

Three cost-effective strategies to encourage reading

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Reference data:

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Based on the work of Wigfield and Guthrie (1995, 1997) and Mori (2000, 2002) regarding motivation and reading, three inexpensive and simple ways were identified to increase the amount of English reading done by Japanese junior and senior high school students. The three strategies were: (a) audio books, (b) vocabulary cards, and (c) reading circles. A year-long study was carried out on 11 students regarding the number of times they used the English library and the amount of reading material they borrowed. Results showed that the use of the three strategies demonstrated an increase in both visits made and materials borrowed.

WigfieldとGuthrie (1995, 1997)、及び Mori (2000, 2002)による読書と動機に関する文献をもとに、日本の中高校生の英文読書量の増加につながる低費用で簡単な3つの方法を分類した。これらは、a) オーディオブック、b) 単語カード、そしてc) 読書サークルであった。11人の生徒に対し、英語ライブラリーの利用回数と貸し出した本の数について一年間にわたって調査した。その結果、上記の3手段を使うことによって、ライブラリーの利用回数および貸出件数の増加が認められた。

OVER THE past 10 years much research has been dedicated to understanding the nature of motivation (see Dörnyei, 2001; Falout, Elwood, & Hood, 2009; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2008), reading and motivation (see Wigfield & Guthrie, 1995, 1997) and reading and motivation in a Japanese context (see Kondo-Brown, 2006; Nishino, 2007; Mori, 2002).

In his attempt to better understand the nature of motivation, Dörnyei (2001) argued that motivation goes through three phases: First it needs to be generated; second it needs to be maintained; and third learners need to retrospectively evaluate their actions. On the other hand Falout, Elwood, & Hood (2009) examined demotivation and found that lower level students were less able to control their affective states, thus allowing negative experiences to affect them to a much greater extent than did more proficient learners. This made lower level learners much more susceptible to falling into a demotivated state. In a Japanese context, Sakai and Kikuchi (2008) showed that internal factors affected motivation more than external factors such as school facilities. Through a case study Nishino (2007) showed that the motivation of two young Japanese learners of English increased as they became more fluent readers.

In order to bring the findings of these studies to the classroom, and based on the work of Wigfield and Guthrie (1995, 1997) and Mori (2000, 2002), three relatively inexpensive and simple ways were identified to increase the amount of reading that Japanese junior and senior



high school students do in English. The three strategies were: (a) audio books (sometimes self-made), (b) vocabulary cards, and (c) reading circles. A longitudinal, action research study of the number of students using the English library and the amount of English reading material checked out was devised to measure if the three strategies increased the amount of reading done by students.

Literature review

In their research on the dimensions of first language reading and motivation among children, Wigfield and Guthrie (1995) used an 82-item questionnaire, which they dubbed the Motivations for Reading Questionnaire (MRQ). The MRQ was designed using motivational theory and consisted of items grouped into 11 constructs. The MRQ identified three categories within reading motivation. These categories are (a) competence and reading efficacy, (b) achievement and value goals, and (c) social aspects of reading. Within these three categories there are 11 subcomponents. Three of these subcomponents helped to shape the strategies implemented. They are: (a) reading efficacy, (b) reading work avoidance, and (c) social reasons for reading.

Mori (2002), finding an abundance of research on motivation and interaction in EFL but a dearth of research dedicated to motivation to read in a second or foreign language, based a 7-point Likert scale questionnaire on the 82-item Wigfield and Guthrie (1995) questionnaire and used it to determine the nature of reading motivation in EFL. Wigfield and Guthrie had researched on first language learners and had used general motivation as their starting point. Mori, however, states in her results that “foreign language reading motivation closely resembles more general forms of motivation as laid out in expectancy-value theory” (pp. 97). She believed that Wigfield and Guthrie’s research is applicable to foreign language learners. Her results indicated that motivation to read in EFL could be divided into an additional

four subcomponents, namely: (a) intrinsic value, (b) attainment value, (c) extrinsic utility value, and (d) expectancy for success. Using Mori’s conclusions that Wigfield and Guthrie’s research was applicable to EFL learners in Japan, the three strategies to increase library use amongst the students at the school were chosen.

