

L2 extensive reading and flow: Clarifying the relationship

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Abstract

Among foreign language educators interest in extensive reading is growing along with questions about learner motivation to read. Maintaining learner motivation over long periods of time is influenced by many variables suggesting that multiple means of stimulating motivation is needed. The psychological theory of flow has been suggested to influence motivation and engagement in reading. This study examined Japanese learners of English in extensive reading classes to see if they perceived to experiencing flow, the conditions that enabled flow, and if experiencing flow influenced their motivation to spend more time reading. The findings showed that these learners often perceived to experiencing flow while reading graded readers, however, greater frequency of flow-like experiences did not correlate with greater amounts of time spent reading.

Keywords: extensive reading, flow experience, L2 reading motivation, L2 reading engagement

Extensive reading (ER) in foreign language classrooms have attracted interest due to the unquestioned needs for learners to receive large amounts of the target language and positive feedback from learners. Learners are often eager to read during the initial phase of an ER program, yet as time passes disparities in motivation arise resulting in learners who read large amounts and those who do not. Educators see the disparities and are stimulated to research reading motivation. Flow theory has been suggested to relate to reading motivation (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). This study explored learners' perceptions of flow in a second language (L2) extensive reading class.

Extensive Reading and Foreign Language Learning

Extensive reading is an approach to teaching and learning reading that uses reading materials that are understandable and meaningful to the learner in order for learners to be able to read large amounts. The aim of ER is improvement in reading ability, fluency, and enjoyment (Day & Bamford, 1998; Grabe, 2009; Krashen, 2011). Foreign language learners need opportunities to receive massive amounts of comprehensible input, and reading material is a primary way to receive such input. Reading time in the classroom is inadequate making it necessary for learners to have reading material that they are able to read on their own (Waring, 2006). Reading large amounts of understandable text yields increases in word recognition and discourse structures,

and fuller word meanings, all a part of the implicit learning system (Ellis, 2003). Thus, extensive reading allows learners to integrate and consolidate language that they have studied previously (Waring, 2006). Vocabulary acquisition research shows the need for numerous repetitions of interacting with a word in order for it to be automatized and thus available for use which further emphasizes the value of L2 learners reading extensively (Nation, 2001).

Research on extensive reading in foreign language classrooms has shown many benefits. Beginning with Elley and Mangubhai's (1983) Fiji Book Flood research, reading large amounts has resulted in greater improvement in reading comprehension for the treatment groups than for control groups (Robb & Susser, 1989; Tanaka & Stapleton, 2007). Reading books for pleasure (simplified and unsimplified) has shown to result in greater increases in reading rates than intensive reading of difficult texts among Japanese university students (Beglar, Hunt, & Kite, 2012). Extensive reading has also been found to be effective in improving learners' general reading ability (Yamashita, 2008). Additionally, ER has been shown to increase learners' positive attitude toward reading (Karlin & Romanko, 2008). Grabe explains that due to difficulty in conducting well-controlled ER research over long periods of time the effectiveness of ER has been overlooked, however, "there is considerable and growing evidence for the impact of extensive reading on reading achievement" (2009, p. 322); an opinion that is echoed by Renandya (2007), "evidence for extensive reading is simply too strong to ignore" (p. 147).

Although significant benefits of ER have been shown, these benefits do not occur quickly. The amount of reading that can be labeled as "extensive" varies due to curriculum and learner's abilities, however, extensive reading programs often require more than one academic term (15 weeks) before improvement in reading ability is consistent and measurable (Karlin & Romanko, 2008; Taguchi, Gorsuch, & Sasamoto, 2006).

Extensive reading programs generally follow the "Ten Principles of ER" (Day & Bamford, 2002) which can be summarized as learners selecting reading material that they enjoy and are able to read quickly, reading for pleasure and general understanding, and teachers facilitating and modeling silent reading in the classroom. The reading for pleasure principle is often overridden by institutional needs for assessment which involves measuring amounts of reading accomplished. Silent reading time is provided in some classrooms, yet in order for learners to accomplish large amounts of reading they must read outside the classroom as well (Robb, 2002). Thus, in order for an ER program to attain its objectives, learners' motivation to read outside the classroom is important.

Motivating learners to read large amounts presents educators with many challenges. The first is the long time span inherent in extensive reading. Learners' motivation to read fluctuates greatly over a long time (de Burgh-Hirabe, 2011; Judge, 2011; Nishino, 2007). Second, learners, particularly in Asian contexts, are often unfamiliar with the autonomous style of learning in ER, and are unsure if autonomous learning is valuable. In Japan, language learners are accustomed to a teacher-lead approach in the classroom (Gorsuch, 2001). Lastly, outside the classroom learners have other priorities than reading including study for other classes, work and social life (de Burgh-Hirabe, 2011; Robb, 2002).

A case study involving learners of Japanese as a foreign language doing extensive reading by de

Burgh-Hirabe (2011) explored changes in motivation to read and the influences behind the changes. Nine participants read graded readers voluntarily for up to eight months during which the researcher gathered data in interviews, reading amounts, and time spent reading. She observed that motivational intensity (reading amount and time) and enjoyment were closely connected, increasing and decreasing together. De Burgh-Hirabe analyzed positive and negative influences on her participants' motivation, and found an interesting relationship between the two. She observed,

When each individual is considered over time, it seems that when the student's motivational intensity increased, the positive influences were operating and/or the negative influences were absent. When the students' motivational intensity declined, the negative influences were operating strongly and cancelled out the positive influences. Therefore, it is suggested that the positive influences are fragile and easily overshadowed by the negative influences. (de Burgh-Hirabe, 2011, p. 186)

This finding suggests that even though a learner has positive reading experiences, when negative motivational influences occur, such as demands in classes, extra-curricular activities, and social life, the negative motivational influences will take precedence over reading. These challenges to reading motivation have led educators to investigate many avenues to motivate learners including goal-setting, on-line sharing of book reviews, and on-line assessment (Campbell, 2011; Truscott, 2012).

