

## Extensive Reading in the Korean EAP University Context: A Reconsideration of Its Goals

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### ARTICLE INFO

Available Online November 2013

Key words:

Extensive reading,  
English for Academic Purpose,  
University,  
English as a foreign language,  
Graded readers

### ABSTRACT

Extensive reading for English language learners is commonly promoted as reading for pleasure rather than reading for information. However, Park (2005) observes that the changing trend in the reading habits of the South Korean people over the past decade has been one from reading-for-pleasure to that of reading-for-survival. Globally, people are being met with increasingly difficult economic times and South Korea is no exception. Reading habits are fuelled by need, whether that need may be for pleasure or information. When it comes to the needs of the adult English language learner concerning extensive reading (ER), however, we may sometimes overlook their real needs for practical information in areas of language proficiency and skills development. Rather, in an effort to foster strong reading habits, we may tend to emphasize reading for pleasure through materials that have been written more to entertain than to inform. Korean university students, in particular, are driven by the need to read for information. In this paper, I argue, by reference to Day and Bamford's (1998) Expectancy-value Model of Motivation for Second Language Reading, that driving university students' motivation to read extensively in English may be better accomplished by raising both the expectancy and value factors with texts that students are able to read reasonably well, which they also consider very worthwhile reading. These materials, for example, could deal with topics that help learners prepare for academic studies abroad and further their career development. The paper concludes that, for university students, at least, the goals of extensive reading may need to be modified so as not to focus exclusively on ease of reading and entertainment.

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Extensive reading (ER) has been advocated much in the past 20 to 30 years as a necessary component of a language learning program. As Shaffer (2012) argues, the evidence in support of extensive reading as a regular component of the language study, especially at primary and secondary school levels, is undeniable. He outlines the following benefits of ER, drawn from an extensive review of the scholarly literature:

- increases in reading rate and reading proficiency
- improvement in writing
- grammar development
- improvements in listening, speaking and spelling abilities
- enhancement of general language competence
- increases in learner affect and motivation to read
- facilitation of language acquisition through comprehensive input
- an increased exposure to language in the EFL setting
- consolidation of previously learned language
- confidence building for reading extended texts
- exploitation of textual redundancy for language learning
- practice in schema activation and prediction skills while reading
- general support and benefits of ER

However, as Macalister (2007) points out, there seems to be a predominant notion or sentiment in much of the English language teaching field that ER is mostly suited to learners in primary or secondary school

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levels. He notes that there may be doubts concerning the practicality of extensive reading for English language development at the university level, owing in large part to time constraints and curricular

demands. In addition to taking time away from syllabus requirements, ER requires not an insignificant amount of time commitment on the part of the students. It is not surprising, therefore, that Grabe (2001: 26) suggests that the role of extensive reading in advanced EAP contexts be further studied for "its potential contributions to student success."

There has been increasing interest in ER research among scholars in Korea over the past several years, and a number of these have addressed ER in the university context (Yang, 2010; O, 2011; Heo, 2012; J.-R. Kim, 2012; J.-S. Kim, 2012; B.-G. Kim, 2012). In general, these researchers, across the board, report positive results, each affirming the value of extensive reading at the college setting. The purpose of this paper is to consider another dimension of ER in the university context, specifically, the use of nonfiction relating to academic and career skills development for ER in the Korean university context.

### **The Case against Graded Readers at the University Setting**

Much of the emphasis in the practice of extensive reading has been on reading for pleasure with texts that are written primarily to entertain rather than inform, namely, fictional work. This is rather inevitable, as by far the type of ER materials most widely recognized is graded readers, the vast majority of which are fictional works. In David Hill's 2013 survey of 54 series of graded readers, together responsible for 2000+ titles, 47 are fiction, and just 7 are non-fiction (Hill, 2013: 85).

This emphasis on reading strictly for pleasure with graded readers may be somewhat problematic at the university setting, however solid the theoretical and empirical support for it has been thus far. One reason is that there may be a predominant notion that time well spent at university is time spent on learning as opposed to 'pleasure seeking', per se, as many students and their professors may attest, at least at Korean universities.