The strategies

The strategies were based on the subcomponents identified by Wigfield and Guthrie (1995) and later Mori (2002). First, audio books were supplied to help students build confidence in their reading (Wigfield and Guthrie’s reading efficacy subcomponent). During in-class activities, instructors had noticed that as students read along with the audio CDs they began to exhibit signs that their fluency and ability were improving, such as increased confidence. This made them more effective and efficient readers. Second, vocabulary cards were introduced. They were meant to supply simple and quick translations that would eliminate the need to search for unknown vocabulary in dictionaries, thus making the reading process simpler, more fluid, and less work (Wigfield and Guthrie’s reading work avoidance). Finally, the reading circles introduced the social aspect of reading (Wigfield and Guthrie’s social reasons for reading). Students could pass materials they liked to friends, encouraging them to read the materials as well, increasing everyone’s enjoyment as well as the amount of material read.

The system at the school

The school is a private language school that focuses on the four basic skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The school has invested in providing the students with a large selection of reading materials such as graded readers and bilingual newspapers. During the enrollment process, students are given



an introduction to the library system and its materials and they are shown how to check out books. The benefits of reading in a foreign language are explained and students are encouraged to take advantage of the opportunity. That being said, they are not required to use the library unless assigned to do so by their instructor, therefore much of the impetus to take advantage of the reading materials is up to the students. In the past, students used the library infrequently, and this led the staff to contemplate ways to motivate them.

Participants

The participants consisted of three junior high students and eight high school students preparing for high school and university entrance examinations at a private language school in Nagano prefecture. The students had a 90-minute class once a week. There were seven girls and four boys, ages ranging from 13 to 18. The participants planned to study a variety of different subjects at the university level such as engineering and nursing. Two of them were interested in studying English. These two students were already using the library more than the others.

Procedure

The method of data collection involved a receptionist or an instructor counting the number of students who visited the school's library, the frequency of the visits, and how many materials were checked out. Visits that were related to assignments from their courses at the language school or the times they went to the library in reading circles during class were not counted. The person taking count asked the students the reason for their visit when the students left the library. A simple form (Appendix 2) was used. A checkmark was made in the appropriate box and the checkmarks were tallied at the end. Library sign-out sheets that showed student names and material titles

were then consulted to see the number of different students and how many of those students actually borrowed materials. Data collection started in April 2009 and continued until March 2010. In July 2009, audio CDs, vocabulary cards, and reading groups were implemented in hope of increasing the amount of library use by the students. Teachers were also asked to encourage students to use the library and to mention new aspects of the library as they became available. The library consisted of graded readers, the *Shukan Times* (a weekly Japanese/English newspaper), English comic books and graphic novels, and books discarded by teachers.

The first strategy implemented was the use of vocabulary cards. The instructors chose vocabulary they thought was difficult but vital to the students' understanding of the story. These vocabulary items were written on small laminated cards to be used as a bookmark and quick reference while reading. The vocabulary items ranged from single words to idiomatic expressions. They were translated directly into Japanese for the lower level library materials but an English definition was given for the upper level materials. At the outset the items on the cards were chosen based on the instructor's experience. But later cards were made by the students themselves and the items were chosen by the readers. The cards were implemented to cut down on the use of dictionaries and make the reading experience more fluid.

The second strategy was audio CDs which were made to accompany materials for beginning readers. Some materials came with a CD but most did not, so a recording of the reading was produced and made available in CD or mp3 format. These were first made by the instructor but later colleagues and advanced students were asked to make recordings. These CDs were implemented to help build confidence in beginner readers.

