Developing Autonomous Self-Regulated Readers in an Extensive Reading Program

J. Lake, Fukuoka Jo Gakuin University, Japan
Trevor Holster, Fukuoka Women's University, Japan

Corresponding author: jlake@temple.edu

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Abstract

Reading is an important skill to acquire for overall language proficiency. Sustained reading skill improvement and reading motivation are needed to become a fluent reader and to develop a positive reading identity. Students are better able to maintain ongoing reading development by becoming autonomous and self-regulated readers. This paper explains the benefits of developing self-regulated readers through an extensive reading program, where students read many interesting books at an appropriate level of difficulty. Students and teachers made use of an extensive reading module for an open-source audience response system. Using this system provides autonomous learning conditions that enable students to read books extensively by choosing books, monitoring, and reflecting on books read. Teachers can monitor students through summaries of the number of books read by each student, estimates of book difficulty, and popularity ratings of the books. Empirical data from our work-in-progress that was presented in Lake and Holster (2013) shows how extensive reading leads to gains in reading speed, reading motivation, and a positive reading identity.

Keywords: self-regulated reading, autonomous readers, positive L2 reading-self, reading motivation, extensive reading

Becoming a strong second language (L2) reader takes much time, effort, and motivation. L2 reader motivation may be influenced by "top-down" dispositional motivations or more "bottom-up" momentary states, that is, L2 readers may exhibit motivations from general reading attitudes or reading identities (Hall, 2012; Lake, 2014; Richardson & Eccles, 2007) that are relatively stable and trait-like or from contextual, situational, fleeting feelings that are more dynamic and state-like (Schiefele, Schaffner, Moller, & Wigfield, 2012). Both types of reading motivations influence the self-regulation of reading. This study explains and examines how self-regulated L2 readers and their motivations can change over an L2 reading course through the use of graded readers and an open-source audience response system in an extensive reading program.

Literature Review

Extensive reading

Extensive reading involves students reading many stories or informative texts at an appropriate level of difficulty that the readers choose themselves. As Davis (1995) explains, "pupils are given the time, encouragement, and materials to read pleasurably, at their own level, as many books as they can, without the pressures of testing or marks" (p. 320). Studies have shown that extensive reading can lead to improvements in vocabulary, writing, motivation, reading identity, speaking, listening, spelling, grammar, and, of course, reading abilities (Bamford & Day, 2004; Cirocki, 2009; Day & Bamford, 1998; Day et al., 2011; Grabe & Stoller, 2011; Iwahori, 2008; Lake, 2014; Nation, 2009). Often extensive reading is contrasted with intensive reading where students are reading short, difficult passages from a text chosen by the teacher (Waring, 2011). Even in an academic reading program with typical reading textbooks, it is important to develop reading fluency. The "best way to develop reading fluency is through extensive reading" (Seymour & Walsh, 2006, p. 39). Therefore, it is important to incorporate an extensive reading component into the program.

In an extensive reading program, students choose books that are meaningful and interesting to them. The successful reading of many books develops positive competence beliefs about reading that leads to higher levels of reading motivation (Guthrie, Wigfield, & Perencevich, 2004; Schiefele et al., 2012). The large amount of input over time increases implicit knowledge of vocabulary and reading that also helps to develop other language skills contributing to overall improvement in language proficiency (Hunt & Beglar, 2005). In two different studies, Lake and Holster (2012) and Lake (2014) show how an extensive reading program led to student improvement in reading identity, reading motivation, and reading speed.

Fluency

Fluency has to do with reading with automaticity and comprehension (Grabe, 2009; Grabe & Stoller, 2011). Automaticity in reading involves the rapid processing of text without conscious awareness. Comprehension comes from the rapid recognition of word parts, words, and greater lengths of text. There needs to be a certain degree of speed to allow complete units to be processed in working memory so that meaning can be extracted. For example, letters need to be recognized so that

words and phrases can form and give meaning, and words and phrases need to be recognized so that sentences can form and provide meaning. Reading with fluency can lead to greater comprehension because it contributes to understanding of larger units of text and more cognitive resources can be employed for strategies or text interpretation (Grabe, 2009; Grabe & Stoller, 2011).

Graded readers

Extensive reading programs typically make use of graded readers. These are books that are graded or leveled based on text complexity. Editors and publishers usually work with some formula that controls for vocabulary range and type of grammar allowed. Lower level graded readers will have higher frequency vocabulary with a close range of words and grammar, while higher level readers will have less frequent words in a greater range and more complex grammar.

