Evaluating an ER programme in the Faculty of International Tourism at Toyo University

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Over the past twenty years, many researchers have espoused the value of Extensive Reading (ER) in a second or another language (Krashen, 2004; Day, 2015). ER involves reading large amounts of text at a level of high comprehension. ER programmes have been found to improve reading fluency and develop reading strategies (Robb & Susser, 1989; Mason & Krashen, 1997; Tanaka & Stapleton, 2007). Further, ER has been shown to increase motivation for reading in a foreign language (Kobayashi, 2019) and generally research shows that students are positive towards its use in Japan at both high school and university levels (Milliner & Cote, 2014; Cote & Milliner, 2015). For a meta-analysis of ER studies see Nakanishi (2015).

Despite the volume of research into the topic, Judge (2011) argues that there is no agreed upon model for ER. However, Day and Bamford (1998) list ten principles that can be applied to reading programmes and these serve as implementation guidelines. These principles include learners reading as much as possible and choosing what they want to read.

In many Japanese high school classes, reading activities focus on intensive study of pre-assigned texts. Such activities attempt to train students to do well on university entrance tests, and frequently involve demanding translation texts, often at the expense of more enjoyable activities (Tanaka & Stapleton, 2007). Nuttall (1982) states that L2 readers can become frustrated because they read too slowly, don’t enjoy or understand what they read, and thus avoid foreign language reading entirely. This loss of motivation is often a problem with L2 readers in Japan (Mori, 1999).

Some researchers, on the other hand, believe that ER may be more effective than intensive study at developing foreign language reading skills (Beglar, Hunt & Kite, 2012). Indeed, a number of universities in Japan such as Meijo University (McCandie, 2017) and Kobe Shoin Women’s University (Bibby, 2017) have now successfully implemented online ER programmes that include easy-to-use learning platforms.

Toyo’s Faculty of International Tourism Management (ITM) has adopted ER programmes in one form or

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another over the past ten years. It started with a few classes using books from the campus library. The author has been involved in the management of that programme from the start, and has seen a move from paper to an online platform since 2019. Currently, as part of the ITM’s commitment to having students study outside of the classroom, and prompted in part by the COVID-19 pandemic, all first year students take a compulsory reading class, part of which is an ER programme called Xreading. This paper sets out the justification for using Xreading and examines student attitudes towards this application and ER in general.

2.0 Overview of Xreading

This section describes the basics of Xreading, the rationale for its use at ITM and related research.

2.1 What is Xreading?

Xreading, Ver. 2 (Xreading, 2020) is an easy-to-use browser-based Learner Management System (LMS) with a library of books, which works on the Amazon Services server in Japan. It was developed by a private company and students access a website by paying a flat rate for six-months of around two thousand yen. This allows them unlimited access to all books on the Xreader browser, or to a restricted library, depending on which set up an institution chooses. Currently there are a total of 1210 books available only in the English language, searchable, for example, by genre or topic. Before students can actually choose a book, they need to purchase a card with a pin access code. This is available through the university bookstore at Toyo University. Along with these cards, students have been automatically assigned a log-in and password that the author created for each student in each class to make viewing students easier on the LMS. The LMS can be viewed on a desktop or smartphone and is compatible with all major mobile operating systems. Once students successfully log in, they need to take a placement test, which determines their reading level. The test was purposefully set at a higher level to avoid students being able to choose books that are at inappropriate levels, thus defeating the point of reading at a comfortable level of comprehension. Students could increase their reading level by reading a set number of words at that level. For a more comprehensive overview of the system itself see Wilkins (2019).

The decision to use Xreader at ITM was made after the author, in charge of the English curriculum, visited a number of conferences and saw presentations from members of the JALT ER Special Interest Group. Presenters reported mostly positive experiences since its implementation. The author also did a basic background search and found literature comparing Xreader with another popular LMS for ER called Moodle reader. Collett (2018) claims that Xreader offers a more comprehensive online environment for ER than its competitors (p. 48).

