

# Can Stories And Self-Selected Reading Slow The Decline In Attitudes Toward English?

**Kyung Sook Cho**  
*Busan National University of Education, Korea*  
[kscho@bnue.ac.kr](mailto:kscho@bnue.ac.kr)

**Young Kim**  
*Yang-Jeong Elementary School, Korea*  
[young754@hanmail.net](mailto:young754@hanmail.net)

## ABSTRACT

*Both fourth graders and sixth graders participating in an English program emphasizing hearing stories and self-selected reading had better attitudes than comparison students about English classes and liked reading more. Although sixth graders in both groups had more negative attitudes than the fourth graders, the difference between the groups was larger in sixth (6th) grade, suggesting that stories and reading can slow the decline of attitudes.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

It has been sixteen years since elementary English education started in Korea. Since then “English Fever”(Krashen, 2006) has spread throughout the country. There has, however, been a growing concern over declining children’s attitudes toward English as a foreign language. According to teachers, the majority of sixth (6th) grade students show negative attitudes while third (3rd) grade students are enthusiastic (Seong, 2003; Ryu, 2005).

Study after study has confirmed that including pleasure reading and hearing stories in EFL improves not only English competence, but also attitudes toward English (Cho, Ahn & Krashen, 2005; Cho & Choi, 2008; Cho & Kim, Hee J., 2005; Cho & Kim, Hey J., 2004; Wang & Lee, 2007).

The purpose of this study is to investigate if hearing stories and free reading in English make a difference on children’s attitudes toward English and can prevent or slow down this decline.

## 2 PROCEDURE

### 2.1 Subjects

Subjects were students of English as a foreign language enrolled in two different elementary schools in Korea in two grade levels, fourth grade (4) and sixth grade (6). According to the Busan Board of Education, the two schools were similar in socio-economic status.

Subjects from the experimental school were 127 fourth graders in five different classes and 165 sixth graders in six different classes.

[Research Index](#) • [Teacher-to-Teacher Section](#) • [Submission Info](#) • [Contact Us](#) • [Subscription Info](#)

Subjects in the comparison school were 135 fourth graders in five different classes and 128 sixth graders in five different classes.

## ***2.2 The Experimental Program***

In the experimental school, fourth graders had participated for two years in an English reading/story program as part of their English as a foreign language class and the sixth graders had participated for four years. In addition to regular instruction, thirty (30) minutes per week were dedicated to read-alouds by the teacher, and ten (10) minutes were dedicated to student self-selected reading in the library. Reading related activities such as book making and reading response journals were included. Students were not required to comment in their logs on each book they read.

Students in the experimental program had access to an English library containing about 4000 books and 2000 books were available on the Internet. In addition to the library book access, all of the Internet books were available for free reading.

The comparison school did not include reading or read-alouds as part of English class, but followed the traditional national English curriculum.

## ***2.4 The Survey***

In order to examine the effects of the read-aloud/reading program on students' attitudes toward English and toward reading, a questionnaire in Korean was distributed to students in each school at the beginning of the spring semester.

The survey questionnaire consisted of four items and was administered in Korean. Students were asked if they agreed or disagreed with each item, responding on a five-point scale (1= a great deal, 5 = not at all). Reliability was high (Cronbach alpha = .95).

### ***2.4.1 Questionnaire items***

1. I like English. (ENGLISH)
2. I usually enjoy reading English storybooks or other English books. (PL READ)
3. I enjoy English class and look forward to it. (LIKE CLASS)
4. I have confidence in my English study. (CONFIDENCE)

## **3 The Hypotheses**

The hypotheses to be investigated were these:

1. The experimental groups in both grades will show superior attitudes toward English and reading for pleasure, will like English class better and will have more confidence in studying English.
2. Differences in attitudes will be larger in grade six (6) than in grade four (4), because of experimental students' greater participation in the story/self-selected reading program.

## 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Results

Hypothesis 1: The experimental groups in both grades will show superior attitudes toward English and reading for pleasure, will like English class better and will have more confidence in studying English.

For both grades four (4) and six (6), this hypothesis was supported. Differences between the groups were statistically significant for all measures (table 1).

**Table 1. Difference between the groups**

|             | ENGLISH     | PL READ     | LIKE CLASS  | CONFIDENCE  |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| GRADE 4     |             |             |             |             |
| Exp (N=120) | 4.03 (1.08) | 3.41 (1.27) | 3.91 (1.05) | 4.02 (1.08) |
| Com(N=134)  | 3.64 (1.28) | 2.89 (1.32) | 3.46 (1.2)  | 3.68 (1.38) |
| T           | 2.57        | 3.19        | 3.14        | 2.15        |
| P           | 0.00        | 0.00        | 0.00        | 0.02        |
| ES          | 0.32        | 0.4         | 0.4         | 0.27        |
| DF = 252    |             |             |             |             |
| GRADE 6     |             |             |             |             |
| Exp (N=158) | 3.95 (.94)  | 3.05 (1.10) | 3.73 (.92)  | 3.69 (1.06) |
| Com (N=128) | 3.43 (1.1)  | 2.43 (1.12) | 3.02 (1.02) | 3.27 (1.13) |
| T           | 4.32        | 4.7         | 6.2         | 3.27        |
| P           | 0.00        | 0.00        | 0.00        | 0.00        |
| ES          | 0.52        | 0.56        | 0.74        | 0.39        |
| DF = 284    |             |             |             |             |

All t-tests one-tailed.

