

If you build it, they will come: From a “Field of Dreams” to a more realistic view of extensive reading in an EFL Context

Setsuko Mori
Kinki University
Japan

There is no shortage of studies that have reported the beneficial effects of extensive reading (ER) on various aspects of second/foreign language acquisition, including reading comprehension, reading speed, and vocabulary development. Anecdote after anecdote shows the effectiveness of ER, and no one seems to repudiate the power of reading in large quantity. This is all fine and good; however, definitions of ER still vary depending on the particular ER researcher or practitioner, despite the fact that most of them refer to Day and Bamford’s 10 principles of ER (1998, 2002) as a theoretical and pedagogical baseline. According to Day and Bamford, ER is best implemented in circumstances where learners can choose from a variety of easy materials on a wide range of available topics (principles 1, 2, and 3), and read individually and silently (principle 8) for pleasure and information (principle 5) at a faster speed (principle 7) in large quantity (principle 4) with reading being its own reward (principle 6). Although most researchers and practitioners seem to adhere to principles 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, and 8 to varying extents and degrees, they may not always be truthful to principles 5 and 6, as they have to deal with a paradoxical situation in which pleasure reading is implemented as a course requirement. Principle 5, “*The purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information and general understanding,*” and principle 6, “*Reading is its own reward*” are both closely associated with reading motivation. Considering that reading, especially reading in a second/foreign language, is an inherently effortful activity that involves choice, motivation is essential to reading extensively. Therefore, in this article I would like to revisit principles 5 and 6 from the point of view of reading motivation, with a focus on ER in the EFL classroom.

What is Reading Motivation?

There are various conceptualizations of motivation; however, theories that are used in reading research commonly include intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) define intrinsic motivation to read in a first language (L1) as willingness to read, since reading is deemed as satisfying and rewarding in its own right. Schiefele (1999) further conceptualizes intrinsic motivation as either object or activity specific, where the former refers to motivation to read because of an interest in the topic of a text (i.e., reading curiosity) and the latter refers to motivation to read because the activity itself provides a positive experience (i.e., reading involvement).

Extrinsic motivation to read, on the other hand, is defined as a reader’s aspiration to read for

reasons that are external to both the activity of reading and the topic of a text. Extrinsically motivated readers read to get positive outcomes or to avoid negative outcomes (i.e., recognition from teachers or peers, competition, and grades). In other words, distinctions between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation derive from differences in the incentives that are attached to reading. In my Japanese adaptation of Wigfield and Guthrie's Motivation for Reading Questionnaire, striking similarities between motivation to read in a native language and in a foreign language were found, and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to read in a foreign language were also empirically identified and validated (Mori, 2002).

Who Reads More, Intrinsically Motivated Readers or Extrinsically Motivated Readers?

As ER means reading in quantity for the purpose of developing a good reading habit and improving proficiency, it is worth investigating how motivation affects our students' reading behavior. Research investigating relationships between motivation and the amount of reading in the L1 clearly indicates that intrinsic motivation is more strongly correlated with the amount of reading for enjoyment than extrinsic motivation (Baker & Wigfield, 1999; Becker, McElvany, & Kortenbruck, 2010; Law, 2009; Wang & Guthrie, 2004).

On the other hand, the evidence for contributions of extrinsic motivation to the amount of reading has been mixed. For instance, Baker and Wigfield (1999) and Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) found positive associations between competition, recognition, grades and compliance (indicative of extrinsic motivation) and reading amount, whereas Wang and Guthrie (2004) found such positive association only for task completion. Furthermore, Becker et al. (2010) and Schiefele, Schaffner, Moller, and Wigfield (2012) obtained a negative correlation between extrinsic motivation and reading amount. Wang and Guthrie (2004) also demonstrated that extrinsic motivation negatively affected reading amount after controlling for intrinsic motivation, while the association between intrinsic motivation and reading amount was strengthened after controlling for extrinsic motivation. Conversely, Park (2011) found that extrinsic reading motivation may not be so disadvantageous when paired with high levels of intrinsic reading motivation.

In my own attempts to explore how motivation contributes to the amount of reading in a foreign language, I also found that my students' intrinsic motivation to engage in the ER activity itself predicted how much they read, while extrinsic motivation did not predict the reading amount (Mori, 2004). This finding is in line with a study by Takase (2007) that showed that intrinsic motivation was a determining factor in explaining the amount of reading.

Can Students Be Intrinsically Motivated to Read in a Foreign Language?

When it comes to reading, we should assume that most researchers and educators, including myself, are anomalies. We just love to read! However, most young people, at least in Japan, where I teach, do not seem to have as strong an affection for books as we do. According to The Mainichi Newspapers' report (2014), the elementary school students surveyed read 11.4 books a month, while junior high school students read 3.9, senior high school students read only 1.6

books, and almost 50 percent of the senior high school students read no books in the month the questionnaire was conducted. A similar trend has been found even with university students in Japan. According to the National Federation of University Co-operative Associations (2014), more than 40 percent of the university students surveyed said they do not read any books at all.

