those who did not.

In the program the students were encouraged to read as many graded readers as possible. They chose a book from the class library, and read books at a suitable level and at their own pace. After reading one book, the students wrote a summary of the book and comments briefly in Japanese. Then they returned the book and submitted the sheet. At the end of each class, they were required to borrow at least one book and read it at home before the next class.

As a pre- and a post-test, a proficiency test called CASEC (Computerized Assessment System for English Communication) was conducted. The result of the tests shows that there is a significant difference in the scores between the students who participated in the program in June and September, and those who did not. However, the effect cannot be seen among the students who participated in the program in either June or September, therefore it is likely that a certain amount of reading is needed for improvements.

1. Introduction

In junior high schools in Japan, teachers do a wide variety of listening and speaking activities to foster students’ proficiency in English. To acquire a language, a massive amount of input is needed. Krashen (1985) believes that comprehensible input is essential to acquire a language. However, in Japanese junior high schools, students are not exposed to enough input. Teacher talks, textbooks, and handouts a classroom teacher provides are the main sources of input. Research has shown that the amount of input as a main source textbook is approximately no more than 19 pages of a paperback novel (Mizuno, 2002).

2. Purpose

The purpose of this study is to identify the effects of an extensive reading program held in two three-week sessions in June and in September for Japanese junior high school students by comparing the students who participated in the program with a control group who did not.

3. Method

To supplement the amount of input, extensive reading has been seen as a reasonable source of comprehensible input. (Kanatani, Osaka, Kimura and Minai (1990, 1991) Including in this research are, studies with Japanese junior high school students as subjects by Kanatani et al.(1994,1995) and classroom reports by Taniguchi (1989) and Osa (1996).

Kanatani et al.(1994) summarize the effect of an extensive reading program for junior high school students as follows: after the 8th month of an extensive reading program, there is a significant difference in the English test scores between students who participated in the program and those who did not. Up to the 14th month, the difference continued, after that, the effect is likely to decrease.

However, there is little other research on the effect of extensive reading for Japanese junior high school students.

In this study, referring to Kanatani et al. (1994), we will examine the effect of an extensive reading program for Japanese junior high school students.

3.1 Subjects

The subjects for this study were 45 Japanese 3rd year junior high school students who participated in an extensive reading program as an elective course. They all attended the same national university affiliated school and were taught by the present researchers.

3.2 An extensive reading program

3.2.1 An elective course

This program was offered for the 160 3rd year students as an elective course. The purpose of the elective courses was to improve proficiency in each subject. The following nine elective courses were held: Japanese calligraphy, social studies, math, science, music, physical education, fine arts, homemaking, and English extensive reading.

The 1st half of the course consisted of daily 90-minute classes held on three days in June. The 2nd half of the course was held on an additional three days in September. Students chose one course for the 1st half and the 2nd half respectively.

3.2.2 Procedure of the extensive reading program

Each 90-minute class was conducted as follows: (See. Appendix 1)

— Students came to the multi-media room where the class was held, and chose a book from the class library, and read at their own pace. They were allowed to stop reading and change to another book as they liked.

— After reading one book, the students wrote a summary of the book and commented briefly in Japanese. Then they
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As a pre– and a post–test, a proficiency test called CASEC (Computerized Assessment
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3 Komazawa Women’s University*, The Japan Institute for Educational Measurement, Inc.*
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In the first class, we instructed them on how to do reading in the class and we handed out a worksheet. The critical points were:
— Choose a book which is at a suitable level. That is, to facilitate reading gain without pain. (Day & Bamford, 1998).
— Read a book that can be read with ease and comfort.

3.3 Reading Materials

Graded readers published by foreign publishers were used. The following were readers that were mainly used.
— Bookworm Series (Starters, Stage 1, Stage 2) by Oxford University Press
— Penguin Readers (Easystarts, Beginner, Elementary) by Longman
— Classic tales by Oxford University Press

3.4 Analysis procedure

As a pre- and a post-test, the CASEC proficiency test was administered to all the 3rd year students at the end of May. CASEC was developed by The Society for Testing English Proficiency Inc. (Nippon Eigo Kenkyu Kyokai) to assess examinees’ proficiency in English. It is based on Item Response Theory. It consists of the following four sections; Section 1: Fill in blanks in a sentence (Vocabulary), Section 2: Fill in blanks in a discourse (Reading), Section 3: Listen & answer a question (Listening), Section 4: Listen & Fill in blanks (Dictation).

