

Exploring Motivational Strategies in Extensive Reading Programs

Shannon Rosol

shannon.e.rosol@gmail.com · 010-4463-7271 · shannonrosol.weebly.com

1. Motivation

1.1 Why is motivation important?

Motivation is critical to students' success.

"The learner's ultimate success always depends on the level of motivation..." (Dornyei, 2014, p.520)

"... research has shown that many teachers find that problems with motivating pupils are the second most serious source of difficulty (the first is maintaining classroom discipline)..." (Dornyei, 2014, p.523)

1.2 What is motivation?

There are varying definitions of motivation: behavioral, cognitive, constructivist and social-psychological (Brown, 2007, p.85-87). All of these point to motivation being a **cognitive and emotional process that is affected by social factors leading to sustained effort.**

"Motivation may be construed as a state of cognitive and emotional arousal, which leads to a conscious decision to act, and which gives rise to a period of sustained intellectual and/or physical effort in order to attain a previously set goal (or goals)" (Williams & Burden, 1997, p.120 as quoted in Dornyei, 1998, p.126).

According to Robert Gardner's Social Psychological Approach, "'motivation' refers to a kind of central mental 'engine' that subsumes effort, want/will (cognition), and task-enjoyment (affect)" (Dornyei, 1998, p.122).

Highly motivated students will have all three: effort, want/will, and task-enjoyment all work together. Of course, some students may only have one or two, but having all three is the desired combination. Therefore, as the starting point for your ER program, you need to check these three things and try to create and foster each one as much as possible.

2. Effort

2.1 Placing Students in the Correct Reading Level

If students have to work too hard to read and are getting discouraged or cannot understand, then they are not reading books at the appropriate level. The goal in leveling students is to get them "reading a longer text with **reasonable comfort** and **without needing to stop** constantly, and **without feeling fatigued or overwhelmed**" (Grabe, 2012, p.311). Usually the reader should **know about 98-99% of the words** in a text used for independent reading.

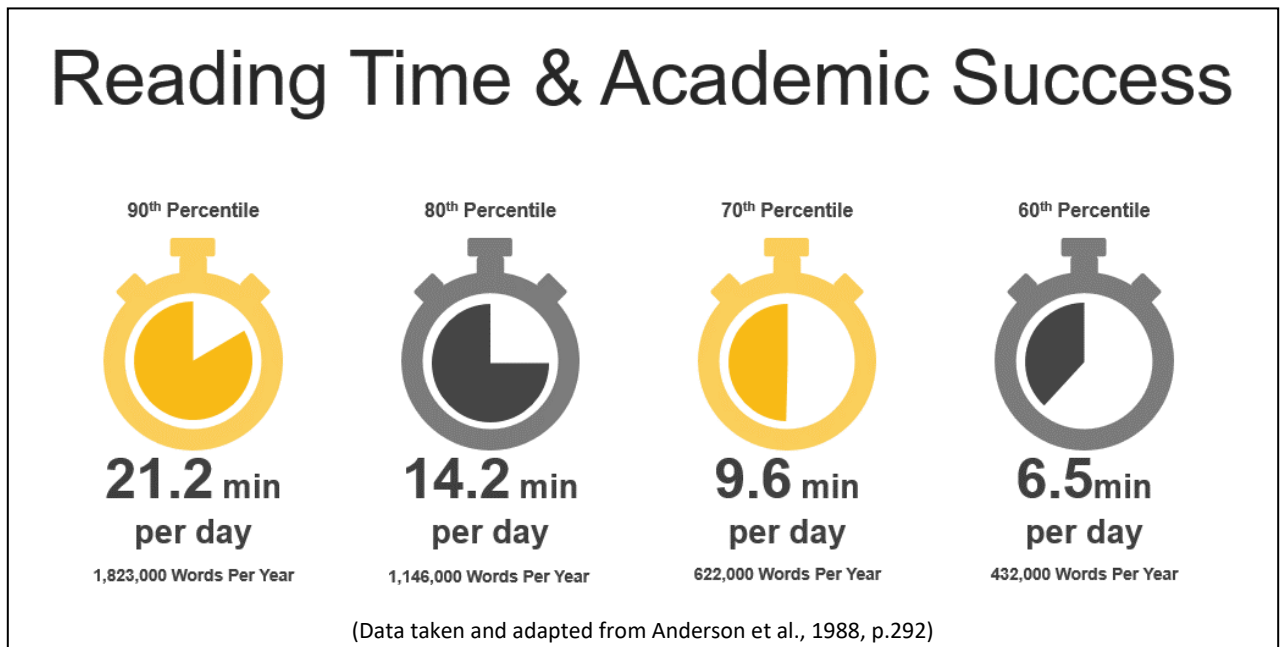
Another way to counteract this is by using texts with **Korean glosses**. "Struggling readers as well as beginner readers in secondary schools can easily start English reading with the help of Korean glosses" (Shin & Ahn, 2006, p.83). Providing paper **dictionaries** for those who are reading paper books and allowing the use of online dictionaries for those reading e-books can help reduce the amount of effort students have to put forth to understand the text.