Motivation and Second Language Reading

Motivation refers to the mental and emotional processes that precede a person's decision to act and the intensity in which to continue the action. Motivation to learn a second language was first explored by Gardner and associates in the Canadian context where they found learners' motivation influenced by attitudes toward the foreign language speaking community (Dörnyei, 2001). Many second language learners are not faced with integrating into a community that speaks the language they are studying which has resulted in a broadening of the research field (Chen, Warden, & Chang, 2005; Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Yashima, 2002,). This shift led away from the view of motivation as a state to motivation as temporal and fluid. Second language motivation is now viewed as a combination of influences including mental processes, emotions, the social context of the classroom, and the learner's L2 language identity (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

Although these advances in L2 motivation research are significant, Grabe argues that motivation for L2 general learning may not be the same as motivation for L2 reading, thus domain specific exploration is needed. He suggests L2 reading motivation needs to explore issues of reading interest, persistence in reading, reading engagement, and reading enjoyment among others (Grabe, 2009). Grabe points to first language (L1) reading research by Guthrie and associates that has delineated sources of reading motivation and teaching practices that influence students' interest in reading (Grabe, 2011). Guthrie and McRae state that "Compared to 10 other motivations, intrinsic motivation for reading was most highly correlated with whether or not students read widely and frequently on their own" (McRae & Guthrie, 2009, p. 56). Intrinsic

motivation is often attributed to individual differences, however McRae and Guthrie describe five classroom practices that teachers employ to influence intrinsic motivation to read, (a) relevance of reading material to the reader, (b) student ownership of reading due to self-selection of reading material, (c) success due to appropriate challenge, (d) collaboration with peers about reading material, and (e) thematic units that emphasize mastery of material. Now I turn to studies that examine L2 reading motivation.

Mori (2002) investigated L2 learners' motivation to read in a Japanese university setting using a questionnaire that reflected the above issues of intrinsic motivation, efficacy, and extrinsic motivation. She found four elements of learners' motivation to read in English: intrinsic value of reading, importance of reading, utility value of reading, and expectancy for success in reading. Grabe concludes from L1 and L2 research findings that there are three main themes that lead to L2 reading motivation, self-efficacy, autonomy, and collaboration (2009). These themes in L2 reading motivation are supported by findings in the following L2 extensive reading case studies.

The first theme, self-efficacy in reading, is a core element of the ER approach created by providing learners with reading material they can successfully read on their own. Educators have found that when L2 learners experience success in reading books at or below their reading level the amount that they read increases, as demonstrated in the following case studies. Japanese high school students in an ER program were observed for five years; when easy-to-read low-level books were introduced in the fifth year the mean amount of words the students read doubled (Takase, 2004). A study comparing different ER programs in a university found that when students started with low level books they read larger amounts than students who shunned low-level books and started with at-level books (Takase, 2008). Studies of Japanese as a foreign language students in an ER program found easy books and slightly challenging books increased motivation to read, however, difficult books decreased motivation (de Burgh-Hirabe, 2011). Likewise, difficult books were found to be a source of de-motivation (Kanda, 2009). Takase explains that the value of reading easy books is that easy books enable learners to read quickly, enjoy the content, and overcome the habit of translating into their first language (2008). Satisfaction in the accomplishment of reading a foreign language book was also found to be a significant positive influence on learners' motivation (de Burgh-Hirabe, 2011; Nishino, 2007). These studies show that where learners have success in reading, they evaluate L2 reading positively and are likely to read more.

The second theme of motivation to read in L2, autonomy, is also a core element of ER and supported by case studies. Autonomy, taking responsibility for one's own learning, has been found to develop in learners who participate in ER programs (Imrie, 2007). Extensive reading facilitates learners in becoming autonomous through providing books learners are able to read on their own, books that are of interest to the learners, and freedom to choose books (Brown, 2012). Learners are also responsible for the pace at which they read books.

Grabe's third theme of L2 reading motivation, student collaboration, is not a core element of ER although numerous collaborative classroom activities have been tried (Bamford & Day, 2004). The concept of 'communities of practice' has been used to investigating a voluntary extensive reading circle and found that "students co-motivated each other" (Hourdequin, 2011, p. 16).

As seen in the above studies, the extensive reading approach can include Grabe's three themes for L2 reading motivation suggesting that ER is a teaching practice that is likely to positively influence L2 students' reading motivation. An additional factor suggested to increase L2 reading motivation is flow experience. Day and Bamford wrote, "Flow experiences are a powerful incentive to continue one's involvement with reading and to make reading a part of one's life" (1998, p. 30).

Flow Theory

Flow theory emerged in the 1980's from the work of Csikszentmihalyi (1990) researching human's most enjoyable moments, which he labeled "optimal experiences." Data were gathered from people who wore an electronic pager and when signaled throughout the day recorded their activity, feelings, and thoughts. Analysis from a broad variety of people in different professions and cultures revealed similar explanations of life's most enjoyable experiences: an intense focus on a task in which a person's energy and ability 'flow' unhindered. Characteristics of activities that are conducive to flow also include descriptions of the flow phenomenon (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 8).