The pre-test was conducted at the end of May, which was about a week before the start of the program in June and the post-test in early December, which was about three months after the program in September.

The students were divided into three groups as follows:
— Experiment Group A (N = 8), which consisted of students who participated in the program in June and September.
— Experiment Group B (N = 37), which consisted of students who participated in the program in either June or September.
— Control group (N = 45), which consisted of students who did not participate in the program.

In order to match the students of the experimental group A or B with those of the control group, the following procedures were adopted: first students who got the same total scores on the pre-test were paired, then those who got close total scores were paired. Second, in terms of motivation toward learning English, the present researchers carefully chose subjects for the control group who were as well-motivated as those of the experimental groups. We were able to choose subjects as we taught the subjects English for three years and knew them very well. It should be noted that some students who did not choose to participate in the reading program were very motivated to study English. They decided to take extra math classes instead as they needed to improve in that subject more than they needed improvement in English.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.1 Descriptive statistics of pre-test (N=8)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N=8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
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<td>TOTAL</td>
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<table>
<thead>
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<th>Table 3.2 Descriptive statistics of pre-test (N=37)</th>
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<td>N=37</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N=8</td>
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<tr>
<td>------</td>
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<td>TOTAL</td>
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</tbody>
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Finally, in order to measure the effect of the extensive reading program, the total scores and scores of each section of the post-test between the experimental groups, and the control group were compared. To compare the total scores a paired t-test was conducted. To compare the scores of each section, analysis of covariance (hereafter cited as ANCOVA) was conducted, as the scores of each section were not utilized for matching.

4. Results

Table 4.1 and 4.2 show the descriptive statistics of the post-test of the total scores and scores of each section of CASEC.

Paired t-test and ANCOVA was conducted to compare the scores of each section between the experimental group A and the control group, and between the experimental group B and the control group. Table 4.3 shows the results of paired t-test and ANCOVA.

As shown in Table 4.3, there is a significant difference in the residual scores controlled for the post-test scores between the experimental group A and the control group (N = 16, F (1, 13) = 7.497, p < 0.05). It should be noted that the error variances between these groups can be statistically considered to be the same and that there is
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N=8*</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Mean (±SD)</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Mean (±SD)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
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<td>31.817</td>
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### Table 3.2 Descriptive statistics of post-test (N=37)  
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<th>Group</th>
<th>Mean (±SD)</th>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
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<td>447.216</td>
<td></td>
<td>447.946</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>77.702</td>
<td></td>
<td>82.827</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<td>TOTAL</td>
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<td>13.685</td>
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<td>119.375</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10.596</td>
<td></td>
<td>11.154</td>
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<tr>
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<td>118.500</td>
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<td>33.594</td>
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<td>9.957</td>
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<td>124.750</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14.240</td>
<td></td>
<td>16.369</td>
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Section 2 of CASEC was made to measure reading ability; too, therefore, the effect of the extensive program might be an improvement in reading ability.

5. Discussion
5.1. Summary of the results
As shown in Table 4.3, there is a significant difference in scores between the experimental group A and the control group. That is, the effect of the extensive reading program resulted in an improvement in reading ability. However, the effect cannot be seen among the experimental group B, therefore it is likely that a certain amount of reading is needed for improvement.

5.2. Interpretation of the results
Why can an improvement of reading ability be seen in this study? There might be some reasons for the development in reading.

Firstly, reading extensively itself has an effect on improving reading. However, there was no effect for the students who participated in the program for three weeks in either June or September, so a certain amount of extensive reading might be needed for development.

Secondly, the quality of reading might improve. It is likely that the students who participated in the program for six weeks both in June and September got used to reading extensively. That might lead students to read more effectively. The following are what they wrote in their report cards.