Self-regulation

Self-regulated learning involves taking active control of learning and is often divided into phases of forethought, performance, and self-reflection (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011). Activities in the forethought phase include actions such as forming goals, planning, and building motivation. In the performance phase, activities include actions such as monitoring learning and interest, and metacognitive monitoring of learning. Activities in the self-reflection phase include such actions as self-evaluation, causal attributions of success or failure, and reflecting on positive feelings of liking or enjoying the activity.

Self-regulated reading carries over these pre-activity, during activity, and post-activity phases into the domain of reading (Guthrie et al., 2004; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997; Tonks & Taboada, 2011). Activities in the forethought phase include such actions as gauging reading ability, gauging text complexity, gauging self-efficacy, matching personal interests with texts, setting number of books per week goals, and setting time per week or scheduling goals. In the performance phase, activities include such actions as going to the library to check out books; monitoring books for difficulty—abandon if too high, continue if not; monitoring books for interest—abandon if too low, continue if not; and monitoring for understanding. Activities in the self-reflection phase include such actions as reflecting on the difficulty, understanding, fluency, enjoyment and impressions of the book.

Self-regulated reading may be confused with reading strategies. Common reading strategies or study strategies include SQ3R, PQRST, and KWL tables. These mnemonics refer to actions students take as they read. SQ3R refers to survey/skim, question, read, recite/recall, and review. PQRST refers to preview, question, read, summarize, and test. KWL refers to what the student knows, wants to know, and learned, which is presented in a table or chart. These strategies are often practiced during intensive reading instruction, and while they have pre-reading, reading, and post-reading elements they are probably better understood as a form of micro-self-regulated learning. In contrast, for our extensive reading study we are focusing on a more macro-form of self-regulation.

Problems with Monitoring ER

Ideally, students in an extensive reading program read many interesting books that they choose themselves and develop intrinsic motivation and an identity as a reader (Lake, 2014). Tests, quizzes, book reports, and other types of monitoring methods by teachers that are focused on specific details, if used with extensive reading, can lead to intensive reading and extrinsic motivation. Strict monitoring of specific details and narrow performance goals leads to problems associated with extrinsic motivation such as avoidance strategies, anxiety, and demotivation (Assor & Kaplan, 2001; Ryan & Connell, 1989; Ryan & La Guardia, 1999; Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCinto, & Turner, 2004). Strict formal assessments may make the students focus more on the assessment than reading. Formal assessments can contribute to a shift from student autonomy, choices, self-regulation and intrinsic reading motivation to teacher-regulation and extrinsic motivation (Krashen, 2004, 2011).

If students shift their intrinsic motivation to extrinsic motivation, then extensive reading may be abandoned as soon as the external regulation is removed. If intrinsic motivation can be maintained it may lead to the development of a positive L2 reading self and an even more general positive L2 self (Lake, 2013, 2014). As pointed out in first language contexts, "the real purpose of reading instruction is the development of individuals who will engage in personal reading for pursuit of their interests, needs, recreation, practical and academic purposes, and for just pure pleasure" (Flippo, 2005, p. 21). To put it simply, in the context of second language

reading, "our long-term goal is to have students who do not stop reading when the reading class is over" (Hudson, 2007, p. 29).

Monitoring Solution

A solution to the monitoring problem is to have students self-monitor. A key component of self-regulation is monitoring and taking responsibility for learning. This encourages autonomous learning, maintains intrinsic motivation, and helps develop self-regulated reading. Using a self-report survey that asks for responses that require general understanding of the texts (for example, "Did you enjoy the book?" or "How quickly did you read the book?") takes little time to complete while keeping the students mindful that readings should be fluent and enjoyable. Thus, the externally monitored, minimally invasive self-reports with gentle reminders of enjoyment and fluency may lead over the school year to an internalization of self-regulated reading.

Keeping track of surveys could be impractical with physical copies because of the large number of different books by different readers in a reading program. With an online survey and database system, collecting information for teachers and students is relatively quick and easy. In this study, a Mobile Audience Response System (MOARS) with an extensive reading add-on was used. MOARS is a free, open-source audience response system (more information and free downloads can be found at MOARS.com; Pellowe, 2010). An additional free open-source extensive reading add-on module was also used. With the system, students can use phones or other mobile devices or regular computers to take quizzes or surveys; in this case, it was the graded reader survey. Teachers can then give feedback to individual students or classes about how many books they have read. For example, after the second week of classes a teacher could give individual feedback that a student has read "X number of books" and that "most students in class have read over 5 books" to provide students with a normative sense of where they are in relation to the group. Alternatively, a teacher could give more aspirational feedback such as "some students have read more than 10 books" to show what some students have found possible.