The Conditions of the Flow Experience

- | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Goals are clear | 6. Problems are forgotten |
| 2. Feedback is immediate | 7. Self-consciousness disappears |
| 3. Skills match challenges | 8. The sense of time is altered |
| 4. Concentration is deep | 9. The experience becomes autotelic |
| 5. Control is possible | |

Csikszentmihalyi describes feedback (2) as noticeable results of one's actions that can show how well one is doing the action. An autotelic experience (9) refers to an activity that is meaningful in itself, in other words, intrinsically motivating. Csikszentmihalyi's conditions can be divided into those that are a part of the activity design (1-5) and those that are a result of experiencing flow (6-9). Conditions which can be designed are clear goals, feedback, skill matching challenge, an environment to concentrate, and an element of control. The conditions that cannot be designed but are a result include, forgetting problems, lack of self-consciousness, a change in the sense of time and an autotelic experience. An important implication of flow theory is that "activities conducive to flow . . . were *designed* to make optimal experience easier to achieve (emphases by author, Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 72). Characteristics of these optimal experiences have subsequently been applied to numerous fields such as sports psychology, management training, and educational psychology among others, resulting in over 100 articles a year between 1997 and 2007 (Ishimura, 2008).

The most important characteristic of activities that trigger flow is a good fit between a person's skills in an activity and the challenges of the activity (Rathunde, 2003). When the challenge of an activity is greater than a person's abilities they feel anxiety; conversely when an activity provides low challenge or opportunity to use one's ability the result is boredom or apathy. This relationship between skills and challenges is depicted in the following diagram (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

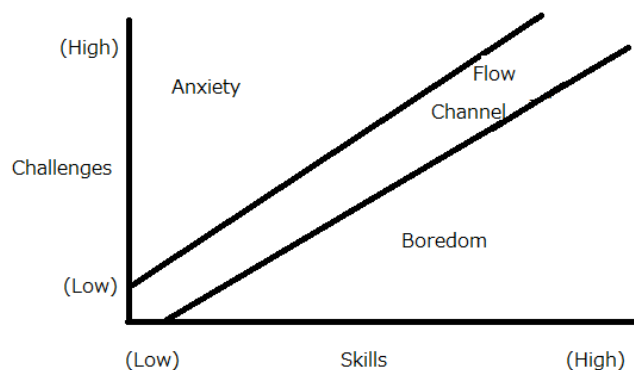


Figure 1. Flow channel

The Flow Channel is the area in which a person's skill level matches the level of challenge in an activity resulting in the intense focus of a flow experience. Within the Flow Channel an activity that has the right match of skill and challenge will eventually be mastered and become boring which can potentially push the person to increase skills (moving right in diagram) and take on more challenge (moving upward). Ideally seeking a balance of skill and challenge "leads to success at the task, which motivates the person to repeat the task at a more challenging level and to use the skills gained previously to accomplish the more difficult task" (Egbert, 2003, p. 502). Flow experiences have the potential to support focused learning and therefore can be described as creating an optimal learning experience.

The theory of flow has been used to analyze learner engagement in the classroom, effectiveness of educational tasks, and educational quality in school systems (Anderson, 2010; Rathunde, 2003; Tardy & Snyder, 2004). Classrooms in which learners reported high frequency or intensity of flow were associated with increases in intrinsic motivation, self-esteem, and time spent doing school work (Hektner & Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). A case study of two young boys who were intrinsically motivated to write in their native language described a state of intense concentration as "blinking out," "like being in a bubble," and "having the touch" (Abbott, 2000, pp. 75-83). Autonomy was noted as an important condition for these boys to experience flow. A study of Japanese university students found that those who put themselves in situations that required high skill and high challenge created a flow-like experience which they described as meaningful (Asakawa, 2009, p. 1). Krashen writes that experiencing flow while reading is when "language acquisition occurs most effectively" (2011, p. 82).

Flow experience while reading was explored in a case study by McQuillan and Conde that collected data from interviews and questionnaires (1996). In both methods of data collection flow was described in non-technical language as, "an intense engagement in a text," after which the participants were asked to recall readings that produced this experience, reasons for reading, and reasons for this engagement experience (McQuillan & Conde, 1996, p. 109). Results showed that these participants perceived a flow-like experience when the reading material was something they had previous knowledge about (skill), allowed for some challenge, was interesting, and was self-selected. Can foreign language learners also experience flow in their second language?

Egbert (2003) examined flow conditions and their relationship to second language classroom tasks to see if certain activities would lead to flow-like levels of engagement. First, she proposed a model that illustrates that if a language learning task is slightly challenging, interesting, and controllable, includes feedback with the chance to focus, then the task can enable flow. Egbert proposed that language learning tasks that fit this model will improve teaching effectiveness. She suggested that “flow and language acquisition occur under many of the same conditions” (2003, p. 506).

Next, Egbert examined learners of Spanish while they were involved in seven different language learning tasks. Following each task the learners completed a questionnaire that asked them to evaluate the task according to four dimensions of flow: (a) balance of challenge and skill, (b) focused attention, (c) interest, and (d) a sense of control. The tasks were analyzed by the number of flow dimensions the participants experienced. An email chat task with a native speaker of the target language received the highest rating and was found to incorporate the multiple dimensions of flow resulting in 92% of participants experiencing the four conditions of flow. Egbert (2003) concluded that “teachers can theoretically facilitate the flow experience for students by developing tasks that might lead to flow” (p. 513).

