

Reports

Using Literature to Improve Empathy Among In-training Healthcare Professionals: A Questionnaire Study

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Objective : Literature has been utilized as teaching material in both medical and nursing education in the U. S. and U. K. for in-training healthcare professionals to grow personally and/or to enhance their empathy. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings also, literature has been regarded as effective learning material that enhances students' empathy as well as language ability. These trends lead us to believe that literature in an EFL classroom is a potentially powerful tool as learning material for Japanese in-training healthcare professionals. The aims of this paper are to clarify what a reading course with a medically-themed novel could bring students based on findings obtained through content analysis, and to then show the significance of literature contributing to improved empathy among students in an EFL classroom.

Methods : A descriptive questionnaire was conducted with 98 students who wrote what their thoughts changed after reading the medically-themed target literature. Content analysis according to Berelson was used for data collection and analysis.

Results : Analysis of the students' comments revealed eight categories : "attitudes toward the way of living and death and/or dying," "the way of reading English novels," "motivations for reading English books and learning English," "understanding the feelings of patients and the people around them, and attitudes toward both of them," "attitudes toward cross-cultural understanding," "interest in movies," and "understanding medical things such as diseases."

Conclusions : The use of literature in the reading course brought about positive changes in students in terms of language, culture and personal growth, and most importantly, nourished the students' empathy, which is required both in medical professions and in the EFL classroom.

Keywords : content analysis, literature, English as a Foreign Language classroom, in-training healthcare professionals, vicarious experiences, empathy

I. Introduction

Rapid advances in technology during the twentieth century have led technical knowledge and skills to be highlighted in medical and nursing curricula. These are of great importance in education for future healthcare profes-

sionals such as physicians, nurses and other medical staff. On the other hand, there has been growing concern over the lack of humanistic studies for them. Some researchers, therefore, have underlined the importance of the humanities to increase students' empathy in medical and nursing education.¹⁾⁻³⁾

A previous study by this author showed that both nursing and medical education in the U.S. and U.K. also had utilized literature to obtain a deeper understanding of others' feelings and eventually to foster students' empathy as well as medical knowledge and skills. Some of the educators in nursing and medical education have already believed that reading literature brings in-trainees vicarious experiences to enhance their empathy which is supposed to be essential in medical settings.⁴⁾

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, some researchers insisted on the significance of integrating literature into an EFL classroom around the 1980s in the U.S., and indicated that the use of literature had been considered to be one of the appropriate tools for fostering their mental growth as well as language ability and cultural awareness.⁵⁾⁻⁶⁾ Ghosn also stated that literature could act as a powerful change agent by nurturing empathy, which was one of the reasons for using literature in an EFL classroom.⁷⁾

In Japan, also, there has been an increasing number of researches on the use of literature in an EFL classroom.⁸⁾⁻⁹⁾ Some educators teaching English for medical and nursing students have proposed the study of humanities through critical thinking and the reading of literary works incorporated into English classes for medical students.¹⁰⁾ However, there is minimal research on the use of literature for Japanese medical and nursing students in an EFL classroom setting.

My suggestion is that using literature in an EFL classroom could offer Japanese in-training healthcare professionals, most of

whom are in their teens or early 20s and have insufficient experience in interpersonal contexts, chances to gain vicarious experiences which will lead to personal growth and increased empathy as well as nourishment of second language ability.

The aims of this paper are to clarify what a reading course with a medically-themed novel could bring the students on the basis of findings obtained through the use of a content analysis method, and to then show the significance of the use of literature contributing to improved empathy for in-training healthcare professionals in an EFL classroom.

II Purpose

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the significance of using medically-themed literature for Japanese in-training healthcare professionals in an EFL reading class. It is expected that they should gain vicarious experiences leading to further understanding of others such as patients and the people around them, thereby improving their empathy, even when they learn English with the use of an English literary work.

The research question was: In what ways do you think you have changed after reading a literary work with a medical theme in the EFL classroom? It is hoped that the students' responses to the research question will include their awareness of understanding others' feelings as well as learning the target language, as a main aim of the reading course.