Finally, students were sent to the library during class time in reading circles of three or four students. When possible, they



were grouped with friends. It was hoped that students would then voluntarily talk about materials that they had already read and recommend the materials to their friends who would then visit the library in their free time to act on the recommendations. Through observation of student behavior and the data available on the library sign-out sheets, it became evident that word of mouth from peers holds much more weight than advice or recommendations from teachers or staff.

Results

The data showed that the total numbers went up in all areas after the vocabulary cards and audio materials were added and students were encouraged to visit the library in groups. We can see that throughout the first 3 months of the school year the numbers stayed consistently low. However, when the three cost-effective strategies were introduced in July, the numbers increased across the board (see Figures 1 and 2). With an increase in students using the library we would expect an increase in the number of materials borrowed and the number of total visits (see Figure 2). This is the case but the average number of materials borrowed per student remained at about three materials a month. The average number of visits per student per month also remained stable around three (see Figure 3). Appendix 1 contains the complete data set. Although the observation was only anecdotal in nature, an instructor collecting data noted that a preference was shown for vocabulary cards over audio CDs. It was also noted that students were actively sharing books, although the conversations and recommendations were often in Japanese. This became evident when sign-out sheets showed that books were often not returned to the shelves but simply handed to friends at the checkout counter.

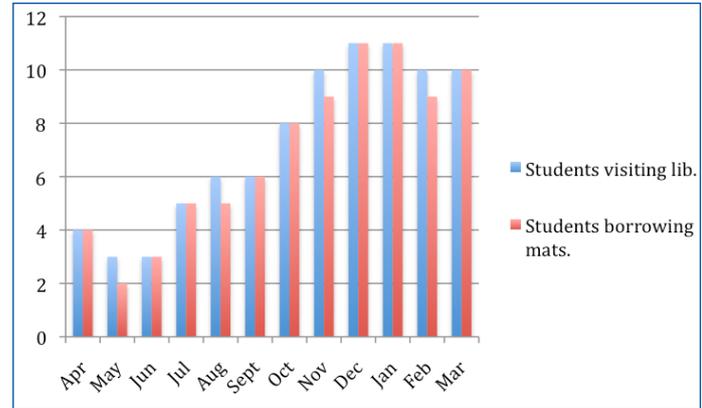


Figure 1. Number of students visiting the library and number of students borrowing materials

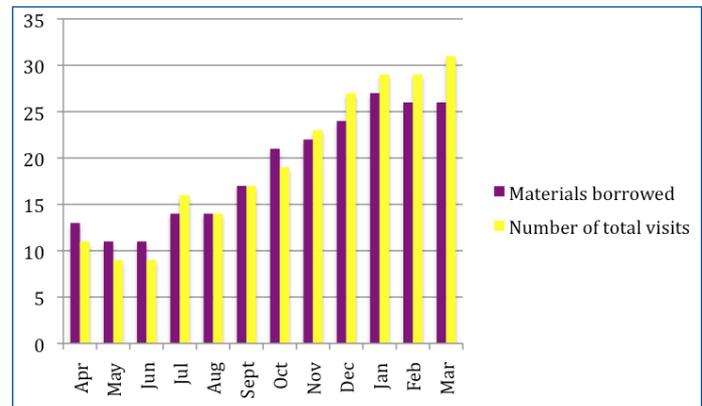


Figure 2. Number of materials borrowed and total number of visits



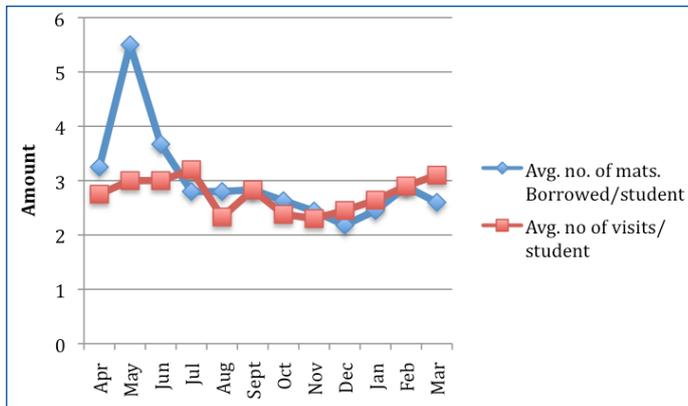


Figure 3. Average number of visits per student and average number of materials borrowed per student