Building on these results Egbert (2005) argues that using computer technology to support language learning can help create optimal language learning tasks in which learners feel comfortable enough to take risks yet avoid boredom. Flow theory has continued to be investigated in computer-assisted learning (Konradt, Filip & Hoffman, 2003; Liao, 2006).

Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) in their recent volume on motivation research in foreign language teaching also view the flow experience as a helpful tool in thinking about motivation. They describe flow as “a heightened level of motivated task engagement” that has value due to inherent cognitive elements such as evaluating challenge in a task and having clear goals, as well as affective elements such as feeling success and autonomy (pp. 94–95).

There has been some evidence of flow-like experiences among L2 learners who are doing extensive reading (de Burgh-Hirabe, 2011; Judge, 2011). Judge’s long-term multi-case study of enthusiastic readers interviewed learners with the aim of discovering their motivation to read. The study revealed that many participants had experienced flow on numerous occasions, leading Judge (2011) to comment, ‘Free reading would seem to lend itself to such flow-inducing tasks, at least among learners who have a positive affective connection to reading’ (p. 178).

Csikszentmihalyi’s conditions for flow that can be designed into an activity have similarities with elements of the extensive reading approach in classrooms. Conditions for flow and comparable elements of extensive reading are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. *Conditions of flow and elements of extensive reading approach*

<u>Conditions of Flow</u>	<u>Elements of Extensive Reading</u>
Goals are clear	Goal is to read, simply focusing on the content
Feedback is immediate	A sense of accomplishment in following a story or completing a book
Skills match challenges	Begin with easy books, raise level as skill increases
Concentration is possible	Silent reading time in classroom or other locations
Control is possible	Learners select books and read at own pace

The five conditions that allow the flow phenomenon to occur are conditions for an optimal learning situation. These five conditions are quite similar to the principles and practices of the extensive reading approach. This seems to show that the design elements of flow are incorporated into the extensive reading approach.

Although there are similarities, some may see a contradiction between the flow condition of challenge and the extensive reading practice of reading easy books. Challenge is an important condition of flow because it engages the learner's skills and retards boredom. Reading easy or below-level books is emphasized in the extensive reading approach to allow for comprehension of long texts and pleasure. Could reading an easy book be an engaging challenge? Indeed, some L2 readers in this study and others have reported that easy books can be boring and do not hold their interest (Beglar, Hunt, & Kite, 2012). However, for lower level L2 learners who struggle to comprehend sentence level meaning, reading a below-level book is challenging due to the length of concentration in the L2 that is needed. Although the grammar and vocabulary of a book may be easy for the reader, combining the pieces and comprehending extended L2 content can be a challenge. Day and Bamford (1998) advise learners to begin with easy books to build confidence and sight vocabularies after which "it is important that they ladder up" by selecting reading material "in concert with their developing linguistic and reading competence" (pp. 91–92). Therefore, the multiple skills involved in L2 reading can make even reading an easy book a challenge if flow-like concentration should occur.

The similarities between conditions of flow and elements of ER practice suggest that flow experiences may increase reading motivation, and likewise, the extensive reading approach may enable flow experiences to occur. Grabe (2009) notes this circular relationship between flow experiences and intrinsic motivation to read and suggests that planning for flow experience in reading would lead to more reading. Grabe (2009) writes, "Certainly the concept of flow, as a theory of motivation, provides a strong rationale for promoting extensive reading, both in and out of the classroom" (p. 181).

This introduction has shown the importance of extensive reading for second language acquisition and development of reading skills. Extensive reading in the classroom is appealing to learners due to the feeling of success in reading and autonomy. Next, the topic of motivation in second language learning particularly reading motivation was overviewed. The research suggests that L2 reading motivation is influenced by student self-efficacy, autonomy and collaboration. Self-efficacy and autonomy have been found to be factors that motivate L2 learners in extensive reading programs. Flow theory was introduced and theoretically connected with intrinsic

motivation resulting in optimal learning conditions. Flow experiences have been researched in L1 reading and L2 classrooms. Influential authors have suggested that flow experiences are related to motivation in L2 learning and extensive reading (Day & Bamford, 1998; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Grabe, 2009, 2011). Although there is some anecdotal evidence of flow in L2 learners while reading, it has not been investigated. Could the intense concentration of a flow experience in reading play a role in motivating L2 learners to spend more time reading and thus reap the benefits of extensive reading? The following field study is an attempt to explore this relationship.

Current Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate if L2 learners experience flow and if that experience is related to reading larger amounts in an extensive reading program.

My research questions are:

1. Do L2 learners perceive a flow experience when reading and if so how frequently?
2. What conditions do learners attribute to enabling flow in L2 reading?
3. Do L2 learners who perceive flow more frequently read more than learners who perceive flow less frequently?

Method of Research

This paper looks at occurrences of flow experience in L2 extensive reading from several different angles. The data was collected from two groups of Japanese college students in extensive reading classes. In an attempt to get an insider view of flow experience in L2 reading, Group A participants completed participant-recall questionnaires (see Appendix A) for 14 weeks that asked for frequency of flow-like experiences and descriptions of the conditions which enabled flow. Data was also collected on the participants' reading speed, amount of reading accomplished and L1 flow experiences (see Appendix B). Due to the subjective nature of Group A's questionnaire which relied on participants' self-identification of a flow experience, the following year a different measuring tool was used to further clarify flow experiences while reading. Group B participants completed a questionnaire (see Appendix C) concerning specific elements of flow experiences.