2.2 Why use Xreading?

Xreading was created in 2014 by Paul Goldberg, who still retains administrative control over the site. This platform, and others like it (M-reader), overcome some of the main problems of providing a physical library of
graded readers for students. These include issues like budget appropriation, management and assessment (Robb, 2011). Further, in previous iterations of the paper-based ER in ITM, students could borrow from a physical library on campus, or individual teachers. Having a minimal selection in the library, as well as students not returning individual books borrowed from teachers, hampered operations at times. Lastly, lengthy book reports, and obvious cheating also made assessment difficult. With the amount of book reviews available on the Internet, it can be hard to verify whether reports were created or copied by a student.

When reading in a foreign language, it has been claimed that learners should be able to comprehend at least 98% of the words in a text (Hu & Nation, 2000). Anything below that and learners are apt to lose both fluency and comprehension. As ER’s goal is for learners to read fluently, one way that students can do this is by self-selecting texts. In Xreading, the placement test assigns an appropriate level, and as the administrator, the author set the initial choice of books at $+ / - 2$ levels from that placement score (most publishing companies run to over ten different reading levels); thus, ensuring both enough books to read and sufficient choice.

Cheating during ER programmes has been highlighted as a problem (Tagane, Naganuma, & Dougherty, 2018). The author can also testify that when reading paper books, students would merely copy / rewrite book reviews they had found on the Internet, leading to suspicion of not actually having done the reading. Assessment of programmes is, therefore; made easier through programmes like Xreading which supply a comprehension quiz at the end of a book, showing how long students spent reading a book (including idle time) and an accumulating word count as students read more. This word count allows for an overall word count goal to be set for the semester. This programme’s goal was decided at 86,400 words with 60% from comprehension quizzes, a total reached with advice from the creator of Xreading who stated this was a usual one-semester goal for mid-level universities. When this goal was first implemented in 2019, the majority of students could reach it. Additional credit was available to students who reached 172,800 words.

The goal setting feature can be very motivating for students as they track their own progress. Although some advocate that in “pure” ER students should not be assessed and read for the pleasure it provides (Day & Bamford, 1998), student interviews suggest that there is an expectation that the hard work they put in should be recognized by appropriate assessment.

2.3 Research using Xreading

Learner efforts with online platforms for ER has inspired a modest body of research. One recent qualitative study to look at the Xreading was Walker (2019). He found that among Japanese junior year university learners ($n = 10$) who had read significantly more screen-based books than others, the suitability of reading online (also mentioned by nine participants) and a need to improve confidence and basic reading skills (both mentioned by nine participants) were found to be the top reasons for the extra amount of reading they had done.

Comparing paper-based and online materials, Walker (2016) conducted a study with university language
majors \((n = 70)\) and found that higher proficiency readers showed a preference for paper-based reading materials, but lower level proficiency readers favoured the online reading platform. It was reported the lower level preferred online materials because they could concentrate on reading better whilst using them.

Researchers have also reported that, compared to other LMS, Xreading engendered a more positive attitude to reading among Japanese high school students \((n = 44)\), with all participants of the Xreading programme being able to reach a reading goal of over 50,000 words during a 15-week semester, compared with one third using another LMS (Milliner & Cote, 2014). An additional study by Cote and Milliner (2015) was undertaken with university students and positive attitudes were recorded among participants over one semester. For example, 31 out of 59 participants expressed either mild or strong agreement with the statement that a 15-week ER course had improved their reading skills. However, in terms of enjoyment only 13 from 59 participants claimed they had enjoyed the ER. It appears some students see the academic benefits of ER, but are not perceiving any intrinsic enjoyment in it.