Table 4.3 The results of paired t-test and ANCOVA

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Experiment Group A</th>
<th>Experiment Group B</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>8×2</td>
<td>17×2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section1</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section2</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section3</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section4</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: ☐: There is a significant difference at the .05 level
×: There is no significant difference.

“I tried to read easier books fast and accurately.” (Student K)

“I learned to read books faster.” (Student O)

“In June I was able to read books at an easier level, but in September I could read books at the next level. Now that I am used to reading English books, I don’t feel I’m reading English books.” (Student C)

“I read fewer books this time than the last time, but I can read them more deeply.” (Student H)

Thirdly, the time during the year when the program was run might be an optimal time for the students to read extensively. As Ota (2002), and Ota, Kanatani, Kosuge, and Hida (2003) mention, in June and September of their 3rd year of junior high school the students produced utterances at a discourse level. It could mean that they comprehend sentences at a discourse level more easily.

Lastly, this time of the school year could also be an appropriate time for them to read extensively, as they become more conscious of entrance examinations for high school, in which they are required to read long passages.

5.3. Suggestions for future research
It should be noted that this study has examined only one extensive reading program as an elective course for the students, therefore the results of this study might not be taken as evidence for the efficacy of extensive reading programs for all Japanese junior high school students. Suggestions for future research would be as follows:

Firstly, the answers of the questionnaires by the students who participated in this study should be examined. In Kanatani et al. (1994, 1995), the subjects’ attitude toward reading improved.

Secondly, each student in experimental group A should be interviewed more thoroughly. How much did each read over the six weeks? What books at what levels did they read? How did they react to each book? How did their attitude toward reading change? These results might shed light on the secret of success in an extensive reading program.

Acknowledgement
I would like to thank Professor Ken Kanatani at Tokyo Gakugei University for his valuable advice on this study. I am also grateful to Daniel Stewart for providing detailed comments on my earlier draft.

Notes
The results of this study were orally presented at the 27th annual meeting of KANTO-KOSHINETSU ENGLISH LANGUAGE SOCIETY in August, 2003.

References


Mizuno, K. (水野耕太郎) (2002).「読み
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
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<td>(\times)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Section1</td>
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<td>(\times)</td>
<td>(\times)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: \(\bigcirc\) There is a significant difference at the .05 level.
\(\times\) There is no significant difference.

“I tried to read easier books fast and accurately.” (Student K)

“I learned to read books faster.” (Student O)

“In June I was able to read books at an easier level, but in September I could read books at the next level. Now that I am used to reading English books, I don’t feel I’m reading English books.” (Student C)

“I read fewer books this time than the last time, but I can read them more deeply.” (Student H)

Thirdly, the time during the year when the program was run might be an optimal time for the students to read extensively. As Ota (2002), and Ota, Kanatani, Kosuge, and Hida (2003) mention, in June and September of their 3rd year of junior high school the students produced utterances at a discourse level. It could mean that they comprehend sentences at a discourse level more easily.

Lastly, this time of the school year could also be an appropriate time for them to read extensively, as they become more conscious of entrance examinations for high school, in which they are required to read long passages.

5.3. Suggestions for future research

It should be noted that this study has examined only one extensive reading program as an elective course for the students, therefore the results of this study might not be taken as evidence for the efficacy of extensive reading programs for all Japanese junior high school students. Suggestions for future research would be as follows:

Firstly, the answers of the questionnaires by the students who participated in this study should be examined. In Kanatani et al. (1994, 1995), the subjects’ attitude toward reading improved.

Secondly, each student in experimental group A should be interviewed more thoroughly. How much did each read over the six weeks? What books at what levels did they read? How did they react to each book? How did their attitude toward reading change? These results might shed light on the secret of success in an extensive reading program.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Professor Ken Kanatani at Tokyo Gakugei University for his valuable advice on this study. I am also grateful to Daniel Stewart for providing detailed comments on my earlier draft.