A previous study by this author showed that the students' comments from the questionnaire conducted after the last lesson of the

English reading class in 2013 were simply classified into three categories that seemed to be equivalent to the three purposes (cultural enrichment, language enrichment, personal involvement) of using literature in an EFL classroom, as suggested by John Collie and Stephen Slater.¹¹⁾ This study concluded that the aim of using literature in the EFL classroom could be successfully achieved for in-training healthcare professionals.¹²⁾

In the present study, however, to acquire more objective and elaborate results, the students' responses to an open-ended question after the last lesson of the English reading course in 2015 were added to those of 2013, and then both of them were assessed with the use of Bernard Berelson*'s content analysis. Moreover, the present study aims at confirming whether the categories obtained according to the content analysis could be finally condensed into the three purposes of the use of literature in the EFL classroom.

III Participants

The participants were the first-year and second-year students majoring in nursing and radiological technology who chose this reading class as an elective subject. They consisted of 49 in 2013 and 49 in 2015. In total, 98 in-training healthcare professionals participated in this research.

IV Method

4.1 Procedure

In this English reading course, *Tuesdays with Morrie* (1997),¹³⁾ a literary work with a medical theme was employed as a study mate-

rial. This novel was written by Mitch Albom, who is an American writer. It is based on a true story. Sixteen years after his graduation from Brandeis University, a journalist, Mitch rekindles his relationship with Morrie, who was his former professor. The fact that Morrie is suffering from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) leads Mitch to visit Morrie again. On the final fourteen Tuesdays of Morrie's life, Mitch visits him to talk about a variety of themes related to life including the world, death, marriage, family, emotions and aging. Morrie, who is facing death, earnestly talks about living as well as death and/or dying.

During the class, worksheets produced by the instructors were also used. The students were required to read the assigned chapters with the help of the worksheets related to those chapters. The worksheets consisted of four sections: 1) Reading Comprehension, 2) Grammar and Phrases, 3) Vocabulary Study and 4) Activity. Sections 1) and 4) were assigned to encourage the students to understand the story line and how the characters thought or felt in the story, while sections 2) and 3) were assigned to induce the students to learn grammatical points and vocabulary, which were necessary for understanding the story.

In order to avoid the students getting tired from reading the target novel, these worksheets were effectively utilized. The efficacy of the worksheets used here, therefore, is not focused on in this paper because this is not the purpose here. Furthermore a control group was also not prepared.

In sections 1) and 4), the students were

asked to check their own answers and discuss the given questions in pairs or in small groups. They could understand the flow of the story with the help of comprehensive questions in the worksheets. The activity section could also provide the students with opportunities to understand how the characters felt or how the disease, which Morrie was suffering from, was described.

After the final lesson of this reading course, the students were asked to complete responses in an open-format questionnaire, and submit them in the given box in the classroom during the instructor's absence.

This research was conducted after screening by the ethics committee at Gunma Prefectural College of Sciences. Not all the students' comments could be collected as they were requested to submit their answers voluntarily.

4.2 Content analysis

Berelson's content analysis has often been applied to analyze the content of communication depicted by participants objectively, systematically and quantitatively.^{14)–15)} The aim of this study was to obtain more objective and elaborate results than those obtained in the previous study. Therefore, this content analysis can be said to be suitable for the more objective assessment of data collected from the questionnaire given in the reading course.

The process of this content analysis method was instructed based on the book about qualitative research, by a nursing professor who has a specialized knowledge of this content analysis. The detailed process was as

follows:¹⁶⁾

- 1) From the students' comments obtained in the questionnaire, the comments which appropriately responded to the research question were selected as content units. Not unexpectedly, many of the students' comments did not clearly depict their personal changes through this reading course partly because the question might not be easy to answer for the students. Therefore, their comments including expressions such as 'I felt....,' 'I thought....' as well as 'I learned....' were also recorded as 'changes' or 'awareness.' While organizing the students' comments, inappropriate records, which did not match the responses to the question and contained ambiguous content, had to be discarded.
- 2) Content units were divided into recording units. One recording unit includes only one subject and only one verb. One student wrote only one comment while others wrote two or three, or one comment with a few themes. When one student wrote one or more comments including different themes, a comment described by a student was further divided into a few sentences with different themes respectively, each of which were recording units.
- 3) All of them were then coded into a group of sentences with a similar theme.
- 4) Each category was given an appropriate name indicating a theme reflecting students' comments including a similar concern or interest.