Use of online materials, particularly Xreading, has led to reported changes in affect among learners. In one qualitative study, Kobayashi (2019) investigated motivation, self-confidence and attitudes towards reading in English with non-English university majors \((n = 49)\). She employed semi-structured interviews (it is unclear how many of the sample were interviewed) and class observations. She further reported that online ER lead to increased instances of motivational intensity and positive attitudes towards reading in English. Kobayashi concludes that “...if the students feel they are learning efficiently, they will be more inclined to continue learning,” (p. 205).

Despite the above testimony, there are some voices of concern about the Xreading LMS. Wilkins (2019) reports a problem with the platform’s stability. Xreading administrators have been attempting to resolve that issue. Moreover, the author and his colleagues have experienced system-wide slowdowns, presumably as a result of increased online usage due to the Corona virus situation.

In this study, the following research questions will be examined:

1. What are the attitudes of students in the sample towards the online ER Xreading at ITM upon completion of the programme as ascertained through a feedback survey and select interviews?
2. What attitudes do students in this sample hold about ER in general as measured through a survey and select interviews?

3.0 Methods

This study uses both quantitative and qualitative research methods to address the research questions and gain a deeper insight into the student attitudes towards the ER programme.

3.1 Quantitative methods

3.1.1 Participants in this study.
Students ($n=223$) in this study were drawn from the first year of ITM enrolled in class called Reading and Vocabulary of which the Xreading component was between 10-15% of the final grade, dependent on students' word count. Along with the Xreading, these classes are also given over to honing the micro-skills of reading. These classes are taught by five teachers, consisting of one Japanese part-timer, one non-Japanese part-timer, one Japanese full-timer and two non-Japanese full-timers. The TOEIC Reading scores of the participants ranged from 60 to 455, with an average score at $M=226.95$ ($SD=69.83$).

3.1.2 Instrumentation.

In evaluating all research questions for the quantitative part of the ER in this programme, the author created a survey with 22 questions in three sections, all adapted from previous studies. The first section deals with attitudes and actions related to using Xreading (11 items), adapted from Walker (2018) and Klassen & Allen (2019), and includes items concerning physical use of the website and students’ motivation for participating in the entire activity. The second section deals with some of the ten pedagogical principles for the implementation of ER programmes (Day & Bamford, 1998) with a view to understanding students’ orientation to the purpose of the ER activity (8 items). The final section (3 items) deals with autonomy and future intentions as these are important concepts for ITM and have been addressed in other research activities within the faculty (Hardy, 2017; Robson & Hardy, 2018). Each statement requires one of four levels of agreement (from strongly disagree to strongly agree), with no middle option.

The survey was created in English by the author and translated into Japanese with the help of a Japanese faculty colleague. A second Japanese teacher of English was shown the first draft and a check was made of the back translation. Where necessary, a few changes were made.

3.1.3 Procedure

The Japanese version of the questionnaire was presented to students around the twelfth week of the spring 2020 semester through the university intranet. The purposes were explained along with the survey and it was further stated that the data were for research purposes and that students’ decision to take the questionnaire was voluntary and would in no way affect their grades. The survey was removed two weeks later in week 14 of the semester.

As well as recording the means of the 22 items, further analysis addressed differences between the low, middle and high thirds of the data set, as determined by their TOEIC reading scores. The decision to concentrate on differences between the groups with differing reading abilities rather than pre-/ post-test differences was made because many previous studies had established positive attitudes through Xreading (Milliner & Cote, 2014; Cote & Milliner, 2015 and Walker, 2019), and one more study would add little to the field. On the other hand, while one study had concentrated on attitudes or actions of higher reading proficiency learners (Walker, 2019), none had compared these with lower level reading samples.

The author carried out ANOVA tests with SPSS, Ver. 26.0 (SPSS Inc., 2009) for the items and followed up
with post-hoc analysis, using Tukey’s test to establish which means were significantly different. With the very real risk of committing a Type 1 Error through measuring multiple mean differences at once, a Bonferroni adjust was used on the three grouping variables of reading proficiency, making a revised \( p \) value of \( p < 0.016 \). Lastly, before running the ANOVA the following assumptions were checked: 1) normality of distribution was checked visually through Q-plots available in SPSS and very few instances of violation were found; 2) homogeneity was checked through Levene’s test in SPSS to check the variance between groups with all instances recorded as non-significant. The data outlining the three groups are seen in Table 1.