More importantly, however, the amount of reading that is required to notice beneficial effects from ER on language development, as Waring (2009) points out, is considerable. To illustrate in regards to vocabulary development: in order to encounter unknown vocabulary such as *stumble*, the 2000th most common word, once, one must read 23,103 words (Waring, 2009: 96). Encountering more sophisticated unknown vocabulary, e.g. *satellite*, once, may require reading in excess of 100,000 words. Then, assuming that the right conditions for incidental vocabulary learning are present—e.g. 1 unknown word per 40-50 known words (Waring, 2009: 84), and the new word is noticed each time it is encountered—and assuming also the most conservative estimate of 5 encounters of a new word for incidental vocabulary learning to take place, then, words like *stumble* and *satellite* would require the reading of 115,625 and 660,714 words, respectively, in order to be learned from ER alone (Waring, 2009: 96). Examining these figures against the total number of words comprising the typical graded reader, 25,000, and one can see how many graded readers must be read in order to learn new vocabulary. While high volumes of reading in graded readers may be feasible during primary and secondary school years, and fruitful for low-proficiency readers mastering higher frequency words, high-volume reading of this kind to the benefit of intermediate to advanced learners at university may be impractical.

Thus, the goals of ER at university may need to be somewhat different from what they are at schools. Rather than a primary emphasis on language development, the goals could be more clearly targeted at driving the engine of students' motivation for reading in English so as to initiate formation of the life-long habit of reading in English. Then, it may be hoped that throughout their post-university years, these learners will be able to amass the volumes of reading that is required on their own to benefit from more significant language gains.

Finally, in this respect, another disadvantage of the use of graded readers at university that is worth mentioning is that they tend to be quite expensive. While university libraries may be stocked with graded readers for students to borrow while attending university, the cost may be a prohibiting factor once they graduate. Their motivation to continue reading in English after graduation may suffer if they are only able to associate text of the kind found in graded readers with extensive or enjoyable reading.

### Theoretical Considerations: Motivation

One of the central tenets of ER is that copious reading is driven by self-motivation, as opposed to external stimuli. Whether reading in the mother tongue (L1) or a second language (L2), learners are driven to read by intrinsic motivation rather than extrinsic motivation. They form strong reading habits because “reading is its own reward” (Day & Bamford, 1998: 8).

Day and Bamford (1998) analyze the nature of motivation for L2 reading based on Feather's (1982) expectancy-value theory. According to Feather's theory, the engine of motivation is seen as driven by two factors: (1) expectation of success, and (2) value gained. On the basis of this theory, Day and Bamford developed an expectancy-value model of motivation for L2 reading (Figure 1).

The model presents four variables that affect the motivation to read in a second language: materials, reading ability, attitudes and the sociocultural environment. Two of these variables (materials and reading ability) relate to the expectancy component of Feather's theory, and two (attitudes and sociocultural environment) relate to the value component. In other words, according to Day and Bamford's expectancy-value model, L2 readers, in order to become strongly motivated to read in L2, must: (a) find the materials they are reading to match their abilities in such a way as to give them expectation of success in the reading, and (b) find in their attitudes and sociocultural environment the belief that much is to be gained personally and there is considerable value in reading.

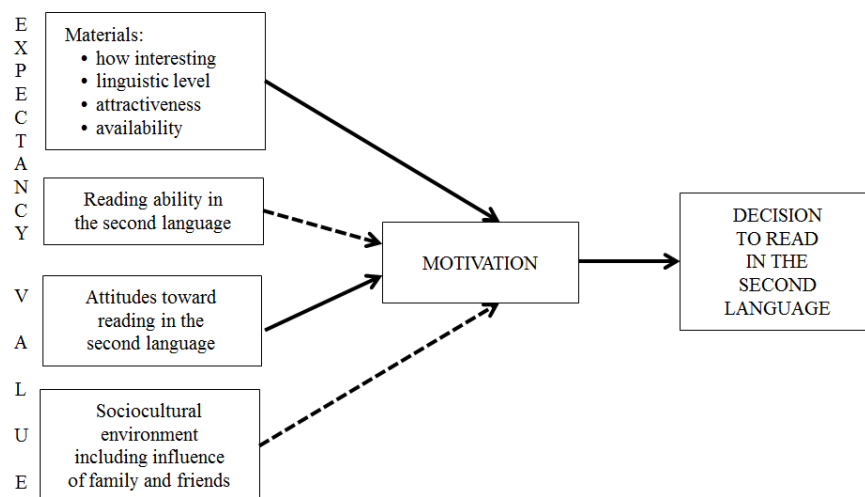


Figure 1. Expectancy-value model of motivation for second language reading  
(Day & Bamford 1998: 28)

Where there is a lack of motivation to read extensively in L2 at the university setting, this may be explained on the basis of these two components of the model, expectancy and value. L2 reading that is perceived to be valuable at university may be that which pertains to academic study or is informational. Academic texts, however, often tend to be difficult, if not insurmountably so, for L2 readers. Hence, while the value component of academic text may be strong, the expectancy component may be compromised to the point that the L2 reader finds little hope of reading the text successfully, leading to low motivation to read. Contrarily, graded readers may afford university students with high expectancy of success, but if these texts do not meet the students' perceived sense of needs or value, then the motivation to read will decline in this scenario, also.