5) To measure the reliability of the coding, I requested three nursing educators, who were not involved in this research, to categorize the randomly selected students' comments, which accounted for about 20%, into eight categories I had inferred.

V Results

The questionnaire was answered by twenty-eight (spring 20, fall 8) out of 49 enrolled students in 2013 and eighteen (spring 12, fall 6) in 2015. Finally, of 98 questionnaires, forty-six were completed and returned. The response rate was 46.9 percent.

After the students' questionnaires were analyzed according to Berelson's content analysis, forty-six comments were divided into seventy recording units and then were coded into eight categories according to their similarities.

The percentage of agreement between raters which was found by W.A. Scott's formula was 94.0%, which showed the reliability

of the coding.¹⁷⁾ The following table shows the qualitative and quantitative results of the coding.

The first category named 'attitudes toward the way of living and dying' accounted for about 24.3%. The students' comments included 'I was able to think about life and death,' 'I was able to learn that dying was not fearful,' 'I learned what is necessary in my life,' 'I learned the way of living from Morrie's words and expressions,' and 'I thought Morrie's way of living would have a great impact on my life.'

The second category named 'the way of reading English novels' accounted for 20.0%. The students described 'I thought that it was important to grasp the whole flow of the story,' 'I thought it was important to understand who or what a pronoun indicates while grasping the meaning of sentences,' and 'I learned that one sentence had a lot of meanings or a deep meaning.' Some students also stated 'The speed with which I read the novel was faster,' 'I learned to read literary expressions although

Table 1 What the students feel changed through the literature-based reading course

Category	N=70 (%)
1. attitudes toward the way of living and death and/or dying	17 (24.3)
2. the way of reading English novels	14 (20.0)
3. motivations for reading English books and learning English	13 (18.6)
4. understanding the feelings of patients and the people around them, and attitudes toward both of them	11 (15.7)
5. attitudes toward reading English novels (reduced biases)	5 (7.1)
6. attitudes toward cross-cultural understanding	4 (5.7)
7. interest in movies (based on novels)	3 (4.3)
8. understanding medical things including diseases	3 (4.3)
	recording units 70 (100%)

at first I could not understand them,' and 'I could translate metaphorical expressions.'

The third category named 'motivations for reading English books and learning English' accounted for 18.6%. The students' comments included 'I would like to acquire more knowledge and think deeply,' and 'I was motivated to do my homework.'

The fourth category named 'understanding the feelings of patients and the people around them, and attitudes toward both of them' accounted for 15.7%. The students' statements included 'I felt the importance of understanding other people's (patients') feelings,' 'I felt the sorrow of people facing the death of a fellow human being,' and 'I felt the importance of mental support for patients and their families.'

The fifth category named 'attitudes toward reading English novels' accounted for 7.1%. The students expressed 'My personal bias towards reading a novel written in English has decreased,' and 'My preconceived idea that I was poor at reading a novel written in English was a little weakened.'

The sixth category named 'attitudes toward cross-cultural understanding' accounted for 5.7%. The students' comments included 'I got interested in customs and cultures different from Japanese culture,' and 'I thought that it was necessary to broaden my horizons to understand people from different countries.'

The seventh category named 'interest in movies (based on novels)' accounted for 4.3%. The students' comments included 'I wanted to have more opportunities to read novels and see films with a variety of themes,' and 'I wanted to see more English films.'

The eighth category named 'understanding medical things including diseases' accounted for 4.3%. The students' statements included 'I improved my knowledge of ALS' and 'I felt the process of 'DABDA,' ** (described by a student) which dying people faced.'