### Table 1. **TOEIC Data from the Three Groups in this study regarding Attitudes towards Xreader (n = 223)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Low score</th>
<th>High score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>149.12</td>
<td>35.86</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>229.93</td>
<td>14.84</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>298.08</td>
<td>41.07</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>455</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.2 Qualitative methods

#### 3.2.1 Informants in this study.

After the programme was finished, it was clear which students had read more books than others. To investigate higher-performing students’ actions and attitudes, an informant from each of the upper, mid and lower reading level groups was chosen. All informants were female with total word reading scores reaching over 100,000 words through the ER programme. Their names have been altered for this study. In one previous ethnographic study, Walker, (2019) addressed online ER habits of successful Japanese learners, but lower level readers appear less in ER research. For this reason, this study analyses differences between informant attitudes of varying reading proficiency as measured by the TOEIC reading test.

### Table 2. **TOEIC Data from Interview Informants (n = 3)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>TOEIC reading score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Riko</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nami</td>
<td>Mid</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sayoko</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>385</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 3.2.2 Procedure

The informants were selected from the data provided by Xreading system and approached by the author to ask for their participation. The purposes were explained and it was reiterated that the data were for research purposes and that participation was voluntary. All students agreed to an interview. Each interview lasted for approximately one hour and was conducted in Japanese by the author through an online Zoom session. The author made notes and took a video recording of each session. Rather than using direct quotes, the author reported the
data as translated summaries of what was said in the interviews.

The author took cues from Walker (2019) about questions to focus on, but mainly he kept the narrative-driven by the informants’ answers to the questionnaire. Question formats and guidelines are set out by Spradley (1979, pp. 78-91), who advocates using a variety of different probes, including grand tour questions, which ask the interviewee to describe details of a specific situation. Example and experiential questions, both of which help to flush out more specific details within the grand tour questions, were also used.

3.0 Results

The results for this section are presented in the three blocks of the survey. Table 3 shows the means for items pertaining to the attitudes towards using Xreading. Taken in order, item 1 shows students have had little exposure to ER before.

None of the informants had taken part in LMS programmes similar to Xreading, and typically studied reading and grammar at high school to improve their scores in university entrance exams. Due to this lack of experience, all informants had a negative image going into the programme claiming such an activity would be mendokusai, or troublesome.

Table 3. Results of Attitudes Towards Using Xreading (n = 223)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>G.Diff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I have taken part in similar programmes to Xreading before.</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I took part enthusiastically in the Xreading activity this semester.</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I was motivated to take part in the Xreading programme this semester.</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>H&gt;L*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Taking in the Xreading programmes has increased my confidence in reading.</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I think the Xreading programme helped me to read more fluently.</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>M,H&gt;L*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I think I am more interested in reading in English than I was before starting the programme.</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I regularly (at least one or twice a week) read books on the Xreading programme.</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I think the goal of 86,400 words for the semester was a realistic goal for me.</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I experienced problems when using the Xreading application.</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. There were enough interesting books to read in the Xreading programme.</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. We used class time to discuss the books we read from Xreading programme.</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>H,L&gt;M*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. H = High-level reading class, M = Mid-Level reading class, L = Low-level reading class. (p = < 0.016).