Appropriate leveling leads to an increase in students' self-confidence and successful learning experiences which in turn leads to increased motivation. According to linguistic self-confidence theory developed by Richard Clement, students' self-perceptions of competency and anxiety in performing a task relate to student motivation (Dornyei 1998, p.123). In addition, motivation can also be based on successful learning experiences according to Dornyei's model which includes L2 Learning Experiences (Dornyei, 2014, p.521). **This means we first want to build positive, successful learning experiences for our students while reading English.** Then after we have built up these experiences and built up student confidence, we can later increase students' reading levels.

Ensuring that students are at the appropriate level is crucial. **Make opportunities to listen and talk** with your students about their level and reduce the level if necessary. One way to ensure that you increase students' level over time is by having students "graduate" to a new reading level after they read a certain set amount.

2.2 Provision of Time

Providing time to students to read in class can reduce the amount of effort students need to put forth in order to read while also leading to greater academic success.



Devoting just one 45-minute class time a week to extensive reading equals about 6.5 minutes per day.

3. Task-Enjoyment (Affective/Emotional Aspects)

We as teachers need to make reading in English as enjoyable as possible.

3.1 The Importance of Resources

Resources should be:

- as wide a **variety** as possible to try to appeal to all students
- **relevant and interesting** to students
- **Organized** in an eye-catching, easily accessible and appealing way
 - Some titles should be easily visible
- **Accessible** to all students

- If texts are not readily available, then students cannot read.
- A recommendations section can help indecisive students find books easily. Try to incorporate different levels so that all students can find books. Try to update and change it regularly so that students can find new books. Teachers and students alike can recommend books.
- An important note, how can you recommend books if you do not read yourself? We as teachers should be modeling reading in both our L1s and L2s. We also need to become familiarized with the reading materials available to our students so that we can adequately interact with them and recommend appropriate books to them.

3.2 Student Choice & Autonomy

“Motivation is highest when one can make one’s own choices, whether they are in short-term or long-term contexts” (Brown, 2007, p.87).

Allow students to:

- choose reading materials and preferred medium (paper books vs e-books)
- set their own personal goals
- choose where to sit/read (if student behavior allows)
- choose the rewards (individually or vote as a class)

3.3 The Classroom Environment

Try your best to provide a classroom that is:

- comfortable
- fun
- relaxing
- alluring
- playful
- safe

You want to create a space where students genuinely want to be.

Recently, I observed the benefits of creating this type of classroom environment and now students will come to the classroom to just hang out or read during their free time.

