ORIGINAL ARTICLE

MOTIVATING ESL LEARNERS OF LOW PROFICIENCY IN READING THROUGH AN EXTENSIVE READING PROGRAMME

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Abstract

The primary aim of this study is to examine on ways to improve low proficiency students' motivation to read English books. An extensive reading program in the reading corner was placed to cultivate the reading habit among low achievers. There was a major concern among teachers and parents about students who could not read and also those who could read but lack the motivation. The research involved 40 students from the same environment. The research was started in February 2016 for twelve weeks. Extensive Reading Program was introduced to enhance the capability of reading among learners and also episodes in the reading was made interesting with engaging vignettes. The experimental group of learners were allowed to pick a reader book of their choice and free reading environment was created. The 40 students were divided into two groups; 20 in the controlled group and 20 in the experimental group. The learners were requested to do a pre test before the research was carried out and a post test after the process of blending extensive reading program that was introduced for a certain period of time. The experimental group was exposed to the Extensive Reading Program. The controlled group of learners were not exposed to any kind of reading programs and the lesson for them was conducted using the normal school syllabus. The findings showed that the new extensive reading programme changed most of the learner's attitude and built their confidence in reading and answering comprehension questions. The new strategies created a better environment for the learners and they felt comfortable with their classroom activity.

Keywords: Students' motivation, reading habit, ESL learners, extensive reading program.

Introduction

English language is taught as a second language in all primary and secondary schools in Malaysia. Therefore very limited time is given for the teaching of English language compared to the language of instruction (Malay language, which is also the national language) Reading comprehension has persistently been a component that played a pivotal role in teaching and learning of the English language and it is central to the second language acquisition in learning institutions. The researcher conducted the research on motivating reading habits among low proficiency learners through an extensive reading program. There have been researches done in Malaysia to show that learners who are guided and monitored read better than learners who are not monitored. It indicated that proper management of extensive reading which is part of Malaysian curriculum system under NILAM (a reading programme introduced by the Ministry of Education) should be looked as a crucial programme as learners are able to improve their language proficiency. Tella (2007)[1], stated that learners who read for pleasure and enjoyment tend to cultivate the habit for reading as a lifelong process. Krashen (2004)[2] too, supports the statement by Tella, stating second language learners should also be encouraged to read for pleasure and indirectly the knowledge can be used for demanding purposes. Reading might not be a difficult task but understanding the gist of the text would be a major task. Comprehending a text is a skill that cannot be acquired overnight but gradually developing the interest in reading and using the correct reading methods could make one a good reader. "Reading .... Must be developed, and can only be developed, by means of extensive and continual practice. People learn to read, and to read better, by reading" (Eskey, 2002)[3]. Learners need to be motivated and self – interest should be cultivated. Learners need to be motivated and self – interest should be cultivated. Readers need to know more than 90% of the words in a text in order to be able to understand the meaning of new words from a context (Hsueh-Chau & Nation, 2000)[4]. On the other hand some researchers have used reading aloud component as an important way to promote Extensive Reading Programme (Smith, 1997)[5].

Research Questions

1. What is expected in learner's performances after taking part in an extensive reading programme?
2. How extensive reading program strategies motivate learners to indulge in more reading comprehension?

Research Methodology

A quasi - experimental design was used in the study. Quasi – experimental design for research in teaching is prominent in the terms of reliability and validity. The aim of using it was to collect data on outcomes of the intervention, knowing the differences of outcome with and without it.

The learners were divided into two groups, twenty learners in each group. The controlled group was taught to do reading of text and answering questions using text books as to abide by the school syllabus. The experimental group was taught by using Extensive Reading programme in a Reading Corner. A corner specially created by the teacher to motivate students who score low grades in the English language. Both the groups of learners were given the same sets of questions. The questions for pre-test differ from the questions for the post-test. The tasks in both the tests were comprehension questions with numerous types of questions. The learners were required to answer all the questions pertaining to the text given. The time allocated was one and a half hour. Scripts were collected at the end of the test and marked according to a marking scheme.