The results of the next five items are all promising, in that they portray, generally, enthusiastic (item 2) and motivated (item 3) learners who seem to believe their confidence to read has increased (item 4) even through this short programme. It appears that the learners in the upper proficiency level were more motivated than those in lower proficiency level groups. As such, significant differences in means were recorded for item 3 [F(2, 220) = 5.13, p = 0.01, η² = .41]. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for the higher group (M = 3.37, SD = 0.53) was significantly different than the lower proficiency group (M = 2.85, SD = 0.57).
Next, all groups on the whole agreed that their fluency had improved (item 5), but more so for the mid and high groups, who may have had more experience of reading, or possibly more efficient reading strategies. SPSS recorded these differences as significant \( F(2, 220) = 5.25, p = 0.009, \eta^2 = .54 \). Post hoc comparisons revealed mean significant scores for the mid group \( M = 3.13, SD = 0.67 \) and high group \( M = 3.13, SD = 0.61 \) were significantly different than those of the lower proficiency group \( M = 2.69, SD = 0.55 \). Lastly, item 6 shows that students’ interest in reading in English increased to some degree through the programme.

The three informants all claimed that they read sufficiently \( (jyuubun) \) in their L1, mainly novels and stories \( (monogatari) \), but read little in English, other than assigned textbooks. Effective L2 readers develop useful reading habits in their L1, which can become valuable in the L2. This may have been one factor explaining their word counts on the programme. It also appears that students underwent a change in motivation from the start of the programme. Riko reported that she was only interested in gaining credit, but once she started reading, her reading level went up too, and further, the length of book she read also increased. This became a source of motivation for her and lead to both a sense of enjoyment and achievement in the activity. Nami was similar in that she was initially motivated only for credit, but once she had started the programme, believed that her reading skills were improving through the full scores gained on the post reading comprehension quizzes. Sayoko had a similar story. She became more motivated by her increasing word count shown in the Xreader system, giving her a sense of achievement through reading. All informants claimed that their fluency had increased the most, when compared to confidence, enjoyment (interest) and reading ability. Looking at the total word count of these three, and their regular reading patterns, perceived increases in fluency can be expected.

The Item 7 result appears to suggest that students read regularly, and this was mainly a product of setting assignments pushing students to read in a particular space of time. Item 8 indicates that the goal set is somewhat realistic, but generally students who have lower levels have access to books with smaller word counts, so in that respect they may have experienced more of an effort to reach their goals.

On the whole, the informants were well disciplined with time, looking at the logs in Xreading showing how students had read for each sitting. They ranged from 10 minutes to just short of an hour. Riko and Nami were aware of when reading fatigue or frustration would set in, and tended to stop at the point. Sayoko wanted to finish a book before she quit for a sitting so that she could have the best chance of gaining a high score on the comprehension quiz.

The informants also felt that the goal was fairly easy to reach, and had indeed reached it by just under half the way through the semester. As said before, Riko and Nami managed their time well to help them reach this goal. As this semester was marred by a pandemic and going out generally was curtailed, Sayoko was able to use the programme as a way of “killing time.” In fact, anecdotally, the researcher had heard through contacts with students that many had extra time to concentrate on English study as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ordinarily, they would focus more on club activities or part-time jobs.
Survey items 9 and 10 measured attitudes toward the system itself. Unfortunately, during the semester the Xreading company carried out a data migration, temporarily shutting the site, but this initial two-day activity lasted over two weeks, with some students losing data along the way. This unforeseen problem had a negative effect on attitudes towards the programme (item 9). However, most students felt that they had enough interesting books to read to some degree (item 10). The library of Xreading extends to many books under different genres, so this result makes some sense.

Certainly, all informants stated that there were enough books to read and all were pleased with the selection on offer. However, the data migration had prevented Riko and Nami from doing reading for two weeks, and their pre and post migration reading habits were markedly different. Sayoko, on the other hand, kept a fairly steady reading output, pre- and post-technical difficulties.

The final item 11 in this section indicates that teachers in this programme were working under different guidelines. Some teachers were offering time for students to discuss books, while others were not. Of the three informants, Sayoko stated that her teacher had apportioned three times in the semester for students to discuss book content for ten minutes per discussion. The survey results showed significant differences between higher and mid proficiency groups \( F(2, 220) = 4.81, p = 0.01, \eta^2 = .37 \). The higher group was \( M = 2.51, SD = 0.61 \), whereas the mid proficiency group was \( M = 2.86, SD = 0.72 \). Sayoko claimed the chat was conducted by keyboard chat rather than actually speaking, so students may have had time to compose their thoughts better.