Standard deviations in parentheses

Hypothesis 2: Differences in attitudes will be larger in grade six (6) than in grade four (4).

Inspection of effect sizes in Table 1 shows that this was true for all measures.

### 4.2 A decline in attitudes

The data in table 1 reveals that both groups of fourth graders had better attitudes in all measures than did sixth graders. Table 2 shows that the difference was significant in all cases except for experimental groups' attitude toward English and toward English class ( $p = .13$ , in the latter case, two-tailed test), and the comparison group's attitude toward English (close to significance,  $p = .07$ , two-tailed test).

**Table 2. Difference between attitudes in grades 4 and 6**

|            |    | <b>Experimental</b> | <b>Comparison</b> |
|------------|----|---------------------|-------------------|
| ENGLISH    | T  | 0.62                | 1.44              |
|            | Df | 276                 | 260               |
|            | P  | 0.53                | 0.07              |
|            | ES | 0.08                | 0.18              |
|            |    |                     |                   |
| PL READ    | T  | 2.5                 | 3.03              |
|            | Df | 276                 | 260               |
|            | P  | 0.01                | 0.00              |
|            | ES | 0.3                 | 0.38              |
|            |    |                     |                   |
| LIKE CLASS | T  | 1.53                | 3.24              |
|            | Df | 276                 | 260               |
|            | P  | 0.13                | 0.00              |
|            | ES | 0.18                | 0.4               |
|            |    |                     |                   |
| CONFIDENCE | T  | 2.52                | 2.64              |
|            | Df | 276                 | 260               |
|            | P  | 0.01                | 0.00              |
|            | ES | 0.3                 | 0.33              |

All t-tests 2 tailed

Effect sizes in table 2 also indicate that the difference between grades four (4) and six (6) was larger for the comparison group in these cases. This is an important finding. It suggests that reading experience and hearing stories slow the decline of attitudes between grades four (4) and six (6).

Figure 1 illustrates the "braking effect" of the read-aloud/self-selected reading program, based on the attitude toward English class results. (All numbers rounded off, for ease of interpretation.)

Figure 1. Attitude toward English class

|                     | Grade 4 | Grade 6 |
|---------------------|---------|---------|
| Experimental group: | 3.9     | 3.7     |
| Comparison group:   | 3.5     | 3       |

As presented in figure 1, in grade four (4), the experimental group scored .4 points higher than the comparison group. Grade six (6) scores are lower than grade four (4) scores for both groups, but in grade six (6), the experimental group scored .7 points higher than the comparison group. The "decline" is greater for the comparison group.

If reading and hearing stories can slow down the decline in attitudes toward English, and toward reading itself, it may be the case that more stories, and more reading, especially more comprehensible and exciting reading, can eliminate the decline completely and even improve attitudes among older children. One teacher of the experimental students, in fact, remarked that students often found the books available to them to be difficult.

### **4.3 Caveats**

#### **4.3.1 Social class differences**

According to the Busan Board of Education, the two schools participating in this study were similar in socio-economic status. Higher SES children generally have more access to reading material, but precise data for these subjects is lacking.

#### **4.3.2 Cross-sectional**

The grade four (4) - six (6) comparisons were cross-sectional, not longitudinal, and should be confirmed in a longitudinal study studying the same children in grade four (4) and two years later in grade six (6).

The results, however, are very consistent with previous studies showing the impact of reading on language acquisition and literacy development in first and second language development.

***Acknowledgement: This paper was supported by the Busan National University of Education Research Institution in 2012.***

## **References**

- Cho, K.S., Ahn, K.O. & Krashen, S. (2005). The effects of narrow reading of authentic texts on interest and reading ability in English as a foreign language. *Reading Improvement*, 42(1), 58-63.
- Cho, K.S., & Choi, D.S. (2008). Are read-alouds and free reading "natural partners"? An experimental study. *Knowledge Quest- Journal of the American Association of School Librarians*, 36(5), 69-73.
- Cho, K.S., & Kim, Hee J. (2005). Using the newspaper in English as a foreign language. *Knowledge Quest- Journal of the American Association of School Librarians*, 34(4), 47-49.
- Cho, K.S., & Kim, Hey J. (2004). Recreational Reading in English as a Foreign Language in Korea: Positive Effects of a 16-Week Program. *Knowledge Quest- Journal of the American Association of School Librarians*, 32 (4), 36-38.
- Krashen, S. (2006). *English Fever*. Taipei: Crane Publishing Company.

[Research Index](#) • [Teacher-to-Teacher Section](#) • [Submission Info](#) • [Contact Us](#) • [Subscription Info](#)

- Ryu, D. S. (2005). *A Survey of Attitudes toward English among Korean Elementary Students*. Unpublished MA Thesis. Busan National University of Education, Korea.
- Seong, E.N. (2003). *A Survey of the effect of English Story Reading Experience on Reading Attitudes among Elementary School Students*. Unpublished MA Thesis. Busan National University of Education, Korea.
- Wang ,F. & Lee, S. (2007). Story Telling Is the Bridge. *The International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 3(2), 30-35.

**IJFLT** is a free, on-line journal. Its continued publication depends on the support of our subscribers & advertisers. [Make a donation or pay for ads here.](#)

After filling out your information

- 1) Click on the dropdown list "Cause Selection" and select " FSP – International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching.”
- 2) Send the email receipt to [ijflteditor@gmail.com](mailto:ijflteditor@gmail.com) so that we can be sure IJFLT receives full credit for each donation.