Notes

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Appendix 1
オリエンテーション資料
英語選択授業 『英語をたくさん読もう』について
この講座の目的：
英語の本をたくさん読むことにより、読むものの楽しさ同英語力をつける
授業の日時は 6月5日、12日、19日
授業の流れ
1. 本を選ぶ
たくさん読むことが目的なので、楽しんで読めるレベルから始め、次第にレベルを上げるようにしよう。まずは簡単だと思うレベルの本から読もう。1ページに知らない単語がたくさんあるよう本は選ばないこと。

2. 本を読む
・ 辞書はできるだけ使用せず、知らない単語は前後関係から判断しながらでき るだけ早く読むようにしよう。
・ 日本語で読むのではなく、英語のままで文脈や活の流れを理解す るように読む。つまりないと思うと こや難しいところははといても速 く一冊を読み切るようにしよう。
・ リラックスして読もう。
・ 面白く、難しいと思った本は途中 で読むのをやめ、新しい本を読んでか まいません。
・ わからなくて困るところ、ここを はずした場合のポイントがわからなく なると思うところでは先生に質問に来 てかってしまいません。

3. 簡単にあらすじを書く
授業の最後に今日読んだ本について簡短に あらすじを書きましょう。

4. 家で読む本を借りる
今度の時間までに家で読む本を借りてく ださい。最低1冊は読むようにしましょう。
次の時間までに読み終わった人は英語科学研究室に持ってきてください。そしてまた次 の本を借りましょう。

とにかくたくさん読みたい。きてあな たの目標は...

Appendix 2
Report Card
Class ( ) No ( ) Name ( )

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Hour</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
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</table>

Title
＜読んだ感想＞（該当するものに○をつけよう）
よく読めた | つまらなかった
内容がよくわかった | 全然わからなかった
辞書をよく使った | 全然使わなかった

Summary (in English or Japanese) *簡単に書こう。10分以上かからないこと。その時間があっ たら次の本を読もう。
手を養える多読の授業（http://www.sfkeio.ac.jp/~kmizuno/paper1/）
Osa, K.（長 勝彦）(1996)、「私のレディング・マラソン」現代英語教育8月号、pp.19-21、研究社。
Ota, Kanatanos, Kosuge, and Hidai, (大田洋、金谷愛、小菅敬子、日吉誠之) (2003).「英語力どのように伸びてゆくか—中学学生の英語習得過程を追う」大塚謙書・鶴田、H. (谷口英美) (1989).「言語活動の指導—一時期による重点のかけ方を中心に—」英語教育12月号、pp.11-13、大塚謙書・鶴田。

Appendix 1
オリエンテーション資料
英語選択授業「英語をたくさん読もう」によって！
この講義の目的：
英語の本をたくさん読むことにより、読むことの楽しさと同時に英語の力につける
授業の日時：6月5日、12日、19日
授業の流れ
1. 本を選ぶ
たくさんの読むことが目的なので、楽しんで読めるレベルから始め、次第にレベルを上げるようにします。まずは簡単だと思われるレベルの本から読もう。1ページに知らない単辞があるような本は選ばないこと。
2. 本を読む
・辞書はできるだけ使用せず。知らない単辞は前後関係から判断しながら読むだけ早めに読むようにしよう。
・日本語を訳しながら読むのではなく、英語のままで要旨や流れを理解するように読もう。つまらないと思うとこや難しいところはあえて速く一冊を読み切るようにしよう。
・リラックスして読もう。
・面白くない、難しいと思った本は途中で読むのをやめ、難しい本を読んでみません。
・わからないと気になるところ、ここをはずしたら話のポイントがわからなくななると思うところは先生に質問に来てかまいません。

3. 簡単にあらすじを書く
授業の最後に今日読んだ本について簡単にあらすじを書きましょう。

4. 家で読む本を借りる
今度の時間までに家で読む本を借りてきてください。最低1冊は読むようにしましょう。
次の時間までに読み終わった人は英語研究室に持ってきてください。そしてまた次の本を借りましょう。
とにかくたくさん読みましょう。さてあなただの目標は...