The results for the second section can be seen in Table 4. On the whole these show much promise as far as having student’s attitudes in line with those espoused by ER programmes in general. They go some way to explaining the favourable results in the first section. First, items 12 and 13 are both similar in level of agreement indicating a high emphasis placed on finding books that suit one’s level and for the student him or herself to choose that book, rather than the teacher. Related to item 5, item 12 showed that students could read books without difficulty to a high degree, particularly in the higher level group who recorded significant differences compared to the lower group \( F(2, 220) = 4.68, p = 0.01, \eta^2 = .36 \). Post hoc results showed the mean score for the higher group (\( M = 3.20, SD = 0.69 \)) was significantly different than the lower proficiency group (\( M = 2.75, SD = 0.61 \)).

On the whole students in the programme read books that were on or close to their reading level from the Xreading, and the interviews suggest this meant reading mostly without stopping to use a dictionary. However, Nami stated that on occasion, in order to increase her work score, she used a dictionary to read a book from a higher level than her assigned reading score. Even though she claimed to have enjoyed the book and it contributed to her reading enjoyment, research suggests that such activities do not work well to improve reading fluency. Riko and Sayoko claimed to have never used a dictionary whilst reading.

Items 14 and 15 both deal with the reading enjoyment. Firstly, item 14 about the perception of reading for enjoyment generally recorded high endorsement, this is despite the fact that very little in the way of explanation
Table 4.  Results of Beliefs Related to Pedagogy of ER (n = 223)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>G.Diff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12. It’s important to read books that are suited to my level of reading ability.</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I could read the books I choose with little trouble.</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>H&gt;L*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I agree with the rationale of doing the ER activity, namely to enjoy reading fluently.</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I think it’s most important to enjoy what I read on the ER programme.</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. After reading the books, I want to discuss what I read in class with classmates.</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. It’s important that the teacher always supports me in this ER activity.</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. It’s important for me, rather than the teacher to choose books for me to read.</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. If I read more, it’s important that my grade reflects that.</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. H = High-level reading class, M = Mid-Level reading class, L = Low-level reading class. (p = < 0.016).

was provided to students about why they should be doing the activity in classes. It seems that some students may have made the assumption that Xreader was being used to develop reading enjoyment.

Riko and Sayoko indicated that they both selected books whose titles seemed interesting and they tended to avoid those outside their fields of interest. In both their cases they chose books first by the picture on the front cover and then by reading the blurb associated with it. Nami, on the other hand, tended to choose books by their titles. She explained that she was interested in reading stories of people who have accomplished great feats or goals in their life, as this helped her to reconsider her own life and work towards her own goals.

Related to item 11, not having much opportunity to speak about books read in class, item 16 seemed to show that students were reluctant to speak about these topics, even if given the opportunity. Riko stated that she actually wanted to speak in class about books, but her classmates were not confident speakers and thus, thought it better to not have such a planned activity. In contrast, name and Sayoko did not think it beneficial to use class time discussing books because they thought it would be difficult to remember the details of the books, and for those who did not know about the book’s topic, a little boring to listen to.

Items 17 and 18 concerned teacher behaviour. Item 17, which asked how important it was to have the teacher support the learners in the ER activity, carries little endorsement, perhaps signalling that students wanted to undertake their reading as a private action, without teacher interference. Indeed, all informants said that the teachers did not spend much time talking about, explaining or introducing any books in class. The informants have said, however, that teachers warned students before the coming deadlines to get them to make headway with their reading. It does seem to show that this Xreading programme had little relationship to what students did in class, and was mainly used as an additional exercise, with the assignment scores and student progress supplied by the programme coordinator, the author.