These students' comments, which were actually written in Japanese, were translated by this author.

VI Discussion

The results show that the students' comments were condensed into eight categories. The meticulous assessment of the eight core categories may make it possible for them to be further categorized into the three main purposes of the use of literature in an EFL classroom suggested by Collie and Slater: 1) cultural enrichment, 2) language enrichment and 3) personal involvement.¹⁸⁾ Carter and Long also introduced 'language model,' 'culture model,' and 'personal growth model' as the three main reasons for using literature in language education.¹⁹⁾ In this paper, however, the terms expressed by Collie and Slater are used for this discussion.

The most common theme is the first category named 'attitudes toward the way of living and dying (24.3%).' This result may be partly because of the content of the target novel, *Tuesday with Morrie*. In the novel, Morrie, who suffered from ALS meets his old student named Mitch and they talk about dying and living on Tuesdays, as if they were in a classroom at a university. The themes about life ranged from the world, marriage, family to death. He tells us, readers, repeatedly in the

story that learning how to live is learning how to die. Therefore it is natural that Morrie's way of living and dying should affect the students reading this novel, leading them to think deeply about their way of living. This category can be said to be equivalent to 'personal involvement' which Collie and Slater supposed to be one of the three main purposes of the use of literature.

The other category related to 'personal involvement' may include the fourth category named 'understanding the feelings of patients and the people around them, and attitudes toward both of them (15.7%).' By reading the target novel, the students could understand the feelings of a patient, his family and his caretaker, and then feel the pain and sorrow of a dying patient. These vicarious experiences could lead the students to raise their awareness of thinking deeply about ill people and/or dying people, and supporting their family and relatives mentally, which is supposed to be needed by healthcare professionals.

As Phillipa and Andrea put it, in their study, 'empathy is the ability to emotionally identify with others - to feel what they are feeling - and to convey that sense of identity to the patient.'²⁰⁾ It can be said that the students could have opportunities to enhance their empathy by putting themselves in others' shoes and understanding the feelings of other people although the word, 'empathy' did not appear in their responses.

The second most common theme is the second category named 'the way of reading English novels.' It shows that the students could raise their awareness of learning English

in various aspects. They were able to understand the importance of grasping the flow of a whole story as well as paying attention to the grammatical points of English.

The categories related to 'language enrichment' may include the second category named 'the way of reading English novels (20.0%),' the third category named 'motivations for reading English books and learning English (18.3%),' the fifth category named 'attitudes toward reading English novels (7.1%),' the seventh category named 'interest in movies (based on novels) (4.3%).' These categories amounted to 49.7%, allowing one to say that about half of the students responding to the questionnaire could gain confidence in reading a novel by reading an unabridged version of a novel, even if it was not completed, and then they showed less bias against an English novel although they had difficulties with reading an English novel at first. This can be said to enable them to be motivated to learn English and read more English novels.

Furthermore, some students showed that they could learn that literature had a variety of unique expressions or metaphorical expressions, which included a lot of meanings or a deep meaning. By the last lesson of this course, they could learn to understand these complicated expressions that they could not understand easily at first. Literature has abundant metaphors and metaphorical expressions which require readers more elaborate inference and imagination. This means that the use of literature in an EFL classroom provides the students with opportunities to think deeply and critically as well as to under-

stand the meaning of English expressions. It may also be said that metaphors and metaphorical expressions in a literary work help in-training healthcare professionals to better understand other people's mental and physical situations.

The students' improved awareness of language learning is actually the main purpose of this reading course in the EFL classroom. Therefore this result may indicate that this reading course was successfully achieved with the main target unspoiled.