Overall, the three cost effective measures increased the total number of students using the library for personal reasons. Before implementation of the strategies, fewer than five of the students in the study used the library in any given month; after implementation the number steadily increased until all of the students were using the library. That being said, the strategies did not have any discernable effect on the average amount of materials borrowed per student per month or the average number of times the library was visited per student per month.

Discussion and conclusion

The data showed an increase in the total number of students using the library and an increase in the total amount of materials borrowed. The data also indicated that there was no real change to the average number of library visits per month and the average amount of materials borrowed per student per month. The

short answer to the basic question, “Did these three strategies increase the amount of reading done at the school?” is a yes, but that is not to say that the results are very clear. Firstly, we can’t determine which of the three techniques was the most or least effective. They were used in concert with each other and separating them at this point would need additional research. These strategies were implemented together because the school wanted to motivate students to use the library. The school had invested heavily in starting up the library and felt the students were not taking full advantage of it; the research questions were an additional consideration. Also while numbers went up in general it doesn’t appear that the reading done by the most motivated students (those students who were using the library before the three strategies were implemented) increased much at all, but instead remained constant. The gains were made by the students who did not use the library much at the beginning of the year. Also we cannot ignore the issue of sample size. No conclusions can be drawn as 11 students do not adequately represent the total population of English learners in Japan, although they do give an insight into some junior high and high school readers.

The results, though, are promising, especially concerning those learners that would not normally go voluntarily to the library for reading materials. These three simple, inexpensive strategies helped to increase the amount of voluntarily checked out reading materials by junior and high school students, some of whom are not enamored with studying English. There is the possibility that they did not read the materials checked out but as the materials were borrowed voluntarily it is believed that they were read.

As an unexpected bonus, the amount of work put into the library went down over time. Originally, the instructor made the digital recordings for the audio CDs and made up all the vocabulary cards; however in the subsequent year the students

made the recordings and cards as assignments. This has lowered the cost and the time expended by the instructor, something that all teachers can appreciate. These strategies also reduced the school's financial burden. It did not have to purchase new materials to attract users but instead got more value out the materials they already had.

Finally, the use of the library has remained at a higher level than before the strategies were implemented. The strategies continue to be popular amongst the students and will therefore be continued as a regular part of the school's program. Observations from staff have indicated that the students that took part in the study have continued to use the library at a higher rate than before and that their use of the library has "rubbed off" onto the new students who have since entered the program.

As this was just an exploratory bit of research, a more extensive and larger study is needed to verify the results. Research in the future should separate the three strategies to determine which is the most effective. I am confident however that the low cost and minimal effort needed to add these strategies to any extensive reading library make them well worth trying.

Bio data

Scott Peters teaches business classes at companies as well as kids and teens classes at schools in and around the Suwa, Nagano area. He is interested in student motivation and extensive reading. <peterss2@hotmail.com>

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Appendix 1

Total number of students visiting library and borrowing materials

2009-2010	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Students visiting library	4	3	3	5	6	6	8	10	11	11	10	10
Students borrowing materials	4	2	3	5	5	6	8	9	11	11	9	10
Materials borrowed	13	11	11	14	14	17	21	22	24	27	26	26
Total number of visits	11	9	9	16	14	17	19	23	27	29	29	31

Appendix 2

Reading materials observation tallying sheet

Reading Materials Observation Sheet				Month:			
Adult Library				Kids' Library			
Girl		Boy		Girl		Boy	
Shukan Times				English Newspaper			
Girl		Boy		Girl		Boy	
Comic Book (English)							
Girl		Boy					