The result of item 18, which emphasized that book selection should be up to the individual student, rather than the teacher, seems to further suggest that this activity can be done without the help of the teacher. Alternatively, it may just be that students are unaware of what a teacher’s role actually could be in an ER programme.

The last part of the survey deals with the potential for Xreading to instil more autonomous behaviour in
learners and through positive experiences continue with reading for pleasure after the credit was available. In Table 5, items 20 and 21 both deal with continuation of ER in the future, but whereas item 20 means are fairly low in the context of a formalized programme, item 21 means are considerably higher. The SPSS results showed that the higher group was significantly different to the lower groups for item, 21. \[ F(2, 220) = 4.55, p = 0.01, \eta^2 = .32 \]. The higher group was \( M = 3.27, SD = 0.62 \), whilst the lower group was \( M = 2.80, SD = 0.71 \). This result may emphasize the private nature and benefits of reading, a result also shown on item 22.

Table 5. \textit{Results of Future Intentions for Reading in English for Pleasure} (\( n = 223 \))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>( M )</th>
<th>G.Diff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20. I would like to part in the Xreading programme again in the second year.</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Even after this programme has finished I would like to continue reading in English on my own.</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>H&gt;L*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. I intend to maintain my reading for pleasure after this programme.</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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\textit{Note.} H = High-level reading class, M = Mid-Level reading class, L = Low-level reading class. (\( p = < 0.016 \)).

In response to the last section, none of the informants seems enthused by the possibility of taking part in an extensive reading programme in the second year. Informant Riko and Nami claimed that they would be busier and not have enough time to take part. Likewise, Sayoko said she wanted to continue reading in English as it was important to use English effectively in her future job, but that a formalized programme would not be necessary to facilitate that.

\textbf{4.0 Discussion}

First addressing research question one, the results of the survey seem to show a perception that motivation, interest in reading, fluency and confidence increased for all levels through this programme. Interest and extrinsic motivation have been shown to increase in Japanese university students with lower level reading skills (Mason & Krashen, 1997). Research on Japanese high school students by Fujita & Noro (2009), found to degrees approaching significance, higher reading level students we able to increase their intrinsic motivation and lower level students were able to improve their extrinsic motivation through ER. Such a split was not so clear in this study and through interviews, it is evident that students are driven by both extrinsic and intrinsic goals.

Informants also perceived that their reading fluency increased, and similar studies also found that students perceived their reading speed to be faster. Even after one semester, Klassen & Allen (2019) recorded that 89.6% of Japanese university students in their study (\( n = 115 \)) felt that ER helped to improve reading speed. Through investigation of the three informants’ reading logs in the present study, all seemed to generally read longer books in less time towards the end of the programme, and anecdotally they felt fluency, above all, had increased.

The LMS itself offers a wide range of books, and not only students in this programme but those from reports of programmes at other universities attest that students are satisfied with the size and variety on offer.
However, difficulties remain in the Xreading system. In previous programmes’ evaluations Wilkins (2019) and Collett (2019) report on the system being down from a few hours to a few days. It was clear such difficulties could lead to user discontinuation (Rogers, 2003), as reported in Collett (2019), a fact that became clear by the author of this paper upon investigating reading logs pre- and post- system failure.

For research question 2, participants displayed a high congruence to principles espoused by Day and Bamford (1998). In a follow-up to that first study, Day (2015) looked at keywords and titles of 44 articles on ER programmes since 1998, and found that learners choosing what they want to read, reading as much as possible, having a variety of reading materials and reading easy material came out as the top four research results. In the present study, results indicate students are operating in an unsupervised manner due to teachers’ positioning of the activity more on the outside of the reading programme.