Context

This study was conducted in an extensive reading class I teach at a junior college in Japan. The class is an elective class for students enrolled in the English Language and British and American Literature major. Students in this major have required classes in English literature, grammar, listening, conversation and writing. For most of the participants this was their first experience of extensive reading.

The extensive reading class met once a week for 90 minutes and continued for 15 weeks. The content of each classes included explanations of extensive reading, accounts of role models of

extensive reading, repeated reading tasks, and talking about books with classmates. Every class included 30 minutes of silent reading time. Flow experience was explained in class five and six in relation to book selection, emphasizing the value of selecting books that are at the reader's level so as not to be boring or too challenging. Because one aim of the study was to explore whether or not second language learners experience flow while reading, flow experience was not further mentioned.

The role of the repeated reading tasks was two-fold; repeated reading has been found to be effective in building fluency, and the tasks were a way to measure participants' word-per-minute (WPM) reading speed (Taguchi, Takayasu-Mass & Gorsuch, 2004).

Participants chose books to read from a broad selection of graded readers. The readers are fiction and non-fiction books written with vocabulary and grammar controlled for different levels of readers. The various publishers have different divisions for each grade, however, the number of headwords (word families) and total running words in the book is written on the cover to aid readers in selection. The participants in this study were primarily reading books with 250~700 headwords and 1,000~6,000 running words. In each class readers were able to select books from 200 graded readers brought into the classroom. There also were several hundred more graded readers in an easy access study room and in the college library. Participants wrote brief book reports that asked for the number of words read and their subjective opinion or experience of reading the book. Students were advised to read at least an hour per week outside class, and were evaluated by an estimate of the time they spent reading (the amount of words they reported to have read divided by their average word-per-minute reading speed). Therefore participants were assessed by the amount of time they put into reading regardless of their reading ability.

Participants

The participants of both groups were Japanese students ages 18-20 with two being 26 years old. Group A consisted of 37 females; Group B was 35 females and 2 males. All had studied English for 6 years in secondary school. The participants generally enjoyed English more than other subjects in high school, yet did not have confidence or ease in reading English. Three of the students had spent a year in an English speaking country but the majority only received limited English input from school textbooks. The average reading speed varied widely from 110 to 246 WPM in Group A, and from 89 to 172 WPM in Group B.

Data Collection

Extensive Reading Experience Questionnaire (Group A). Group A was given the Extensive Reading Experience Questionnaire (see Appendix A) at the end of every class following the silent reading time for 14 consecutive weeks. The questionnaire was written in Japanese and had three questions concerning, (a) the past week's ER experience, (b) a flow-like experience, and (c) reading goals for the next week. Question 2 was stated as, 'During this week did you have the experience of becoming engrossed in a book to the extent that time was forgotten? If the participant responded 'yes,' they were asked to describe the conditions that enabled the flow-like experience to occur. Only the answers to question 2 were used for this study, questions 1 and 3 were included to lessen the focus on flow experience.

Question 2 refers to some conditions of flow, deep concentration, being unconscious of self, problems and the normal passage of time, but not all conditions. This question was adapted from the following question used broadly by Csikszentmihalyi and associates to determine if a person had experienced flow, “Did you ever have the experience that you forgot yourself and forgot time and became so involved with what you were doing that you didn’t notice anything except what you were doing?” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 55). Using non-technical words to describe flow was also a characteristic of the instrument used in the study by McQuillan and Conde to identify flow experience while reading (1996).

The participants completed the questionnaire in Japanese and wrote the week number and their student number on the questionnaire. The positive or negative answer to question 2 was entered for each participant for each week. Thus, a participant’s frequency of reporting a flow-like experience over the 14-week term can be seen, along with the number of participants in the class who reported a flow-like experiencing during a given week. The responses to the open-ended part of question 2 concerning conditions of flow were translated into English and recorded chronologically for each participant. The 293 short answers were grouped into five themes: (a) book content, (b) location, (c) book level, (d) time, and (e) other. Although a description of conditions that enabled intense concentration was requested for affirmative answers there were some participants who did not experience a flow-like experience and wrote the conditions that they thought inhibited flow. These answers were later reverse-coded. The participants were told that the questionnaires would not be read until after grades were completed, and thus would not influence the instructor during the term or the assessment process. The participants were asked for permission to use their data and it was given.

Reading Speed, Amount Read and Time Spent Reading (Group A). The Repeated Reading task in every class involved reading an essay for one minute, three times. The participants were told to practice comprehending in English while reading (not translating into L1) and to experience faster reading on the 2nd and 3rd readings. The participants recorded the number of words read in each reading. The mean number of words read during the first reading was used as the participant’s mean reading speed.

The amount of words read was collected from the book reports. The brief report included book title, word count and opinion or experience of reading the book. Participants were taught how to write about their subjective opinion or experience of reading the book. The word count of each book was cumulated to represent the amount read. The amount read was not used in itself to assess learners’ motivation or grade because the amount read is greatly influenced by the participant’s reading speed.

The time spent reading was estimated by dividing the amount of words read by the participant’s mean reading speed figured as words-per-minute (WPM). For example a student who read 100,000 words and had an average 130 WPM reading rate, had an estimated reading time of 769 minutes or 12.8 hours. The reading was done in class and outside of class.