Although there can be numerous factors that affect children's reading habits, Scholastic's (2013) survey of 6 to 17-year-olds suggests that parents' reading frequency, in addition to children's reading enjoyment and their own belief that reading for fun is important, may predict their reading frequency. However, The Mainichi Newspapers (2014) also reports that approximately 45% of the participants in their 30s and 40s said that they do not read books at all, and unsurprisingly, quite a few elementary, junior and senior high school students answered that they are never encouraged by their parents to read (30.6%, 36.8%, and 47.7%, respectively). Considering the possibility that reading attitudes transfer from L1 to L2 (Day & Bamford, 1998; Yamashita, 2011) and the fact that reading in a second/foreign language requires a far greater cognitive load, it looks like the odds are against us.

So, can our students be intrinsically motivated to read in a foreign language? From my experience as a teacher, I recurrently witness a tendency where a limited number of students become engrossed in reading and end up reading a lot while the rest of the students read less than an ideal amount. Such repeated experience led me to conduct a pilot study to closely observe and examine my students' reading behavior in a class where graded readers were introduced. In this study (Mori, 2011), 49 university students were engaged in reading graded readers in class for 12 weeks in the first semester and 12 weeks in the second semester. They were required to read a certain number of words, which was 10 percent of their final grade for each semester. The students were also encouraged to borrow books from the library and to read more than the minimum requirement. They were also informed that they would be given extra points for any amount exceeding the minimum requirement.

The findings tentatively confirmed my suspicion that reading amount is greatly skewed. Specifically, only 12 percent of the students read far more than the minimum requirement, whereas the majority of the students read either just about or less than the minimum. Although there are various definitions of outliers, those six students who read much more than the average were defined as outliers in this study for the sake of convenience.

A close examination of the outliers indicated that they are not exactly "serious" students who attempt to fulfill all the class requirements diligently, as many teachers may expect. In particular, although the outliers scored slightly higher than the other students on vocabulary quizzes, the final examination, and the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), they did not do as well as the other students in terms of classroom performance, as measured by participation and homework. Interestingly enough, however, a comparison of means implied that the outliers differed from the other students in the area of motivation to read using graded readers. In sum, what distinguished the outliers from the other students could be their motivation to read in English, especially their willingness to read outside of class and their interest in stories.

In a nutshell, although Day and Bamford (1998) argue that a successful ER program promotes positive attitude and motivation toward reading due to its flexibility and a lesser amount of

competition, in reality, students' motivation to read in a foreign language may not be so straightforward. There has been some research investigating possible relationships between ER and attitudes/motivation (e.g., Cho & Krashen, 1994; Fujita & Noro, 2009; Lao & Krashen, 2000; Mason & Krashen, 1997; Matsui & Noro, 2010; Robb & Susser, 1989; Yamashita, 2013). However, no studies seem to provide convincing evidence that ER promotes intrinsic motivation, which is a driving force behind reading extensively for pleasure.

Who Are Those Outliers? Why Are They Intrinsically Motivated?

Research on children's reading behavior in the L1 suggests that their self-perceptions of reading ability are closely related to their intrinsic reading motivation (Baker & Wigfield, 1999; Bouffard, Marcoux, Vezeau, & Bordeleau, 2003; Medford & McGeown, 2012). If children repeatedly encounter difficulty or failure while reading, they are likely to be discouraged to read, and as a result, their reading motivation and self-concept decline. Alternatively, if their experiences with reading are repetitively successful, they will enjoy reading more, and consequently, their reading motivation and self-concept increase. Therefore, it can be assumed that those outliers may already have a well-established L1 reading habit supported by strong intrinsic reading motivation and high self-perceptions of L1 reading ability, which potentially helps to reduce the psychological and cognitive barriers to reading in a foreign language. On the other hand, they may have had successful experiences reading in a foreign language in the past, which enhanced their intrinsic motivation to read in a foreign language. Conversely, considering the heavy cognitive load involved in reading in a foreign language, it is not difficult to imagine that students with low self-perceptions of reading ability in a foreign language and possibly in their L1 may not be as intrinsically motivated.

Medford and McGeown (2012) investigated whether five main personality factors, namely agreeableness, extraversion, neuroticism, openness to experiences, and conscientiousness (referred to as the Big Five) would predict children's intrinsic reading motivation after controlling for their reading skills and self-concepts. They found a significant correlation between personality and intrinsic motivation to read. More specifically, openness to experiences and agreeableness both made significant contributions to children's reading curiosity whereas openness to experiences made additional contributions to reading involvement. Agreeableness and conscientiousness also correlated with intrinsic motivation, though to a lesser degree. Although there is no research investigating relationships between personality and intrinsic motivation to read in a foreign language, if personality plays a part, reading motivation may be more resistant to change than teachers and researchers would hope as personality traits are considered to be relatively stable and consistent (Roberts & DeVecchio, 2000).