Successful readers in the programme, like the three informants, were able to set realistic goals and have better time management skills, a result that was also found for successful readers in another similar programme (Walker 2019). Having students be more successful readers also leads into the topic of student training. Due to the Corona virus, all work and orientation was moved online, including orientation for this programme. As such, it is unlikely that students paid much attention to it along with the other hundreds of messages they were bombarded with. To alleviate some of the problems, the author created a “how to” YouTube video showing basic site navigation, but as well as this, other planned activities are necessary. At Meijo University, McCandie (2017) reports that regular lectures were used to share the benefits of ER and how it can help overall English ability. This could be done both online or face-to-face.

Successful student training implies that all teachers are on board with the programme. Flanagan and Cus-tance (2017) report that if ER does not fit the desired outcome of teachers, or teachers do not have time to work on developing the programme, expanding or maintaining the programme becomes difficult (p. 13). All teachers, including part-time teachers, appeared to be very co-operative in this programme. At a minimum, Bibby (2017) suggests teachers should be offered a chance to provide feedback on the programme.

5.0 Conclusion

This study was affected by limitations such as its research design, and more importantly, it took place during a pandemic. Firstly, due to time, the author focused on group differences; whereas, a pre-test post-test design may have revealed more details of how students changed through the program. Next, although there is no current end in sight to the pandemic, during the lockdown many students have been forced to stay at home, instead of attending club activities, part-time jobs or other normal social activities. Thus; results for this semester are unlikely to be replicated if and when the lockdown ceases. Finally, all the interview informants were female, and as such there may have been gender differences in reading. Having applied the above caveats, the results for this study are promising. The research questions were as follows:
1. What are the attitudes of students in the sample towards the online ER Xreading at ITM upon completion of the programme as ascertained through a feedback survey and select interviews?

Generally, all group levels appeared to be positive towards the programme, and felt to a fair degree that the programme had increased their confidence, motivation, fluency and interest in English. They also felt that the target set for the programme was realistic. Although, it is unlikely that many students would like to continue such a programme into the proceeding years at Toyo. Another point is that students’ attitudes will depend to some degree on how management of the programme is handled by teachers. This study revealed divergence among teachers with regard to how it is facilitated, which needs to be addressed. At a minimum, a frank and open discussion is needed with all reading teachers about the ways to both implement and sustain an online ER programme. Plus, a consensus needs to be reached on the amount of teacher involvement and use of regular class time for an online ER programme.

2. What attitudes do students in this sample hold about ER in general as measured through a survey and select interviews?

In general attitudes towards the Xreading programme are positive (Table 3), and concurrence exists with some of the tenets associated with ER (Table 4), which leads the author to suspect that students seem to understand the rationale for this ER activity. Such endorsement is important when introducing programmes into the curriculum. There also appears to be a tendency for students to want to carry out the activity with little support from the teachers (item 18), in a more independent manner. However, students tend to feel that participation in the program in ER programme in general, and perhaps, by extension, this Xreading programme, should be rewarded with credit (item 19) ; a move away from the assertion by Bamford and Day (1998) that the enjoyment of reading itself should be the reward.

Future research should address how reading habits, motivation and performance developed through programmes actually change when the programmes finishes. Grabe and Stoller (2002) state it is difficult to examine these benefits and changes over a short amount of time. ER is likely to remain as part of the English curriculum in the ITM for the future.

6.0 References


Extensive Reading (ER) is pedagogical tool that requires learners to select and read a large volume of books at a level that does not impede comprehension. ER researchers and practitioners claim ER increases motivation, confidence, interest and fluency in reading in a foreign language. The Faculty of International Tourism Management (ITM) at Toyo University has been managing an ER programme for a number of years as part of a first year compulsory reading English class, but recently switched from paper to an online Learner Management System called Xreading. For the purposes of faculty development, this paper outlines results of a survey \((n = 223)\) and interviews \((n = 3)\) addressing student attitudes towards that system and ER in general for ITM first years in the 2020 Spring semester programme. The author, also the manager of this programme, discusses these results, concluding with recommendations.

**Key words**: Extensive Reading, Japanese universities, reading attitudinal survey, qualitative interviews, Xreading

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