Some tips to foster a pleasant classroom atmosphere:

- Try non-traditional seating
- Allow students to bring or eat snacks
- Add color
- Involve students in the decorations and design
- Keep your classroom door open

3.4 Breaking up the Monotony of Learning

Familiar routines are good, but they may become monotonous to students. Thinking of creative ways to break up this monotony:

1. Switch seating in the classroom
2. Change the location (go outside when the weather is nice)
3. Mix up the genre that students are reading and pay attention to the length of the books
4. Creating additional creative projects such as:
 - a. Book recommendation posters
 - b. Book advertisement posters
 - c. Drawing the book in a comic strip
 - d. Literary circles
 - e. Reading partners/groups
 - f. Book recommendation presentations

4. Want / Will (Cognitive Aspects)

4.1 **Repeatedly** and **consistently** explain the rationale behind ER to students.

Some of the benefits of ER: (Mikulecky, 2011, p.19)

- Provides massive amounts of comprehensible input: the primary requisite for significant language acquisition
- Allows students to make gains in vocabulary and grammar knowledge
- Fosters reading fluency
- Improves writing in the second and foreign language
- Fosters the development of a positive attitude toward reading in the second or foreign language
- Motivates students to read more

If students understand why they are reading, they will be more motivated to read.

4.2 Individual Goal Setting

Self-determination theory supports student choice, so having students set personal goals at the beginning of the year can motivate students. Be sure to help guide them through this process. The goals should:

- Be specific
- Have clear criteria for success (measurable)

Some good examples:

- I want to go up one reading level.
- I want to read 1000 pages this semester.
- I want to read 200 books this year.
- I want to read 100 words within 1 minute.
- I want to find 3 books I really like.
- I want to learn something new about __.

A bad example:

- I want to feel like reading in English is easier. (too vague and unmeasurable)

4.3 Teacher Set Goals

- Teachers should set goals higher than what the students would set for themselves. You never know what students can accomplish if you don't challenge them.
- Goals should be both reasonable and challenging.
- Success should focus on student's efforts and learning gains rather than ability.

4.4 Consistency and Monitoring

Students' progress needs to be consistently monitored at regular intervals (Brown, 2007, p.94).

- Weekly one-on-one meetings
- Using book charts, journals, or other progress-keeping records
- Visual representations help students see their progress in motivating ways
- Remaining consistent means students know when and how to expect their progress with be monitored
- Regularly remind students of the value of ER and expectations

Success Criteria need to be clear and straightforward for students to follow (Dornyei, 2014, p.526).

4.5 Intrinsic Motivation

You can assess if your current motivating strategies are intrinsic by using this checklist from *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy* (Brown, 2007, p.93):

- Does it appeal to the genuine interests of your students? Is it relevant to their lives?
- Do you present it in a positive, enthusiastic manner?
- Are students clearly aware of the purpose of it?
- Do students have some choice in choosing some aspect of it or determining how they go about fulfilling the goals of it?
- Does it encourage students to discover for themselves certain principles or rules (rather than simply being told)?
- Does it encourage students in some way to develop or use effective strategies of learning and communication?
- Does it contribute- at least to some extent- to students' ultimate autonomy and independence?
- Does it foster cooperative negotiation with other students in the class? Is it truly interactive?
- Does it present a "reasonable challenge"?
- Do students receive sufficient feedback on their performance (from each other or you)?

You can also encourage intrinsic motivation through **learner-centered** and **task-based** techniques.

Make sure that the tasks you give students are **non-threatening** (Mikulecky 2011, p.32).

Some task-based activities include: (Mikulecky, 2011, pp. 32-38)

- Quizzes
- Book Conferences
- Peer Conferences
- Book Response Forms
- Book Presentations
- Reading Circles
- Book Posters
- Book Charts

Perhaps let students choose between some of the tasks listed above.

4.6 Incentives and Rewards (Extrinsic Motivators)

You want to use these with care. Students can easily lose interest in reading for the pure enjoyment of it or as a way of learning English.

- **Use sparingly** as these can be addicting (Brown, 2007, p.89).
- Involve students' choices and ideas (students choose the rewards)
- Encourage Cooperation (students work together to accomplish a goal)
- Discourage Competition (while competition can motivate students, it can also cause problems with group dynamics)
- Use timing to your advantage (providing a short-term incentive or mentioning rewards near the end of the year can be used to your advantage to motivate students at a time they usually aren't as motivated)

If you are interested in some recommendations to make extrinsic motivators more intrinsic then see *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy* (Brown, 2007, P.93-95).