Driving university students' motivation to read extensively in English requires raising, ideally, both the expectancy factor and value factor. This may be accomplished by presenting texts that students are able to read reasonably well, which they also consider very worthwhile to read. Although this may involve texts that are above the so-called *i* minus 1 level, Day and Bamford (1998: 28) acknowledge that motivation to

read in L2 may be sustained where “the value attached to the act of reading might outweigh the expectation that they will have a hard[er] time reading.”

### **Learning Needs of Korean University Students**

The value component that drives the motivation to read in L2, according to Day and Bamford’s expectancy-value model, may be strengthened by aligning students’ ER with their general language learning goals.

According to start-of-term learning needs surveys conducted among hundreds of students at a Korean university in this author’s teaching experience, two principal areas of need tend to arise repeatedly: preparation for academic studies abroad and career development. This observation is congruent with that which Park (2005) made concerning L1 reading in the general population of South Korea, that reading habits have been changing from one of reading-for-pleasure to one of reading-for-survival. Part of the reason for this is that Koreans, as with people all over the world, are being challenged by increasingly difficult economic times. Korean university students, as well, are not immune to the harsh economic realities of the present day, and worries about their future upon graduation abound as jobs become scarcer. In times like this, topics on academic and career skills development can provide a powerful motivation and incentive to read.

While ER materials that meet university students’ real informational needs may be more difficult to read than graded readers, the motivation to read may be sustained, according to Day and Bamford’s model as discussed in the previous section, if the value component is strong enough to compensate for some weakness in the expectancy component, provided that the weakness is not so overwhelming as to be inhibiting. In other words, provided the materials are not too much above the students’ levels of language proficiency, then, although texts may not necessarily be at the *i* minus 1 level of difficulty, their motivation to read the material may not suffer. This is, in fact, what some data recently collected by this author would seem to suggest, although the data is yet to be formally analyzed.

Another consequence of using more difficult texts for ER is that the speed of reading will decrease proportionately to the amount of difficulty the learner encounters. Observations that this author has made among her students is that although the reading speed may not be so slow as to prevent fairly fluent and enjoyable reading, the decrease in total number of words that learner encounters may reduce the language development benefit of this type of ER over the period within which it takes place. This consequence was partially compensated for by encouraging the use of dictionaries at the end of a reading session, not during, to look up and learn a limited number, only, of unknown words. The texts chosen by the students, if not on the recommended list, were also screened by the author to ensure that they would not be too much above the students’ level of reading ability to enjoy.

At this juncture, as well, it may be useful to recall that the goals of ER at the university level need to extend beyond language development as previously argued. Instead, the goals may be more usefully focused on simply driving the learners’ motivation to read, in order to initiate a life-long habit of reading in English, so that the more pronounced language gains may follow later in life after graduation.

### **Examples of Materials**

The Appendix contains part of a selection of fiction and nonfictional book ideas that have been introduced to the students of this author over the course of two years of implementation of ER at a Korean university. The list is not complete, but includes only those titles relating to academic and career skills development.

The books were introduced to students of intermediate to advanced levels of English proficiency. The students were not limited to choose from among the complete list, but could submit titles of other books that they were strongly motivated to read, for approval by the author. The students borrowed the books from the library or purchase them. Some of the titles were also loaned out from the author’s personal library.

In the author's experience, this approach to ER at the university level has been quite successful, and impressions so far are that students' motivation to read may be sustainable long-term. Longitudinal data need to be collected and analyzed, however, to substantiate these impressions.