Sample

The learners were from a Form 4 level. The school is situated in a rural area. The learners were only well versed in their first language (the Malay language). The school is a C grade level school with band 4. The school is located in Ipoh, SMK Kpg. Pasir Puteh, was chosen as the research platform. The school has 1500 students and it is located in sub urban area. The learners were divided into two groups. Twenty learners were in the experimental group and another twenty in the controlled group. The experimental group was exposed to Extensive Reading Programme, in the reading corner to gradually cultivate an interest in reading and to bring out the learners from the conventional exam oriented (most students in Malaysia, read English books only for examination purposes) school life. The controlled group was not exposed to any reading programmes and they read only when there was a purpose or instructed by the teacher.

Findings

This section described the data collected after the Extensive Reading Program. The research has been completed. Learners were given a post-test to evaluate the effectiveness of the research. Learners were given similar test as the pre-test but the text was a different one. The learners were instructed to complete the task in the given time individually. The respondents were from two groups. The respondents from Frequency A were from the experimental group and the respondents from Frequency B were from the controlled group. The post-test was done to compare the differences in competence among both the groups. The Frequency A group was exposed to ERP where else the Frequency B group was thought only using the traditional method. The results of the respondent's data were as below.

Descriptive Analysis on the Post-Test :

Multiple – Choice Questions

Table 1: No of respondents got the questions correct

Item	Frequency A	%	Frequency B	%
Question 1	20	100	18	90
Question 2	20	100	17	85
Question 3	20	100	13	65
Question 4	18	90	13	65
Question5	18	90	12	60

Respondents from Frequency A did better than the respondents from Frequency B. In Frequency A were the experimental group and in Frequency B were the controlled group. In Frequency A, the 20 respondent were able to tackle questions 1 to 3 without any struggle compared to Frequency B. 20 respondents were not able to complete the task with correct answers. In frequency B none of the questions the respondents were able to score 100 % and it could be due to the fact they were taught only using the traditional method and Frequency A were taught using ERP. Majority of Frequency A respondents were able to score 100% and only for questions 4 and 5 were 90%. The respondents in Frequency A and Frequency B were instructed to read all the options given before choosing the best answer based on what they comprehended. Respondents from Frequency A were able to use the skimming reading method to locate the appropriate answers

Meaning of word

Table 2: Looking for meaning of words through context

Item	Frequency A	%	Frequency B	%
Question 1	20	100	15	75
Question 2	20	100	15	60
Question 3	20	100	13	65
Question 4	20	100	13	65
Question5	20	100	13	65

Respondents from Frequency A were able to score all correct (20) 100% compared to Frequency B. The respondents in Frequency B had difficulty in locating the meaning of words through context. In Frequency B, the 20 respondents could not locate all the meaning of words to 100%. In questions 1, the respondents of (15)75% only were able to locate and in questions 3 to 5, only (13)65% were able to locate the meaning through context. These learners were not exposed to ERP. In the Frequency A the respondents were given a few exercises on guessing the meaning through context and the facilitator was able to facilitate them to use their background knowledge.

Main Ideas

Table 3: Looking for main ideas in the text

Item	Frequency A	%	Frequency B	%
Question 1	20	100	16	80
Question 2	20	100	15	75
Question 3	20	100	15	75
Question 4	18	90	14	70
Question5	18	90	12	60

The respondents in Frequency A were able to locate the main 3 ideas (20) 100% and the next 2 main ideas about 10% only could not be located. In Frequency B, Question 1 of main ideas only (16) 80% of respondents were able to locate and on Question 2 and 3 only (15) 75% of the respondents were able to do it and Question 5 nearly half of the respondents (12) 60% only could locate it. The respondents in Frequency A were exposed to locating main ideas in the ERP at the reading corner. Teacher was only a facilitator there.