Motivation is invisible; there are “no objective measures of motivation,” therefore it can only be deduced from actions that are evaluated to be the result of motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011,

p. 197). Motivation stimulates an action, which is seen in effort and time on task. In this study I chose to use the estimated time spent reading as an indication of motivation to read because it involves the choice to begin reading and intensity to continue reading. This is similar to de Burgh-Hirabe's motivational intensity measure that combines reading amount and reading time.

Follow-up Questionnaire (Group A). The Follow-up Questionnaire (see Appendix B) was created after analysis of the above data in order to learn about the participants' experience of flow in L1 reading. Would participants' frequency of a flow-like experience in L2 reading be similar to their experience in L1 reading? Csikszentmihalyi suggests that there are people who experience flow more frequently along with about 15% of people who may never experience flow in any activity. The questionnaire was administered six months after the ER class finished. Because of the time gap the participants did not need to recall the ER class, they only needed to reflect on their L1 reading in general. The 'Follow-up Questionnaire' asked whether or not they had the *experience of becoming engrossed in a book* in L1 reading, what conditions enable the experience, and the frequency of the experience. The questionnaire was in Japanese and 32 of the 37 participants were present to respond. The questionnaire asked for the participants' student number so that the data could be added to earlier data.

The multiple sources of data were recorded according to student number resulting in a composite picture of each individual's mean reading speed, extensive reading word count, estimated time spent reading, number of experiences of flow in L2 and L1 along with conditions perceived to enable of flow experiences while reading.

Flow Conditions Questionnaire (Group B). Due to the subjective nature of the flow experience and weaknesses of the self-reporting method used in Group A, an additional approach was implemented the following year to Group B in a similar ER class. The Flow Conditions Questionnaire (see Appendix C) was based on Egbert's questionnaire reflecting four dimensions of flow: interest, control, focus and challenge. The 12 questions asked the participants to evaluate their reading that day in class instead of during the previous week as in Group A's questionnaire. Group B's questions related to interest in book, control over book selection, ability to focus on reading and the balance of challenge and ability in reading. The questionnaire was conducted in four classes in the middle of the term. The response to each item was on a Likert format scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Four of the questions were written in the negative and their answers were reverse scored. The responses on each questionnaire were averaged; a mean score of 5.0 to 7.0 indicated that the participant had reported the conditions of a flow-like experience.

Results and Discussion

Research question 1: Do L2 learners perceive a flow experience when reading and if so how frequently?

The results of the present study suggest that these participants did perceive a flow-like experience when reading in a foreign language, and they seemed to experience it frequently when reading graded readers. Table 2 shows the number of Group A participants who reported to

have perceived a flow experience while reading in and out of the classroom during a week.

Table 2. Number of group A participants who reported a flow-like experience

Week	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Participants reporting a flow-like experience (N=37)	19	21	27	17	25	26	23	16	21	23	19	20	16	25

Table 3 shows the number of Group B participants who reported flow conditions while reading in the classroom.

Table 3. Number of Group B participants who reported flow-like conditions

Week	9	10	11	12
Participants reporting flow-like conditions	26	20	18	18
<i>N</i>	35	32	31	32

Table 2 and 3 show that in Group A 43-72% of participants reported a flow-like experience each week (in and out of the classroom) and in Group B 56-74% of the participants reported flow-like conditions while reading in the classroom.

Looking at individual participants in Group A, all but one of the 37 participants reported a flow-like experience. Eighty percent of the participants reported a flow-like experience in six or more weeks during the 14-week period (mean = 8). Figure 2 illustrates the frequency (in number of weeks) in which individual participants reported a flow-like experience and the amount of participants with the same frequency.

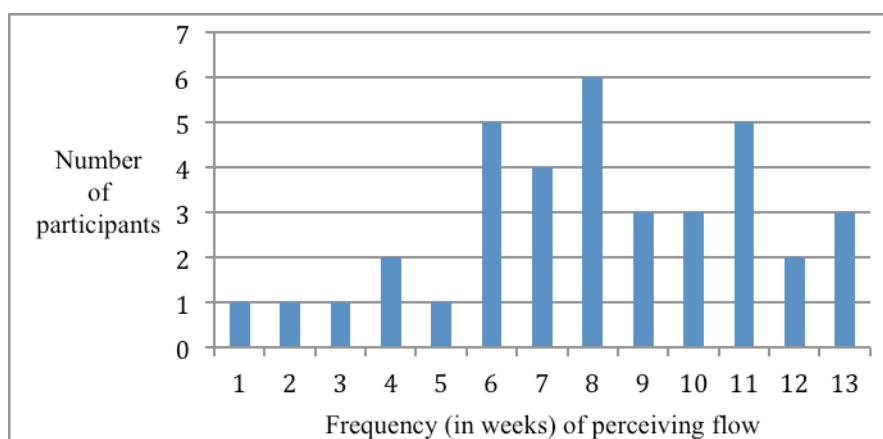


Figure 2. Frequency of group A individuals perceiving flow

The results of the Follow-up Questionnaire found that all of the participants reported to have had a flow-like experience in L1 reading. The frequency in which they reported to experience this was “several times a year” (20), “several times a month” (11) and “several times a week” (1), $N=32$.

Although flow is a difficult phenomenon to measure, the results from Group A and Group B suggest that flow-like experiences are common when L2 learners are reading graded readers. Even if the flow-like experience that participants reported may not have been the intensity of Csikszentmihalyi's description of flow, these learners seem to be engaging in L2 books. Overall, the data in this study on frequency of flow-like experiences while reading graded readers suggests that extensive reading can be considered an optimal learning task for L2 language learners.