5. Social Factors

5.1 The Role of Family and Home Environment

Family support is vital to students' success (Gardner, 2004). Therefore, teachers should:

- Explain the rationale of ER and convince parents and guardians of its necessity (One idea is to provide a note to parents that you can send home with students, or give to homeroom teachers to pass on to the parents. This note can be written in both Korean and English or just in Korean. The note can explain all of the benefits of ER and ask teachers to encourage their students to promote the ER program.)
- Involve parents and update them on their student's progress
- Listen to parents' concerns and feedback
- Encourage families to read together and model reading

5.2 Build positive relationships with your students.

- Students' perceptions of their teacher affect their motivation. This is a part of the appraisal of the classroom environment where students evaluate both their teacher and course and affects motivation. (Dornyei, 1998, p.125)
- Be a role-model of the reading and the behavior you want to see
- Develop mutual respect and understanding

5.3 Open Communication

Your relationship with your students will affect how open your communication is and vice versa (Harmer, 2007, pp.113-115). Some recommendations:

- Set regular one-on-one meetings (weekly or biweekly)
- Reach out to struggling students
- Truly listen to and respect students' concerns
- Listen well and often
- Provide different methods of communication

5.4 Positive Feedback

- Focus feedback on students' effort and cultivating the kind of behavior and activity you want to see
- Actively monitor students, progress regularly so that you are aware and can give feedback (Harmer, 2007, p.138)
- Feedback can be given directly to the student or indirectly through parents, homeroom teachers, or other students
- Feedback can be written or oral

5.5 Group Dynamics

The concept of group dynamics comes from psychology, anthropology, sociology and other social sciences. "Group dynamics affect the motivational state and behavior of the group as a whole, although it may affect different individuals in different ways" (Dornyei, 2014, p.527). Two important areas are:

1. Group Cohesiveness (Dornyei, 2019)
 - a. Foster cooperation, collaboration and support for others in your classroom
 - b. Minimize competition like competing for top prizes. Instead, you can simply have all students receive a prize if they achieve a goal. One's performance should not hinder another's.
 - c. Group goals are a great way to get students working together and encouraging each other
2. Group Norms (Dornyei, 2019)

- a. Help students to learn about each other.
- b. Form your class rules together and have clear rules and consequences. (It is important to remember to also consistently enforce them.)
- c. Be more authoritative in the beginning and move slowly to a more facilitating and cooperating role
- d. Give positive feedback to individuals who are exhibiting the behavior you want to see and later to the class as a whole after norms have been established.

6. A Few Important Things to Remember

6.1 After generating student motivation, it needs to be maintained. (Dornyei, 2014, p.523)

Therefore, students need consistent and regular reminders about their progress and long-term goals. This is why book charts, posters, etc. can be very effective in keeping students motivated. Not only do they provide a nice visual representation to display students' progress, when regularly updated, they show the incremental progress made along the way and builds up to a large amount of progress.

6.2 Interestingly, participation in extensive reading programs can lead to increased student motivation.

This is especially true in the areas of promoting confidence in English reading and interest in English-speaking culture. "In other words, extensive reading was effective in promoting confidence in English reading and interest in English-speaking culture and Korean reading" (Shin & Ahn, 2006, p.82). I chose this study to demonstrate this change in motivation because it is based on Korean high school students.

6.3 Quality should be valued over quantity. (Dornyei, 2014, p.523)

Focus on just a few of the strategies that you think will work best in your setting. You can always take it step-by-step and incorporate these incrementally over time.

6.4 Remember to keep your strategies student-centered and focus on making reading pleasurable.

Our long-term goal is to make self-motivated and life-long readers so this should always be at the front of our mind. Keeping our strategies student-centered and increasing the enjoyment of reading can really help us achieve this goal.

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