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Abstract

The study examined the effects of pleasure reading by comparing performance between aesthetic readers and efferent readers on a proficiency test that tests knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, writing competence and general understanding. The aesthetic readers easily outperformed the efferent readers as the input they received was more pleasurable, which lowered their affective filters. The results showed that pleasure reading is a powerful tool that helped the readers acquire language in a low anxiety state.

Keywords: Low Affective Filter, Pleasure Reading, Pleasant Comprehensible Input, Incidental Acquisition

Introduction

It has been hypothesized that extensive reading results in the acquisition of all measures of language competence including grammar, comprehension, vocabulary, syntax, fluency and writing style in a second language performance. (Mason & Krashen, 1997; Waring & Takaki, 2003; Hitosugi, C. I. & Day, R., 2004; Kim & Cho, 2005; Krashen, 2004; Lee, S.Y., 2005; Ponniah, 2011; Liburd & Rodrigo, 2012). Extensive readers, in general, read either for information or for pleasure. This study attempts to explore the potentials of pleasure reading, a powerful tool in second language education that not only results in language acquisition but also creates a pleasurable learning environment. The anxiety level of the readers will be very low when they are

involved in pleasure reading because this kind of reading is enjoyable. The pleasure component becomes the driving force for the readers to read more and eventually they may spend more time on reading and will read more frequently (Ujiie & Krashen, 2002).

Readers who read for information read only when the need arises and do not read frequently and for long durations. It is thus likely that pleasure reading or aesthetic reading is more efficient when compared to reading for information and the readers who read for pleasure outperform those who read for information.

The goal of the study is to determine the effects of pleasure reading by comparing performance between aesthetic readers and efferent readers on a proficiency test. If Pleasure Reading results in better comprehension, writing competence and overall acquisition of language including grammar, vocabulary, writing style and general understanding, language acquirers can be encouraged to read for pleasure.

THE STUDY

Participants

The participants in this study were fifty first-year engineering students from India who had had studied English as a second language for twelve years. All subjects had received the same amount of formal instruction and exposure in English. Their English language proficiency and their general understanding of the language were considered to be fairly high as they all had passed the All India Engineering Entrance Exam (AIEEE), one of the toughest competitive exams for higher education in India.

Procedure

A challenging test comprising four components, reading comprehension, vocabulary (cloze test), grammar and error correction and written language competence, was administered. The difficulty level of the test was high. The test contained items such as the following:

After reading a passage explaining the causes of obesity:

People's eating habits during the time of stress are said to indicate

- a) Overweight people are tense
- b) Thin people don't eat under stress
- c) 56% of the population is overweight
- d) A large number of people deal with stress by eating.

A cloze test in which subjects were asked to fill in each blank with a suitable word:

The system at ___ in the schools and at the work ___ should change from sheer obedience as a ___ greater than inquisitiveness.

Rewrite the passage, correcting errors.

Interviewees should be encouraged to relax, talk freely about themselves and to ask the panel questions.

Write a paragraph incorporating a given sentence:

That was when he realized why so many people believed Krishna.

The test papers were evaluated by the authors. The reliability of the test was modest, Cronbach alpha = .683, just below the .7 level usually considered to be adequate.

A questionnaire was given to the students to confirm that they had the habit of reading in English and to categorize them as Aesthetic or Efferent readers. Four subjects responded that they read both informative articles and stories, comics and novels. Discussion with the subjects indicated that they read some informative articles for pleasure and are therefore categorized as aesthetic readers.

Results

All 50 students answered that they indeed had a habit of reading in English. Their answers to the second question and discussion with the students helped the researchers to categorize the participants as aesthetic readers and efferent readers.