In addition to the student information, teachers or administrators can also look at the graded reader information such as the relative difficulty of the books, or what books are interesting, or which ones are often being read. Using this information could guide student advice or future library book purchases. For those interested in research, the extensive reading add-on for MOARS allows a download of formatted

data and a control file for a many-faceted Rasch measurement (MFRM) for use in Facets software available from winsteps.com (Linacre, 1994, 2010). This makes it possible for teachers or researchers to do a more in-depth analysis of the data.

Work-in-Progress

For our current study that we reported on in our presentation at the Self-regulation in Foreign Language Learning: Shared Perspectives symposium held at Shimonoseki City University (Lake & Holster, 2013) we used data collected with MOARS and also separately collected motivation data and reading speed data. The motivation data was from self-reports of a positive L2 reading self, L2 reading self-efficacy, and L2 reading anxiety. (For more information on reading motivation, positive L2 reading self, L2 reading self-efficacy and extensive reading see Lake, 2014.) The reading speed tests were taken from Quinn, Nation, and Millett (2007).

The participants in our study were first year students in a public university in western Japan. They were all in an academic English program with classes in reading, listening, writing, and communication skills. The motivation surveys were given at the beginning of the academic year, mid-year, and at the end of the academic year. The reading speed tests were given at the beginning of the semester, mid-semester, and at the end of the semester, for two semesters.

Preliminary general findings from the data gathered with MOARS were that the system provided practical, reliable measurement of students and books. This allows for feedback to students and teachers. In addition, more specific findings from the Facets analysis showed that for group gains in reading ability a minimum of 20 books needed to be read, but for substantive individual gains in ability a realistic number is 40 to 50 books per semester, or about 100 books per year. The Facets analysis of the books showed that different publishers' self-reported book levels increased in difficulty on average. However, for some publishers the variation in difficulty within a level often overlapped considerably with other levels. This shows that it cannot be assumed that a published book at one level will be easier or more difficult than a book at another level. Students need to be actively engaged in choosing books that are suitable for reading fluently at their own levels.

We found that reading speed in words per minute correlated with: proficiency as measured by the TOEFL ITP (r = .49); positive L2 reading self (r = .48); L2 reading anxiety (-.35); and L2 reading motivation (r = .45). Students in our reading

program showed an average increase in their reading speed of 23 words per minute over a semester. However, we found some problems with the reading tests used to measure speed because of the differing text complexity; as a result the reading speed may need to be adjusted (Lake, Holster, & Pellowe, 2014).

To be an autonomous and self-regulated reader it is important to have a positive L2 reader identity or positive L2 reading self (Lake, 2014). Our L2 reading self measure correlated with: L2 reading anxiety (r = -.52); L2 reading motivation (r = .64); unadjusted raw reading speed in words per minute (r = .48); institutional lexico-grammar test (r = .41); and proficiency as measured by the TOEFL ITP (r = .41).

Conclusion

As part of a work-in-progress, and from previous studies (Lake, 2014; Lake & Holster, 2012), we found that autonomous learning conditions can help students develop as self-regulated readers. Through the use of data generated by MOARS we were able to give teachers and students feedback that helps them monitor progress.

Through the use of graded readers in an extensive reading program, students gained in reading speed, developed a more positive L2 reading self, and increased L2 reading motivation. Students' L2 reading anxiety showed a negative relationship to a positive L2 reading self, L2 reading motivation, and reading speed. If students are to be able to read outside the classroom, they will need to be autonomous self-regulated readers, and this study shows that a foundation to develop as such can be built in an extensive reading program. This has the potential to help students in the future as they read for personal and academic interests, and far into the future as lifelong readers.

Notes on the contributors

J. Lake is a lecturer at Fukuoka Jo Gakuin University. His research interests include language learning motivation, language assessment, extensive reading, and applied positive psychology.

Trevor Holster is a lecturer at Fukuoka Women's University. His research interests include the integration of classroom assessment with instruction, performance based testing, peer-assessment, and placement testing. He is the Publications Chair of the JALT Testing and Evaluation SIG.

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