Research question 2: What conditions are conducive to flow in L2 reading?

The results of the open-ended question on the Extensive Reading Experience Questionnaire revealed four conditions (see Table 4) that participants attributed to enabling flow-like experiences.

Table 4. *Conditions that enable flow-like experiences*

Condition	Number of responses	Percent
Book content	119	40
Reading location	82	27
Book level	37	12
Time	9	3
Other	9	3

Book content was accredited in 40% of the responses as the greatest contributor to a flow-like experience. Participants described books that were interesting, had a fun story, or aroused their curiosity. *Reading location* was given in 27% of the responses. A quiet location that enabled concentration was the most common response. This was followed by descriptions of a calm relaxing environment, such as one's bedroom. Respondents also acknowledged the role of background music in the classroom and appropriate room temperature. Conversely, an uncomfortably hot classroom hindered concentration. *Book level*, the third category included descriptions of books that they could read easily, that didn't require use of a dictionary or that contained pictures to help them understand the story. A fourth category related to *time schedule*. Having free time or making reading time in one's schedule were given as reasons for experiencing flow. Also, being busy with a school sports event inhibited experiencing flow. The last category, *other*, refers to responses about reading strategies such as imaging the story or listening to the narrative CD accompanying a book. Finally, during the last half of the term several respondents noted that becoming used to reading in English was a positive factor in enabling a flow-like experience.

The results of the Follow-up Questionnaire found similar results concerning conditions that enable flow in L1 reading to occur. Book content was given as a condition by 22 of the participants. They attributed fiction, mystery and books of their interests as books that enable a flow-like experience. Location was given by 24 of the participants, described as at home, quiet, able to concentrate, and solitary. The third condition that 5 participants reported was time to read.

Egbert's study found that through different classroom tasks teachers can facilitate the flow

experience for students (2003). Similarly, this study suggests that teachers can facilitate three of the conditions for flow by providing books that are likely to interest the students and at the students' reading levels, and by creating a quiet classroom in which to concentrate.

Research question 3: Do L2 learners who perceive flow more frequently read more than learners who perceive flow less frequently?

This question attempted to see if Group A participants who reported a higher frequency of perceiving flow would also spend larger amounts of time reading. In order to see this relationship the estimated hours of L2 reading time was viewed in relation to the reported number of weeks with flow experiences. A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated to assess the relationship between reading time and frequency of flow. There was no correlation between the two variables ($r = -0.0313$, $n = 37$). A scatterplot shows the lack of relationship between frequency of experiencing flow and time spent reading (Fig. 3).

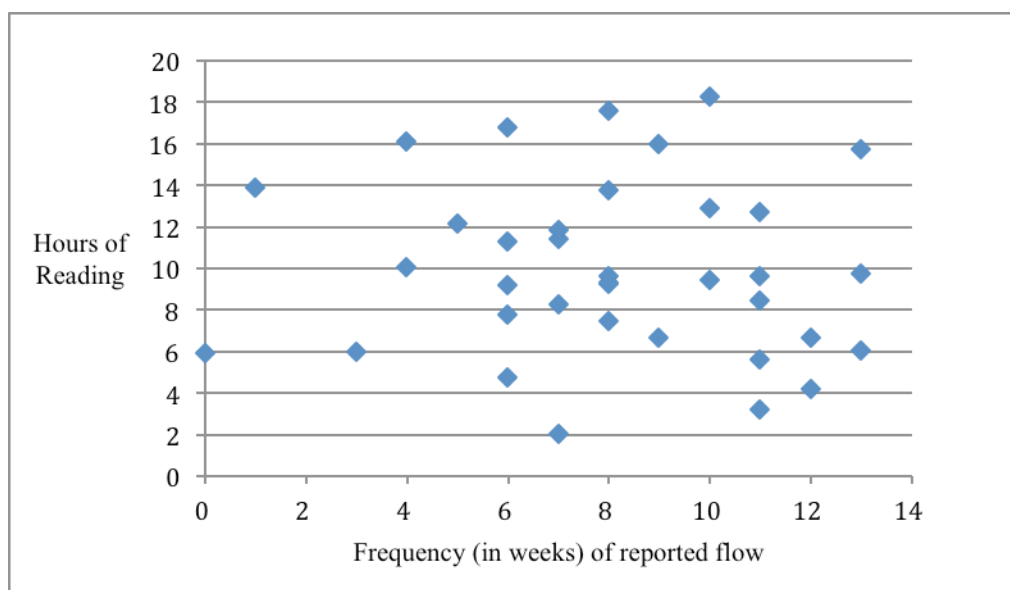


Figure 3. Relationship between hours of reading and frequency of flow

After the above results were analyzed the Follow-up Questionnaire was created in order to understand the participants' perceived experience of flow while reading in their native language. All 32 respondents had experienced 'being engrossed' in a Japanese book with one person reporting to experience flow several times a week. Would this respondent's familiarity with experiencing flow weekly in L1 reading influence the frequency in which she perceived to experience flow in L2 reading? Yes, she reported to perceive flow in 13 of the 14 weeks. Would this familiarity with experiencing flow motivate her to read for a greater amount of time than other participants? No, the estimated amount of time she spent reading was not high, 9.71 hours (mean is 10.44).