Table 1 presents the responses of the subjects to the second question ‘State the kind of books you read.’

s. no	Aesthetic Readers	Efferent Readers
1	Novels / short stories / newspapers / fiction / adventure / mystery / plays	I read the newspaper everyday

2	I sometimes do like detective novels or adventure novels or any book not in my syllabus.	Hindu newspaper
3	I read stories of genres like thrillers, mystery and science fiction. Authors being Sidney Sheldon, Isaac Asimov, Peter F. Hamilton, Jeffrey Archer, Robin Sharma, etc.	Newspaper reading
4	Usually authors like Chetan Bhagat, Jeffrey Archer and Dan Brown	Newspaper
5	My preferred genres are science fiction and high fantasy. Eragon, Lord of the Rings and Septimus Heap are the three series I have recently read in the high fantasy genre. In science fiction, my most recent reads were Ender's Game by Orson Scott Card. I am planning to read Isaac Asimov next.	Newspapers
6	Comics	I read technical books and autobiographies of famous personalities
7	Fantasy, biography, thriller (the subject reads biography for pleasure even though "biography" is categorized here as informative)	I read only technical books and magazines
8	Novels	I read newspapers and academic books
9	Novels – science fiction, thrillers	Academic books
10	Comics or detective novels	I read articles of various kinds
11	Novels	I read encyclopedias and when some news is interesting in newspapers.
12	I like to read novels which involve fantasy and adventure.	I like to read technological books. My favourite is Digit.
13	Novels – thrillers, science fiction, classics, sometimes fantasy	1 hour a week. (discussion with the student shows that he reads only for information. He does not have a pleasure reading habit)
14	Novels – thrillers	
15	I read fiction and adventure stories	
16	I prefer novels to short stories. Any interesting papers on astronomical studies are also one of my choices. (the subject also reads informative articles on astronomy for pleasure)	

17	I read storybooks and novels.	
18	Historical stories	
19	Novels	
20	Story books	
21	Fantasy, mystery, thriller, horror, comedy, romance	
22	Fiction	
23	Crime and thriller	
24	Novels	
25	Fiction, short stories. Anything with a good story line.	
26	Novels	
27	Comics	
28	Novels, by prominent writers	
29	Fiction, fantasy and thrillers	
30	I read fiction mostly	
31	I read novels (mysteries) and books about astronomy (the subject reads astronomy articles for pleasure)	
32	I like to read adventure and mystery books	
33	I read sports articles (Discussion with the student indicated that he reads such articles for pleasure)	
34	Mostly fiction, detective stories, comics	
35	I mostly read novels by Sidney Sheldon and Dan Brown and also short stories by Ruskin Bond and Katherine Mansfield.	
36	Sci-fi novels, comics, crime & thriller novels, fantasy novels, etc.	
37	I read detective novels and fiction books.	

Table 2 presents the Independent samples t-test results for both groups

	Mean score for Aesthetic readers	Mean score for Efferent readers	t	p	Effect size (d)
Reading Comprehension	6.93 (1.57)	6.38 (1.12)	1.15	.254	.40
Vocabulary (Cloze Test)	6.84 (1.34)	5.84 (1.84)	2.03	.047	.62
Grammar and Error Correction	7.71 (2.41)	5.38 (1.43)	3.26	.002	1.18
Writing	3.55 (.94)	2.26 (.99)	4.17	.000	1.34
Total score	25.05 (4.12)	19.88 (3.88)	3.94	.000	1.30

N = 37 for Aesthetic readers and 13 for Efferent readers, standard deviations for raw scores given in parenthesis. Maximum score for Reading comprehension, Vocabulary, Writing competence is 10 each and for Grammar and error correction 20.

Aesthetic readers clearly did better on the test, and the differences were statistically significant for Vocabulary, Grammar and Error Correction; Writing, and Reading Comprehension, but the difference was not statistically significant in the case of Reading Comprehension.

The overall scores of the Aesthetic readers were significantly greater.

Discussion

The subjects of both groups acquired language subconsciously as they received comprehensible input. But, the presence of a pleasure component in the input helped aesthetic readers acquire more language, which is consistent with the pleasure hypothesis.

Because Aesthetic readers have enjoyment as their goal, it is likely that they read more than Efferent readers. It is plausible that this is the reason for their superior performance, as well as the presence of a lower affective filter.

A possible flaw of the design is the fact that the study is the lack of control of out-of-school reading. A severe test of the hypothesis that reading for pleasure is superior would make sure all reading is done in-class. This may be impossible to do, because Aesthetic readers will continue to read outside of school.

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“The sum of human wisdom is not contained in any one language, and no single language is capable of expressing all forms and degrees of human comprehension.”

Ezra Pound