What Can We Do?

If, as research suggests, intrinsic motivation is the major predictor of the amount of students' reading, encouraging students to read for pleasure (principle 5) not for external reasons (principle 6) should be regarded as a prerequisite for success of an ER program. However, considering numerous factors that may impede intrinsic motivation to read in a foreign language, it is almost

naïve to assume that students become intrinsically motivated when given a lot of choices from a wide variety of “interesting” texts. Data shows that book lovers like us are likely to be few and far between. Even if we are lucky enough to have students with good reading habits and strong intrinsic motivation, in an EFL environment, they can easily satisfy their desire to read by reading in their own language. Reflecting such a reality, ER is often introduced as a course requirement in EFL reading classes, which inherently undermines principle 6. In other words, principles 5 and 6 are important but may not be very realistic definitions of ER, at least in most EFL environments.

There seem to be two general choices to deal with such a conundrum. One possibility is strictly observing principles 5 and 6, and hoping that intrinsically motivated students will read a lot without any external incentives. In this scenario, our job as instructors is simply to create a desirable environment where those students have free access to a wide range of reading materials on stimulating topics. However, if we believe that we also have a responsibility to the majority of the students who would not voluntarily pick up an English book, our alternative is to count more on extrinsic motivation (i.e., introduce ER as a course requirement).

As mentioned above, many motivation researchers argue that intrinsically motivated readers spend more time reading and tend to be more deeply engaged in reading; therefore, intrinsic motivation is more beneficial to reading development than extrinsic motivation (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997), and extrinsic motivation has an undermining effect on performance. However, Park (2011) suggests that the undermining effect may depend on the levels of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation: If students have high intrinsic motivation, moderate extrinsic motivation would not undermine the performance, but if they have low intrinsic motivation or extrinsic motivation is too high, extrinsic motivation would undermine the performance. On the premise of a certain level of intrinsic motivation, carefully enhanced extrinsic motivation may not be disadvantageous to reading in a foreign language.

In addition, some cultural psychologists (Kitayama, Duffy, & Uchida, 2007), distinguishing between independent cultures such as North America and interdependent cultures such as East Asia, argue that intrinsic motivation may have different meanings depending on which culture one comes from. Choice is an essential part of behavioral motivations for Americans; thus, self-determination theory suggests that choice and autonomous engagement enhances intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). On the other hand, some researchers indicate that East Asians become more intrinsically motivated when choices are made for them by trusted authority figures or peers (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999). Considering the significant role teachers and peers play in many Asian countries (Gobel, Mori, Thang, Kan, & Lee, 2011; Mori, Gobel, Thepsiri, & Pojanapunya, 2010), recognition from teachers or peers, competition, and grades (indicative of extrinsic motivation) may be helpful for students to read more. With this in mind, I would propose that the principles suggested by Day and Bamford (1998, 2002) be viewed not so much as a checklist for effective ER, and also that more emphasis and attention be given to the context in which the students and the program are located.