Lastly, the categories related to 'cultural enrichment' may include the sixth category named 'attitudes toward cross-cultural understanding (5.7%),' and the eighth category named 'understanding medical things including diseases (4.3%).' The students have had great interest in foreign culture, in which the main characters, Morrie and Mitch live. Additionally, the medical things, which the students could learn by reading literature, may also be regarded to be foreign or unfamiliar culture in that the students would learn in their curricula in the future, and are not so familiar to medical knowledge. These categories accounted for 10.0%, but the first category named 'attitudes toward the way of living and dying (24.3%)' may also be included in the category 'cultural enrichment,' because attitudes toward life and death is one of cultures.

Due to Berelson's content analysis, the students' comments could be categorized more elaborately than those obtained in the previous study conducted in 2013. By analyzing their comments according to this content analysis without the author's subjective views, their

comments could be more accurately condensed into eight categories.

These eight categories, however, were ultimately condensed into three categories, which were the key purposes of literature use in the EFL classroom. That means that the result of this study was almost the same as that of the previous study in terms of changes the students thought they made through reading a novel. It seems to be certain that literature in the EFL classroom brought about positive changes in students in terms of language, culture and personal growth.

On the other hand, the difference between this study and the previous one is that this content analysis has defined the results of categorized students' comments in a quantitative way. It can be said that this study has also led us to understand more clearly what the most common theme was among the students who were enrolled in the reading course using a medically-themed novel.

The most important thing, however, is that the use of literature could lead students to be able to become emotionally identified with the characters in the story even in the EFL classroom. It can be confirmed that the use of literature in the EFL classroom is a potentially powerful tool for in-training healthcare professionals because they could nourish their empathy through vicarious experiences as well as raising their awareness of language learning and foreign or unfamiliar culture.

VII Limitation and Conclusion

In this study, the number of the participants was relatively small and the rate of the

students who responded to the open-format questionnaire was less than 50%. Therefore the results indicated above may not best generalize the overall tendency of Japanese in-training healthcare professionals learning English.

English education in Japan has not sufficiently taken this kind of reading course with language and literature integrated into consideration. Further research will be needed to improve the class activities in the EFL reading course for further enhancement of empathy as well as language learning. Moreover, I would like to investigate other literary works with a medical theme which could be more appropriate reading materials for in-training healthcare professionals in the EFL classroom.

Notes

* Bernard Reuben Berelson (1912-1979)

He earned his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago in 1941. From 1941 to 1944, he served as a director at the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University. After that, he worked as a professor of Library Sciences and Sociology there and also penned a few books related to Library.²¹⁾ Content analysis was originally utilized for quantitative analysis of printed matter conducted in the 18th century in Sweden.²²⁾ After he wrote "Content Analysis in Communications Research in 1952, the use of the content analysis method spread to a wide range of disciplines such as psychology, sociology, anthropology and politics."²³⁾⁻²⁴⁾

* * 'DABDA' stands for 'Denial,' 'Anger,' 'Bargaining,' 'Depression,' 'Acceptance.' In her book titled *On Death and Dying* (1969),²⁵⁾ Elisabeth

Kübler-Ross proposed them as five stages which individuals experience when they are faced with their own death.

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医療系学生の共感力を高める文学教材の可能性

—— 学生による自由記述の内容分析に基づいて ——

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目的：英米の看護教育及び語学教育における文学の活用現状に基づいて、日本の医療系学生対象の英語授業においても文学は有用な教材としての可能性を持つと考える。本研究の目的は、医療をテーマとした文学作品を活用した英語講読授業において、医療系学生の語学学習の役割とともに共感力向上の一助となる文学の可能性を検証することである。

方法：最終授業後に依頼した学生（4クラス、98名）による自由回答式質問に対する記述を、ペレルソンの内容分析を用いてコード化し、どのような点において自己変化を認識したかについて分析した。

結果：コード化された記述は、8つのカテゴリーに分類された。その中に、共感力の向上につながる可能性を示唆するカテゴリーを見出すことができた。

結論：医療系学生にとって、文学作品は、語学や異文化に対する認識を高めると同時に、疑似体験を通じて共感力を高める一助となる有意義な教材としての可能性をもっていることが示唆された。

キーワード：内容分析，文学，EFLクラス，医療系学生，疑似体験，共感力