In sum, this study did not find a relationship between flow experience while reading in L2 and motivation to spend time reading. Although a flow-like experience suggests that learners are engaged in reading books that are interesting and at their level, this positive experience alone did not necessarily lead to more time spent reading in and out of the classroom. Two possible

explanations can be suggested by returning to the work of Grabe and de Burgh-Hirabe. One, Grabe suggests three themes of reading motivation: self-efficacy, autonomy, and collaboration. The extensive reading program in this study did allow participants to experience success in reading, as seen in the frequency of flow-like experiences, and it allowed for autonomy, however there was little emphasis on students collaborating with each other.

A second possible explanation can be found in de Burgh-Hirabe's (2011) observation that L2 readers' positive motivation is fragile and can be easily cancelled out when negative motivational influences appear. Reading done outside the classroom in particular is subject to negative motivational influences. Therefore even when L2 reading yields a sense of accomplishment and is meaningful, if an opportunity to socialize with friends or pressure to complete other classwork arises the motivation to read is likely to dissipate. Along the same line, Ushioda reminds educators that learners are "real people" situated in various contexts with multiple identities and goals (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 78). The reading considered in this study (Group A) included reading in the classroom and out of the classroom where motivation was subject to negative motivational influences.

A relationship of flow experiences and motivation to read was not found, however the relationship between extensive reading and flow was clarified. Because the extensive reading approach to teaching reading includes the conditions of flow that can be designed into a task, ER enabled L2 learners to experience flow-like engagement while reading in the classroom (Group B). In this study a majority of the participants identified the flow-like engagement while reading graded readers in the classroom. Therefore, extensive reading is suggested as a second language learning classroom approach that improves teaching effectiveness by including conditions for reading engagement.

Limitations

This exploratory study contains weaknesses that limit immediate application of the findings. First, this study was conducted at a small college of primarily women. Second, flow experience is a subjective phenomenon, which is difficult to identify and measure. Although Group A participants reported in the questionnaires concerning L2 and L1 reading that they did recognize having had an experience of being absorbed in a book, this may not necessarily indicate a flow experience like the lengthy definition of Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 1997). The description of a flow-like experience on the questionnaires used in Group A may have been so simplified that it allowed participants to include any reading experience in which they concentrated. Self-evaluation questionnaires also have problems with participants' various ways of evaluating their own behavior. These weaknesses of definition and self-evaluation may have been corrected in the Group B Flow Conditions Questionnaire.

Another limitation of the study is that I taught participants about flow theory in classes five and six. I emphasized that flow can occur when there is a balance of skill and challenge which I then related to the students' selection of books. Following this explanation Group A participants may have responded positively concerning flow to please the teacher (in Week 5, seventeen students reported a flow like experience whereas 25 did in Week 6). Nevertheless, the desire to please the

teacher could not have been an influence on the questionnaires written in class four when a large number of participants (27) reported a flow-like experience.

Conclusion

The extensive reading approach has shown many benefits for learners although it often relies on learners being motivated to read outside the classroom in order to read large amounts. Maintaining motivation over long periods of time is complex and influenced by many variables, suggesting that multiple means of stimulating reader motivation are needed. The flow experience has been suggested to contribute to motivation in reading and may assist in reading engagement.

This study found that the participants often experienced flow-like concentration in an L2 extensive reading class as well as in L1 pleasure reading. The conditions of flow that can be designed into an activity and the ER approach were shown to have many similarities suggesting that an instructor can facilitate flow-like concentration in a reading classroom. Extensive reading was found to be a teaching approach that allows for many learners to engage in L2 reading in the classroom. The conditions that enabled flow-like experiences as reported by these participants emphasize the importance of a generous supply of books at the readers' levels and a quiet reading environment.

This study did not find a relationship between frequency of flow experiences while reading and reading amount. Although flow experiences have been suggested to motivate reading, in this study participants who weekly reported experiencing flow while reading did not seem to be motivated to read more outside the classroom than participants with fewer flow experiences. Motivating learners to do L2 reading outside of the classroom seems to be influenced by many factors other than the quality of the reading experience.

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Appendix A

Extensive Reading Experience Questionnaire

Student number: _____ Class number: ____

1. During the past week was the experience of extensive reading good or not so good? Why?
2. During this week did you have the experience of becoming engrossed in a book to the extent that time is forgotten? Yes ____ No ____
If you answered ‘yes’, explain the conditions that made it possible.
3. In the next week how much do you plan to read? Why?

Appendix B

Follow-up Questionnaire

Student number: _____

At the end of each Reading 1 class you answered a questionnaire. The following question referred to ‘flow experience,’

2. During this week did you have the experience of becoming engrossed in a book to the extent that time is forgotten?
Yes ____ No ____
If you answered ‘yes’, explain the conditions that made it possible.

Please answer the following questions.

1. Before entering this college had you experienced ‘being engrossed’ in an English book?
Yes ____ No ____
2. Have you had the experience of ‘being engrossed’ in a Japanese book?
Yes ____ No ____

3. If you answered 'yes' to the above question please write the conditions that enabled that to occur.
4. What frequency do you experience 'being engrossed' in a book?
several times a year ____ several times a month ____ several times a week ____

Appendix C

Flow Conditions Questionnaire

1. This book was difficult to understand.
2. The content of this book is interesting.
3. I chose this book because it seemed to be at my level.
4. While reading I often thought about other things than the content.
5. This book was a good level for me.
6. I chose this book because it looked interesting.
7. This book was too simple.
8. This book sparked my curiosity.
9. The content of this book was not interesting.
10. Reading this book is meaningful.
11. While reading I stayed focused on the book content.
12. I would like to read more books like this one.

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