References

- Baker, L., & Wigfield, A. (1999). Dimensions of children's motivation for reading and their relations to reading activity and reading achievement. *Reading Research Quarterly, 34*, 452–477. doi: 10.1598/RRQ.34.4.4
- Becker, M., McElvany, N., & Kortenbruck, M. (2010). Intrinsic and extrinsic reading motivation as predictors of reading literacy: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 102*, 773–785. doi: 10.1037/a0020084
- Bouffard, T., Marcoux, M., Vezeau, C., & Bordeleau, L. (2003). Changes in self-perceptions of competence and intrinsic motivation among elementary school children. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 73*, 171–186. doi: 10.1348/00070990360626921
- Cho, K., & Krashen, S. (1994). Acquisition of vocabulary from the Sweet Valley Kids series: Adult ESL acquisition. *Journal of Reading, 37*, 662–667.
- Day, R. R., & Bamford, J. (1998). *Extensive reading in the second language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Day, R. R., & Bamford, J. (2002). Top ten principles for teaching extensive reading. *Reading in a Foreign Language, 14*, 136–141.
- Deci, E., & Ryan, R. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Fujita, K., & Noro, T. (2009). The effects of 10-minute extensive reading on the reading speed, comprehension and motivation of Japanese high school EFL learners. *Annual Review of English Language Education in Japan, 20*, 21–30.
- Gobel, P., Mori, S., Thang, S.M., Kan, N., & Lee, K. (2011). The impact of culture on student attributions for performance: A comparative study of three groups of EFL/ESL learners. *JIRSEA Journal, 9*, 27–43.
- Iyengar, S. S., & Lepper, M. R. (1999). Rethinking the value of choice: A cultural perspective on intrinsic motivation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 96*, 349–366. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.76.3.349
- Kitayama, S., Duffy, S., & Uchida, Y. (2007). Self as cultural mode of being. In S. Kitayama & D. Cohen (Eds.), *Handbook of cultural psychology* (pp.136–174). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Lao, C. Y., & Krashen, S. (2000). The impact of popular literature study on literacy development in EFL: More evidence for the power of reading. *System, 28*, 261–270. doi: 10.1016/S0346-251X(00)00011-7
- Law, Y. (2009). The role of attribution beliefs, motivation and strategy use in Chinese fifth-graders' reading comprehension. *Educational Research, 51*, 77–95. doi: 10.1080/00131880802704764
- Mason, B., & Krashen, S. (1997). Extensive reading in English as a foreign language. *System, 25*, 91–102. doi: 10.1016/S0346-251X(96)00063-2
- Matsui, T., & Noro, T. (2010). The effects of 10-minute sustained silent reading on junior high school EFL learners' reading fluency and motivation. *Annual Review of English Language Education in Japan, 21*, 71–80.
- Medford, E., & McGeown, S. P. (2012). The influence of personality characteristics on children's intrinsic reading motivation. *Learning and Individual Differences, 22*, 786–791. doi: 10.1016/j.lindif.2012.06.002
- Mori, S. (2002). Redefining motivation to read in a foreign language. *Reading in a Foreign Language, 14*, 91–110.
- Mori, S. (2004). Significant motivational predictors of the amount of reading. *RELC Journal, 35*,

- 63–81. doi: 10.1177/003368820403500106
- Mori, S. (2011). Possible outlier effects on extensive reading research. *Kinki University Center for Liberal Arts and Foreign Language Education Journal (Foreign language edition)*, 2, 187–203.
- Mori, S., Gobel, P., Thepsiri, K., & Pojanapunya, P. (2010). Attributions for performance: A comparative study of Japanese and Thai university students. *JALT Journal*, 32, 5–28.
- National Federation of University Co-operative Associations. (2014). *Campus life data 2013*.
- Park, Y. (2011). How motivational constructs interact to predict elementary students' reading performance: Examples from attitudes and self-concept in reading. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 21, 347–358. doi: 10.1016/j.lindif.2011.02.009
- Robb, T., & Susser, B. (1989). Extensive reading vs. skills building in an EFL context. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 5, 239–251.
- Roberts, B. W., & DelVecchio, W. F. (2000). The rank-order consistency of personality traits from childhood to old age: A quantitative review of longitudinal studies. *Psychological Bulletin*, 126, 3–25. doi: 10.1037/0033-2909.126.1.3
- Schiefele, U. (1999). Interest and learning from text. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 3, 258–279. doi: 10.1207/s1532799xssr0303_4
- Schiefele, U., Schaffner, E., Moller, J., & Wigfield, A. (2012). Dimensions of reading motivation and their relation to reading behavior and competence. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 47, 427–463. doi: 10.1002/RRQ.030
- Scholastic. (2013). *Kids and family reading report: 4th edition*. Retrieved from <http://www.scholastic.com/readingreport/Scholastic-KidsAndFamilyReadingReport-5thEdition.pdf>
- Takase, A. (2007). Japanese high school students' motivation for extensive L2 reading. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 19, 1–18.
- The Mainichi Newspapers. (2014). *Dokusho seronchosa*. [Public opinion survey concerning peoples' reading habits].
- Wang, J. H., & Guthrie, J. T. (2004). Modeling the effects of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, amount of reading, and past reading achievement on text comprehension between U.S. and Chinese students. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 39, 162–186. doi: 10.1598/RRQ.39.2.2
- Wigfield, A., & Guthrie, J. T. (1997). Relations of children's motivation for reading to the amount and breadth of their reading. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 89, 420–432. doi: 10.1037/0022-0663.89.3.420
- Yamashita, J. (2011). Relationship of reading attitudes between L1 and L2: An investigation of adult EFL learners in Japan. *TESOL Quarterly*, 41, 81–105. doi: 10.1002/j.1545-7249.2007.tb00041.x
- Yamashita, J. (2013). Effects of extensive reading on reading attitudes in a foreign language. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 25(1), 248–263.

About the Author

Setsuko Mori is a professor in the Faculty of Law at Kinki University, in Osaka, Japan. Her research interests include how individual differences such as motivation, attributional tendencies, and personality affect learning behavior. She is on the editorial board of *Reading in a Foreign Language* and *JALT Journal*. E-mail: setsukomori@mac.com