### **Conclusion**

While there is undeniable evidence of the value of graded readers for language proficiency development of primary and secondary school L2 learners, this paper has argued that they may not meet the needs of university L2 learners very well, owing primarily to their focus on reading for pleasure rather than information, and the volume of reading and time investment that would be required on the part of the learners to notice significant language gains. It has also been argued that ER goals for university L2 learners may need to differ somewhat from those for primary and secondary school L2 learners, in that they could be more clearly directed at driving the engine of motivation for reading in L2, in order to initiate the development of a life-long habit of reading. To this end, Day and Bamford's (1998) expectancy-value model for second language reading was examined for ways in which motivation for reading may be strengthened for university L2 readers. It was suggested that, although compromises may need to be made in terms of reading speed and fluency, motivation for reading may be strengthened by introducing university L2 learners, at least in the Korean EFL context, to reading materials that align well with their more general language learning goals, namely, preparation for academic studies abroad and career development. It is hoped that this paper contributes a fresh perspective on the issue of ER in the university context, and offers insights that may spur further research in this important area of investigation.

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## Appendix

Nonfiction Book Ideas for Intermediate to Advanced EFL University Learners

### Academic Skills Development

- 100 Ways to Improve Your Writing*. Provost, 1985.
- Beyond the Answer Sheet: Academic Success for International Students*. Badke, 2003.
- Complete Idiot's Guide to Clear Thinking*. LoCicero et al., 2005.
- How to Read a Book: The Art of Getting a Liberal Education*. Adler & Van Doren, 2006.
- Make the Most of Your Mind*. Buzan, 1984.
- Master Your Memory*. Buzan, 2003.
- McGraw-Hill's Concise Guide to Writing Research Papers*. Ellison, 2010.
- Moonwalking with Einstein: The Art and Science of Remembering Everything*. Foer, 2011.
- Peak Performance: Success in College and Beyond*. Ferrett, 2010.
- Reading and Making Notes*. Godfrey, 2010.
- Reading Smart: Advanced Techniques for Improved Reading*. Schaffzin et al., 1994.
- Stop Feeling Lazy: How To Break The Procrastination Cycle Once And For All And Excel*. Look, 2013.
- Study Smart: Hands-on, Nuts-and-bolts Techniques for Earning Higher Grades*. Theodore & Princeton Review (Firm), 1992.
- The Elements of Style*. Strunk & White, 1999.
- The Joy of Reading*. Van Doren, 2008.
- The Memory Book*. Lorayne & Lucas, 1996.
- The Mind Map Book*. Buzan & Buzan, 1993.
- The Speed Reading Book*. Buzan, 2005.
- Writing to Learn: How to Write and Think Clearly About Any Subject at All*. Zinsser, 1988.

### Career Skills Development

- 101 Great Answers to the Toughest Interview Questions*. Fry, 2009.
- Career Distinction Stand Out by Building Your Brand*. Arruda, 2007.
- Getting from College to Career: Your Essential Guide to Succeeding in the Real World*. Pollak, 2012.
- Headhunter Hiring Secrets: The Rules of the Hiring Game Have Changed—forever*. Freeman, 2010.
- How to Become CEO: The Rules for Rising to the Top of Any Organization*. Fox, 1998.
- Invaluable: The Secret to Becoming Irreplaceable*. Crenshaw, 2010.
- Job Interviews for Dummies*. Kennedy, 2012.
- Marketing Yourself: The Catalyst Guide to Successful Resumes and Interviews*. Staff, 1983.
- Me 2.0: 4 Steps to Building Your Future*. Schawbel, 2010.
- Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*. Sinek, 2009.
- The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*. Maxwell, 2007.
- The Essential Drucker: The Best of Sixty Years of Peter Drucker's Essential Writings on Management*. Drucker, 2008.

### Communication Skills Development

- Confessions of a Public Speaker*. Berkun, 2010.
- Excellence in Business Communication*. Thill & Bovée, 2011.
- How to Learn Any Language: Quickly, Easily, and on Your Own!* Farber, 1991.
- How to Talk to Anyone: 101 Little Communication Tricks for Big Success in Relationships*. Lowndes, 2003.
- How to Win Friends & Influence People*. Carnegie, 1998.
- Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*. Cialdini, 2007.
- Just Listen: Discover the Secret to Getting through to Absolutely Anyone*. Goulston, 2010.

*The Etiquette Edge the Unspoken Rules for Business Success.* Langford, 2005.

*The Exceptional Presenter: a Proven Formula to Open up! and Own the Room.* Koegel, 2002.

*The Naked Presenter: Delivering Powerful Presentations with, or Without, Slides.* Reynolds, 2011.