Table 4: Summarize the text

Item	Frequency A	%	Frequency B	%
Fact 1	20	100	12	70
Fact 2	20	100	14	70
Fact 3	20	100	14	75
Fact 4	20	100	12	70
Fact 5	18	90	12	70

In this section, summarizing the fact was not an easy task for Frequency B. The Frequency A respondents were able to practically rewrite most of the facts. Facts 1,2,3,4 and 5 was easily written by the (20)100% respondents. This shows the ERP method has helped the respondents to rewrite the facts easily. Frequency B respondents did face difficulty in writing the facts and none

of the facts was located by all the 20 respondents. Facts 1,4 and 5 were only located by (12)60% respondents and facts 2 and 3 were only written by (14)70% of the respondents. The rest of the learners were struggling to write out the facts grammatically correct without the teacher's guidance

Comprehension Questions

Table 5: Answering Comprehension Questions

Item	Frequency A	%	Frequency B	%
Question 1	20	100	18	90
Question 2	20	100	15	75
Question 3	20	100	15	75
Question 4	19	95	15	75
Question5	19	95	14	70

In this section, most of the respondents were well versed. It was a noticeable fact that the respondents from Frequency A always liked to attempt comprehension questions. The respondents from Frequency A were able to complete the task without any hindrance. The Frequency A respondents scored 100% for questions 1 to 3 and 95% for questions 4 and 5. This revealed the fact that ERP introduced in the reading corner produced learners with more competence in attempting questions. Frequency B respondents faced difficulty in completing the task due to a fact of not had been exposed to a more effective ERP. Question 1 about (18)90% of the respondents were able to complete because most of the time Question1 was a direct Question from the text. Question 2 to 4 only (15)75% of the respondents managed to get it correct and the last Question 5 (14)70% of the respondents got it correct.

Conclusion

It was noted that most of the respondents came from an average background and the parents were not highly qualified in their academic. So, background or home environment did not play a role in the respondents' education. The respondents depended 100% on the school for their achievement in studies. Respondents were not exposed to any materials in English at the home environment.

About 35 (87.5%) respondents were from a Malay (the largest ethnic group in Malaysia) background and the language of communication was only the Malay language. The rest 5 (12.5%) were Indians (the third largest ethnic group in Malaysia) and their language of communication was Tamil. The Malay teachers only communicated in Malay language to the

respondents at school. The respondents managed to communicate in English with the English language teachers during the contact hours only. Some of the respondents had low self-esteem and most of the time they maintained silence or isolate themselves with the hope the English teacher did not notice them.

There was a tremendous change in the responds attitude after the ERP followed by the reading corner were introduced and rewards were given every now and then to motivate them to read English Storybooks. Respondents liked the change of atmosphere from formal instructions and class control to informal instructions and more relaxed classroom. The respondents were allowed to walk to any corner of the class and read. They were also allowed to sit with friends in groups to read and retell the story to each other.

Students were encouraged to rekindle their prior knowledge when they read a familiar or a test that interest them. In the beginning, teachers formed questions to provoke their prior knowledge pertaining to the text read but gradually respondents were able to connect their prior knowledge to the text read. This activity was noticed when respondents were able to tell facts related to the story or text read orally. Respondents were also trained to think aloud in their mind as their fluency in reading improved. Respondents were able to visualize the story and tell out orally in sequence without much difficulty or stressed situation. Respondents liked the idea of prediction of the story before reading by the illustration or title and they felt a sense of accomplishment or achievement when the prediction matched after the story is read. There was always a glow in their face to show something has been accomplished without any guidance.
Respondents preferred to read fiction books compared to non- fiction because it was easier to comprehend and was more captivating. There was a lot of difference seen in certain category of questions at the pre-test and post-test. Respondents were not exposed to many reading strategies during the pretest. The post-test was only done after the respondents were exposed to a few reading strategies for several times in the classroom.

In conclusion, this analysis revealed that reading corners (Extensive Reading Programmes) could help to produce good results after a lot of training regardless the students background or environment. The only question was ,'will the teacher be able to go on using these reading programme and also accomplish teaching the syllabus given by the Education Department before the end of the year?' There is only one solution for this, the Ministry of Education has to allocate more time for the teaching of English Language.

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